
Philipp von Rosen Galerie

Markus Huemer

The Oranges Don't Like the Kiwi in the Painting

Opening October 30, 2020 between 5 and 10 pm

The artist is present

Exhibition from October 31, 2020 through January 9, 2021

With *The Oranges Don't Like the Kiwi in the Painting* we will open our second solo exhibition on October 30, 2020 at 5 p.m. with the Berlin-based artist Markus Huemer (*1968), who comes from Linz in Austria.

While in Spring 2018 we showed a number of paintings and in particular two media art works, Huemer, in his current exhibition, adds drawings to his paintings. Media art, this should be mentioned here once again as a reminder, plays a decisive role in Huemer's oeuvre. This has to do with his native city of Linz and the Ars Electronica Festival founded in 1979 as well as with the sites of his early artistic influence (Düsseldorf Academy, KHM in Cologne and ZKM in Karlsruhe). More precisely, his work is concerned with the question of how and with what "justification" painting (and drawing) can be continued in the digital age. This question can be answered with the help of media art (i.e.: using tools from the digital world – computers and projections), as well as with classical means of painting (brush, paint, canvas).

In *The Oranges Don't Like the Kiwi in the Painting* we show paintings which – as it seems – are dedicated to three old-fashioned-looking themes: Fruit still-lives, which appear in the title of the exhibition, and flower still-lives and insect studies.

We have known still-lives with fruits since ancient times. And as a separate genre, still-life painting established itself in the 17th century. Perhaps the best known, antique still-lives are those that we do not actually know, but only from the mythic story of the competition between the artists Zeuxis and Parrhasios, which has been handed down by Plinius: Zeuxis had painted grapes so realistically that birds pecked at them. Nevertheless, he did not win the competition. For the curtain, which had veiled Parrhasios' picture had even deceived Zeuxis, the superior human being, when he wanted to pull it aside. For the curtain was also painted.

And thus, with this deception, we are already in the center of the topic that Huemer is, above all, interested in: the difference between reality and pictorial reality, the representability of the real and the point of attempting such representability. Of course this is not only Huemer's topic. Rather, the representation of reality has been regarded over centuries as the core task of painting (and sculpture). But, of course, the results always had to be seen as more or less successful abstractions. For no matter how well and 'close' to reality a history painting depicted the historical situation or a still life the artistic arrangement of objects, it was always (only) a depiction and not the actual event itself that was captured on the surface. And so it is with Huemer: we see painted fruits and vegetables, oranges, melons, kiwis and pumpkins. But they are painted in false, not "realistic" colors (black, gray tones, white, and yellow where it does not belong) and they have, above all, a very strange relation to their titles. Because these titles suggest a mental life-of-its-own of fruits, will and opinion and emotion, as we would expect – if at all – rather with portraits or history or genre paintings. One can see, for example, a water melon lying in the center of the painting on a table (is this really a table?), which – as the title of the painting suggests – apparently "Wants to Be Alone in the Painting" (and that is what is indeed the case). In fact, however, we, the viewers of the works, will only very rarely be able to learn of such a will, unless we have developed a spiri-

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tual relationship to the things depicted. This oblique relationship between painted object and work continues in all paintings of this group of works. After all, in the painting that shows a pumpkin, a kiwi is indeed not to be seen. And that is not surprising, because *There is No Space for the Kiwi in the Painting*.

Humorous titles are not new for Huemer. Rather, he has always undermined the pictorial function of depicting traditionally ascribed to painting by combining grotesque-sounding titles in which the text of the title and what appears to be represented do not at all refer to each other. As a rule, there was no correlation between picture and title, unlike in this work group of fruit still-lives. But it remains the case with this series that the titles are basically meaningless. It is true that in *The Oranges Are Numerically Superior to the Pumpkin in the Painting* more oranges are depicted than pumpkins. But: the sentence itself is meaningless, because normally there is no superiority between pumpkins and oranges. Rather, if there is more of one than of the other, it is a quantitative and not a qualitative relation suggested by the word "superior".

"Relation" is the keyword that is also suitable for discussing the group of works of the flower still-lives. All these still-lives were created after copperplate engravings by Maria Sibylla Merian. In the second half of the 17th and at the beginning of the 18th century Merian had drawn about 4000 plants and 2000 insects and other animals on numerous journeys into the whole world and published them – in volumes with copper engravings, which were each dedicated to specific topics – and made them available to a larger general public with this reproduction. In this way Merian created an image of things that are and were in the world, which was suitable to show us and study them and thus provide us with knowledge. Moreover, she accompanied her pictures with explanatory texts, thus claiming a scientific approach, which – this is the other side of the coin – earned her that she was not taken seriously as an artist. She thus pursued a plan that was in harmony with the urge to explore and discover, which had already motivated the beginnings of still-life painting in the 15th and 16th centuries: to collect and depict objectively given things, to analyze them, to gain knowledge, to "create an image", if you like. Today we rightly speak of a flood of images. Everything is depicted, nothing remains hidden. So it seems. But: for the Internet and the digital world, there are no realities to depict. What there are, however, are "images" as metaphors for the real thing. Digital processes, i.e. interventions in algorithms, are called "viruses". And these "viruses" are given "names" that are themselves speaking ("Slammer", "Relax", "Elk Cloner"). And Huemer creates precisely such metaphorical images, with recourse to the representations of Maria Sibylla Merian. He thus paints plants and insects, gives these paintings titles that refer to "real" existential computer viruses and similar invisible digital things, and thus creates an image for the essentially invisible process (not a depiction, of course, which would be rather series of signs in the form of zeros and ones).

But Huemer is not primarily an analyzer of the digital world. Rather, as an artist, he wants to inspire us to ponder the invisibility of the digital and – this expansion of the spectrum is virtually evident in today's times – the biological viruses. By doing so, he places himself with his painted pictures in the tradition of painting and its claim to find images for reality. And this is what he does as a painter who also and especially examines his medium and the possibilities it offers.

This is exemplified by the monumental and particularly varied painting *The Lovely Ika-Tako-Virus Exchanges Your Pictures for Squid*. For this painting, too, Huemer falls back on

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Merian, one would almost like to speak even of "copy & paste". In any case, it is an intertextual quotation, a taking up and processing of the model, the representation of the seventh panel in the "Third Part of Flowers" of Merian's *New Flower Book*. But instead of trying to depict the plants mentioned as vividly and realistically as possible, Huemer obscures precisely this illustration. In his painting, which can hardly be deciphered because of its size alone, one sees little of the plants, and much of the possible painting techniques. The painting has six different and clearly defined painterly treatments. On the one hand the monochrome surfaces in yellow, and on the other hand the silhouette-like, graphic black of the flower below. In addition, the painted pasty blossom. Plus the recessed i.e. unpainted blossoms and leaves as well as the monochrome background white with fine pencil drawings. And – last but not least – the central main plant, which is nudged with the brush, thus eliminating any gesture and making the process more reminiscent of a computer rendering (because it is a quasi-digital process: "color no" / "color yes" at a specific point).

For further information and / or pictures please contact the gallery.