

Marietta Franke. In a long moment

One might think that Christof Mascher has invented a pizzicato, electrified painting that lives on speed and precision, if it were not for Raoul Dufy, the master of color modulations within an open skeleton of lines, who has tossed landscapes and architectures into lines and colors in order to state a painterly world that lives from within, that unflinchingly goes its own way, parallel to everyday reality.

Christof Mascher writes about his work process:

*“For me, it is not ostensibly about the visible pictorial contents. They serve more as a means of transport for the application of color through brushstrokes, lines and other painting gestures and the resulting forms and surfaces, whereby A.R. Penck comes to mind – from surface to form – which can also take place the other way around. As a writer (sprayer), I consider painting and drawing as a preferred way of thinking and as an attitude to the world.”*¹

Raoul Dufy's painting was on display at the first Documenta in Kassel (1955) shortly after his death in 1953, when it was a matter of rediscovering artistic possibilities that could open paths to an artistic future. Since Christof Mascher studied with Walter Dahn, he encountered various artistic possibilities and approaches, especially in the person of his teacher: First of all, the "Wilde Malerei", which began at the end of the 1970s and was presented to the public in 1982 in the exhibition *Zeitgeist*, and then an artistic development going back to the time shortly after World War 2 in the person of Joseph Beuys, who was the teacher of Walter Dahn, that is, the teacher of his teacher.

The title that Christof Mascher has now given to his latest exhibition, after having been in the art business for almost 15 years, takes up a literal speech from the book *Palm Desert* by Don Winslow: "Where you are going" announces an indeterminate perspective of the way and the future, which the artist sees inwardly, in his artist's soul, as a state of "speechlessness", of "unconscious action".² And the postscript "there you are " then attaches to it a seemingly succinctly stated conclusion, which just for this reason makes one prick up one's ears.

One could also say: "For as one beds oneself, so one lies", loosely based on a song by Berthold Brecht³, which could certainly also be applied to artists, because they pursue their own artistic development and are also responsible for it in a certain way, which is not intended to moralize. Despite all the possible misunderstandings that artists can get into with their work, especially if they are ahead of their time, artistic behavior and decisions have consequences not only for self-perception, but also for the way other people, the so-called viewers, perceive them. Christof Mascher seems to be aware of the implications of this connection, which is far from the end of the artistic story:

“I move on thin ice in the sense of a process-oriented work, which is characterized

¹ Email from Christof Mascher to Marietta Franke (Oct. 19, 2022)

² *ibid.*

³ Berthold Brecht wrote the libretto for the opera *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1930), Kurt Weill the music. It includes the song *For as one beds oneself, so one lies*.

by a self-assurance, an inventory of the current perception – where do I stand, who am I, what does the picture tell me, what do I want to say."⁴

The artist draws his reference material both from art history – in particular from architectures and detached architectural elements (for example windows, doors, balconies, stairs, fences, lanterns, etc.) of various epochal/stylistic classifications, as can also be found in Raoul Dufy's mural *La fée électricité* (Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris), which are reformed, – furthermore from landscape representations as an interplay of architecture and nature, as well as from visual influences of aesthetically open pop culture, such as with quotes from vintage cartoons, album covers, from films, such as the architectural quote of *Bates Motel* from Alfred Hitchcock's film *Psycho* (1960), or from videogames, such as the *Knowby Cabin* from the horror film *Evil Dead*, which plays a role in the epic game *Fortnite 3* (2013)⁵, and others. Another cinematic source for Christof Mascher's painting can be found in David Lynch:

*"His disturbing dream sequences, his way of telling something. Never has anything captivated me more than (the film) Twin Peaks (1990/91), simply everything fascinates me here, starting with the film music. I'm working on the same mood."*⁶

One of his watercolors from 2016 is dedicated to the generation of young people who were abandoned, the so-called No-Future-Generation of the early 1980s, after the title *Music for the Jilted Generation* of the album cover of the English band *Prodigy*, founded in 1990. As an artistic approach, the reference to the music scene can be found even more extensively in Walter Dahn's work, even extending into the design of artistic works with covered lettering and imagery. His need to find connections between high culture and mass culture, which is driven by the need for consumption and experience, also has an experienced artistic role model in Walter Dahn.

While Christof Mascher's earlier paintings show a darker, crystalline, colder and sometimes earthy color palette influenced by black and dark blue areas, which are then heightened by white areas and lines and broken up by individual color inlays and accents in turquoise, green, yellow, violet, pink, etc., contrasting in their brightness, the color palette of the new watercolors and canvas paintings he is currently exhibiting at Philipp von Rosen Galerie feature "gorgeous 1950s/1960s pastels" and colors used for jogging suits and sneakers in the early 1990s, the "early 90's colorways" as he calls them.⁷

If there is a connection between Raoul Dufy's and Christof Mascher's painting, then it is not least because Raoul Dufy seemed to move on the artistic border to decorative painting, which brought him less appreciation in his time, when the

⁴ Email from Christof Mascher to Marietta Franke (Oct. 19, 2022)

⁵ Compare Ben Street, *Christof Mascher: Memory Palace*, 2016, in: <http://thirdtext.org/mascher-memory-palace>

⁶ Email from Christof Mascher to Oliver Zybok (July 17, 2008, in: catalog *Christof Mascher. 1979*, Galerie der Stadt Remscheid, 2008, no page reference (text by Oliver Zybok, *Christof Mascher, Das innere Labor*)

⁷ Email from Christof Mascher to Marietta Franke (Oct. 19, 2022)

difference between high and low culture was not yet questioned, but which can be seen differently from today's perspective with regard to graffiti and its accompanying artistic and cultural re-evaluations. A painting like Raoul Dufy's *Homage to Claude Debussy*, created in 1952, shows the fusion of written and drawn lines with a color freed from representational or other formal ties, which could have anticipated the writing, tagging, acting in signs and images, and coloring of graffiti, especially since his paintings artistically reinvent/transform the outside of the world in a painting writing or writing painting, especially in landscapes, city views, or window panes from an interior to the outside.

The atmospheres⁸ of Christof Mascher's and Raoul Dufy's paintings alone come from different times. While Raoul Dufy, after a certain initial period with his painting, which is linked to the Fauvism of Henri Matisse, finally discovered and wanted to communicate his joy in the beauty of the world also in its momentariness, in Christof Mascher's paintings there are spaces of memory to be contemplated, which dive into darker realms of the human soul and its distances. There is something more or less eerie or mysterious about them. As in the exhibition *History Crush*, they seem to engage in raptures about historical events and people and suggest strange, anonymous figures/fantasy beings that are not tangible, where abandonment and insecurity dwell, which tell of a different attitude to life. The writers who roam the city at night to put graffiti on the walls of buildings are part of a questioning and rebellious counterculture that puts unrecognizable/anonymously encoded spray messages on architecture like another skin to proclaim the necessity of human and social change.

The new paintings by Christof Mascher, both the watercolors and the large-format oil paintings on canvas, come across with a lightness of color that extends right into the brushstrokes, as if a wind had blown through his painting, bringing with it colored, sometimes warmer light. The fleetingly laid out architectures and landscapes appear as if they had been painted on luminous screens. This painterly electrification links Christof Mascher once again with Raoul Dufy, but also shows that Mascher finds his images through various media.

He writes:

*"I start with a first layer of acrylics, watercolors and water-based pencils. Then I go over it with oil paints, oil pencils and sometimes spray paints. At the end of the day, I look at what I've created on my tablet, PC or phone and then continue painting digitally. This gives me the opportunity to try a lot without destroying the painting."*⁹

The delicate and rapid lines bring perception to a point where memories disappear rather than emerge, in painterly terms, finally giving way to a long moment that makes it possible to move on and, at best, start again.

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⁸ Compare Gernot Böhme, *Atmosphäre, Essays zur neuen Ästhetik* (1995), Frankfurt 2017

⁹ Email from Christof Mascher to Marietta Franke (Oct. 19, 2022)