

Paradoxical States of Suspension

Jaakov Blumas' analytical strategies of painting.

The renewed interest that abstract art has elicited in recent years is rooted in the intelligence and virtuosity with which today's artists have been palpably deconstructing the persistent myths of modernity. Since the 1980's, Jaakov Blumas has been investigating the vocabulary of painting with the same precision that is dedicated by linguists and philosophers to the elements of language.

What at first glance may appear as a coherent composition following a comprehensive set of rules upon closer examination turns out to be a multi-level game with diverging entities, which - like the pieces of a puzzle or the playing cards in a game of Memory - have been consciously put together in an "incorrect" rather than a "correct" manner.

Thus, the perception of Blumas' paintings is constantly and purposefully subverted. While on the one hand self-contained, clearly delineated forms appear to invite the viewer to become immersed in placid, almost meditative contemplation, on the other hand widely arched or loosely assembled lines right next to these set the gaze into a state of irritating motion. Different formal means as well as different speeds of realization and reception call for continually new adjustments when looking at the artist's works.

The seeming coherence, transparency, and clarity of the constellations distributed, so to speak, without any "ulterior motives" on the surface of the picture plane is also reduced to absurdity by Blumas by his use of paradoxes similar to those played out by artists such as M. C. Escher or Op art protagonist Victor Vasarely on the level of spatial-optical illusions. Does the stairway lead down to the front or upward and to the back? While from one perspective the cubes appear to spring forth in a concave shape, from

another they create the impression of being inverted into the opposite.

These are the kind of ambiguities Jaakov Blumas is dealing with on the two-dimensional surface when working with pointed ellipses assembled from what appear to be circular segments, which can be seen as purely plane forms, but can also be viewed as concavely or convexly domed bodies.

Blumas suggests the notion of three-dimensional entities particularly in his current works in which he no longer interconnects the segments in the traditional format of the panel painting, but rather assembles modules into "shaped canvases", as they were developed by Frank Stella in the 1960's. The artist's interest in abstract American painting from Motherwell to Sean Scully is not to be ignored. In his amalgamative modular picture construction system Blumas merges pictorial elements drawn from this rich tradition to create ever-new compositions.

Abstract forms must also be "read" - a realization that Jaakov Blumas owes not least to René Magritte whom he holds in high esteem. With his famous pipe, Magritte has uniquely articulated the notion that images and language permeate and contradict one another in ways that are sometimes paradoxical.

When below the painted pipe we read that this is not a pipe, this indeed is only a problem because of the fact that an inner voice utters the sentence "this is pipe" at the moment of encountering the painted pipe.

And this inner voice, which also accompanies the perception of forms, colors, lines, and other primary visual phenomena of a painted picture, is neither negated nor suppressed by the artist.

The hermetic impression conveyed through Blumas' clear pictorial language based on simple geometrical

forms, the seeming withdrawal from a reality outside of the painting, paradoxically allows the viewers the very scope of freedom to generate their own associations, ideas, and emotions.

In the act of perception, all viewers bring to bear an abundance of associations, which, however, as is also the case with the various levels of perception, constantly reshift, never conjoining to form a coherent "sense". The "weightlessness"* which Christoph Heinrich found to be a central characteristic of Blumas' painting, is more and more consistently based on an irresolvable state of weightlessness on a formal as well as on a semantic plane.

Indeed, it is exactly this state of weightlessness that guarantees the painting's autonomy with regard to an exterior reality. Jaakov Blumas' paintings lead us into a world that has its own rules and yet still does not exist of its own accord, but in the artist's view only becomes a reality through the viewers' activity. A painting seen by no one does not really exist. And thus Blumas succeeds in rendering, not only in a formal sense, a kind of quadrature of the circle: he salvages the aesthetic autonomy of the picture by radically committing it to the viewers' faculty of reception.

Jaakov Blumas, "the unfulfilled promise", exh. Kat.
Galerie Ruth Sachse

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