

Martha Jungwirth

Pädagogisch wertlos (devoid of pedagogical value)

12. April 2013 - 27. July 2013

Opening Reception Friday, 12. April 2013
19:00 - 21:30 h

This is Martha Jungwirth's first show with Gallery Cinzia Friedlaender, Berlin. The painter, who received the Austrian Decoration for Science and Art in 2012, has consciously managed to evade categorization throughout the course of her career, which spans almost half a century. The works on view in this show were created between the late Nineteen-Eighties and the early Nineties, and represent her use of an abstract figurative style at a specific point of time in her oeuvre.

The works on view in the gallery are painted in oil on cardboard or hand-made Indian paper mounted on canvas. Jungwirth chooses materials that expose the accumulated patina of their previous usage and which react to the paint differently than a canvas. The paintings pertain to a specific tradition that places itself - knowingly and, perhaps, defiantly - in the murky waters between abstraction and figuration. Here, compositions as well as the different ways in which the paint is applied to the surfaces, both hold a dual significance as ends in themselves but also as carriers of meaning, or mediums of representation. They also relate to the artist's interest in the mirroring of a process. Gestures captured on the painted surface speak of the corporeal presence of the artist but also of one's struggles (physical at times) with the possibility of giving aesthetic form to immaterial substance, transitional mental states, observations, yearnings and all things not easily expressed with words.

In 1968 Jungwirth formed, together with fellow Austrian artists Franz Ringel, Peter Pongratz, Wolfgang Herzig, Robert Zeppel-Sperl and Kurt Kocherscheidt, the group *Wirklichkeiten* (Realities). She was the only female artist in the group. The movement formed around the notion of negating the two leading artistic strands dominating the Vienna art scene at the time: *Art informel* and the Vienna School of Fantastic Realism. Their claim was for a more socially relevant art, which leaned toward realism and was often peppered with satire and social criticism. Stylistically, however, there was no artistic concept that united the six members of the group, and the formal ties that united their work were rather loose. Even during her involvement with the *Wirklichkeiten*, Jungwirth's paintings have already oscillated between abstraction and concrete representation and, in the Nineteen-Eighties, her work became increasingly abstract as her approach to painting as a medium focused on formal aspects of the practice over theoretical or thematic ideas. Though inherent to her work, the figurations in Jungwirth's paintings can sometimes only be discerned in relation to titles like "Selbstportrait" (Self-portrait, 1987). But the paintings do not lend themselves to finite readings, and oftentimes the titles confuse rather than suggest a possible interpretation. Nevertheless, approached without any attempts at deciphering, as the title of the show may encourage the viewer to do with its promise to be "devoid of pedagogical value", a more intimate and disarmed engagement with the works might materialize.

Works from the same period were recently on view in the show "Martha Jungwirth, Albert Oehlen, Matthias Schaufler" at Galerie Hammerlehle und Ahrens, Cologne 2012, which highlighted the formal links between the three artists, belonging to three different generations. Jungwirth's works were also included in the recent show "SCHÖNES KLOSTERNEUBURG", 2010, which featured a new hanging by Albert Oehlen of works from the Essl collection.

Text: Hili Perlson