

Oil on troubled waters

For centuries painting has been associated with flat surface. We know however, that beyond this surface lies a wide open field of imaginative expansion. The view reaches into long distances and into dark abysses. Later, painters (re)discovered the surface, and temporarily acknowledged its qualities. Thereafter, their painting opened into real space, passed its boundaries and conquered new spaces – continuously fighting against a cult of surface that was already gradually contaminating the public's perception.

Jochen Schambeck is not the first to take this route, however his work is unique in its lack of compromise. His work is 'full on'. It is flooding, whirling, eruptive. Similar to a stream of lava, his painting runs over everything that is trying to stop it – even the tins that were once its source. Painting becomes material, the visible becomes tactile. Even a sense of smell is induced, as the explosive fuel of his painting is oil. And oil, any kind of oil, is an excellent carrier of power. Where would mankind be today without the conserved energy of millions of beings, who lived millions of years before our time, stored in the earth's crust? But oil also reproduces itself over and over again – nowadays in the form of blossoming, fragrant fields of rape.

It is oil that prepares our meals, lubricates our machines, feeds our engines and anoints our priests and kings. Millions of sun worshippers apply a daily layer of the Messiah's oil of beauty. Little oil lamps burn on All Souls' Day. The early works by Jochen Schambeck reminded me of artificial flowers and porcelain arrangements found in French cemeteries. But none of these chunks of colour is artificial. It is just stirred colour that blossoms in a natural way.

Oil stands for power, energy and beauty. But oil is unlike oil. A painter using oil colour is no oil sheik. Oil is ambivalent. An oily smile is not a sympathetic smile. Oil was poured onto the wounds of the assaulted vagabond by the merciful Samaritan. Oil poured onto raging waters cures, soothes and calms the waves. But oil on water can also be polluting – oil pollution wastes bird life and spoils our environment. Oil on water? Soothing? Rather Schambeck's work evokes thoughts of pouring oil onto the raging flames of painting.

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