

Clemens Ottnad

## **about flow**

Many artists working in the area of figurative-objective representations of landscapes employ photographic templates. A special moment, a specific climatic constellation, rapidly changing cloud formations, suddenly emerging light reflexes on surfaces are captured on film or digitally saved and stored in vast quantities. This information can be accessed at any time in a domestic atelier setting in order to combine temporally and locally disparate visual impressions in the process of pictorial creation. Closer inspection of paintings generated by this process often reveals to the eye a certain motionless 'flatness'. In this context, the term 'flatness' carries a dual meaning. In the formal sense it implies the absence of differentiated details, exciting composition and creation of spatial depth. In the figurative sense, contemplating the natural landscape spread out before us, it indicates the complete loss of soulfulness as well as insight into nature.

In her paintings and drawings, Renate Gaisser has always adopted an opposing position. Consequently, when working outside in natural surroundings *sur le motif*, her often large-scale paintings are not the result of an intermittent approach based on preliminary sketches as practised by romantic landscape artists such as Caspar David Friedrich in order to subsequently continue and complete work in an atelier. Nature itself represents the atelier of Renate Gaisser! Selecting potential sites and interesting motif constellations, the artist - equipped with canvases, paint and easel - exposes herself for hours and hours in wind and weather to this intense experience of nature. In contrast to fixed sketches, drawings or photographic templates used by different artists, inevitably light and shadow continuously change during the course of the working day. Depending on the position of the sun or cloudiness, temperatures change and different scents of water, soil and plants emerge stimulating multiple senses leading to a synaesthetic flow of awareness with results widely differing from mere intentional topographic representations.

In concentrated sequences of related motifs, Renate Gaisser engages with the live view experienced in the natural environment. Irrespective of whether we are confronted with winter impressions of dried blades of grass or summery divergently flowing water plants set in the midst of lilies and lines, abstract compositions can be easily perceived in the paintings

as well. In these arrangements, recurrent questions addressing the pictorial structure resurface, including consolidation and separation, brightness and darkness, colour transitions of shadows, space and periphery, dynamics and solidification, chaos and order. Formally submerged in the manifold nature of water-plant-formations that seem uncontained, overflowing the picture frames albeit at the same time captured in dried oil paint, the viewer loses themselves utterly within the depths and recesses of the therein mirrored nature.

Spontaneously art historical analogies emerge not least based on Renate Gaisser's profound knowledge. It was the English landscape painters including John Constable in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Barbizon School artists in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and above all impressionists who uniquely devoted themselves to Pleinairism with a similar unconditional commitment to outdoor painting. Admittedly, in Feuilleton articles at the dawn of the revolutionary epochal style the terminology of momentary 'impression' was used as an insult. The close interaction of painters and photographers at the time is emphasized by the mere fact that in 1874 the very first overview of the works of Cézanne, Degas, Pissarro and others was held among all places in the workshop of Nadar, by trade a photographer and a pioneer of aviation.

It is not only the current threat of environmental destruction that renders an urgent analysis of natural phenomena more crucial than ever. In his biopoetic plea for a desperately needed change of perspective, the philosopher Andreas Weber has clarified that he considers the incessant change of one lifeform into another as the great mystery of nature. As a final line he proposes that every ecosystem is a love process. Andreas Weber points out, that this process does not imply that natural reality equals pleasantness and harmony, that this is exactly not the case. He considers mutualism as driving force, a process of intermingling, intermixing and collective imagination where an individual only thrives while nourishing the wholeness, and the wholeness only prospers if the individual is free to be its true self. For Andreas Weber, the essence of love is to be productive because the other is productive: every ecosystem is a love process. The biopoet concludes: 'Little wonder that we feel loved when out in nature where we also verifiably love ourselves more- and others too.'\*

\*based on the manuscript by Andreas Weber: Zurück zur beseelten Natur, SWR television broadcast, 25.11.2018

See also: Andreas Weber, Matter and Desire. An Erotic Ecology. White River Junction, MA, 2017