

Christoph Tannert

Exploding the Limits of Color, Searching for Truth

The luminescent light-gray, oval belly of a boat set against the night sky.

Bodies, packed close together, immobile, caught in the strong current of waiting, no chance to land, no escape, a feeling of insecurity in an unfamiliar place. No torches of liberty in sight. Each passenger a cluster of colored points of self, rich in nuances, the group a colorful patchwork rug, lyrical and cacophonous, ruptured by the dynamics. All angular forms are question marks. Hermetic beauty. In the foreground the railing, a protective arc and marker of distances in one.

It is difficult to make out what the artist is speaking of. Are we experiencing the end of a sea voyage with adverse wind conditions or the calm before the storm? Is Daniel Mohr exploring inner coherencies or talking about extremity? About the icy gaze of our insensitiveness? About the void of loneliness?

The work described is entitled *Melilla* and anyone who has heard the terrible news about this outpost of "fortress Europe" —the Spanish exclave on the Mediterranean coast of Morocco, which in 2005 witnessed a bloody wave of refugees—knows of the suffering associated with this location. *Melilla* was stormed from the land, however more recently African boat refugees have been heading for Lampedusa. In another work, whose title includes the name of this Italian island, Mohr relates not only to the catastrophic reality of tens of thousands of illegal immigrants who have journeyed across the seas and against whom Europe has battened down the hatches, but also to the cognitive function of the image itself. Mohr's *Lampedusa* boat, thrusting heavenwards out of a black background, explores the possibilities offered by the impetuous modernist imagery, questioning the aesthetic mode itself, in order not to be merely retrospective in the sense of standstill, but to be constantly up-to-date with contemporary painting.

With this kind of image, which particularly appealed to me among the artist's works, Mohr is not concerned with depicting current political affairs. On the contrary, his intention is to lend expression to the vital experience that is initially a relationship between color and form, communicated via the sense of sight, well aware of the fact that translatable and non-translatable contents in every (good!) artwork correspond to one another and that although life is made up of sequences of time, a painting is a non-processual object, *Melilla* and *Lampedusa* are statements, linked to the category of movement, seeking the context of society and based

on social interest. With *Floss der Medusa* (*The Raft of Medusa*), an allusion to Théodore Géricault's painting by the same name.

Mohr had already attempted to comprehend "why it is no longer possible to depict such catastrophic, epochal events as credibly as back then-and in addition, Peter Weiss's chapter about this painting in the *Ästhetik des Widerstands* (*Aesthetics of Resistance*) played a role." Nevertheless, with *Melilla* and *Lampedusa* he has created a new, conceptual freedom of movement with a wild aroma, liberated from leftist pack-ice sets of mind that nowadays merely carry ideological phrases about the class-struggle function of art in front of them like monstrosities.

Mohr works on the sublimation of rational harmonies. However he is also concerned with the painted structure in itself. He allows himself to venture out into Impressionism just as much as he loves to break down and divide what he has seen, dissolving it into an ornamental picture plane using staccato-like brushstrokes. He is familiar with the clear tones of luminism and with radically reduced use of color. His previous work is a search movement setting off in different directions at the same time, With the book and exhibition

title Bestimmte Negation (Determinate Negation) Mohr plays "on a certain visual principle that is a common thread throughout my work, namely that more importance is often placed on the environment of the portrayed 'object' rather than the 'object'" itself, so that the latter is also defined by its surroundings, which enclose it like a template.

A circumstance that can all too easily be forgotten: something is only what it is in relationship to the world around it."

From Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, who defined the term "determinate negation," we know that the basic parameters are never available as a whole, however the ability to act within the framework of that which already exists is the prerequisite for the productivity of criticism and the effectiveness of an experience that prompts change.

For Mohr, image production means a constant critical examination of truth in the representation of reality, within the relationship between the visual (the particular) and the non-visual (the general).

Mohr struggles to inscribe his images with a cognitive form. He sees art from the standpoint of Theodor W. Adorno as a form of non-discursive language. Adorno calls it: similar to a concept, without concept. IF we accept that art is a form of communication that has meaning, even if it is a concealed or severed meaning, it follows that we can also speak of a cognitive form of art.

As a consequence of the art market constantly trying to palm us off with something that is already history, we must also reflect on the nature of art and the element of truth it might contain. This value should be based on the degree of truth a work of art contains (and not on the price). As is well known, those interested in profit deride such a stance. In Adorno's case every search for the aesthetic is a search for the truth. Mohr does not shun diversions or even taking wrong routes in order to explore the dynamic connection between truth and the artistic expression of the subject. Each artwork poses its own questions and beauty manifests itself as an inner act of aesthetic necessity.

For Mohr the level of truth is dependent on combining the materials and imagination in such a way that his own environment enters into a contextual dialogue with the visual image by being deformed into the two-dimensional surface of the picture.

With this approach he willfully accepts—in particular due to the rich diversity of associations generated by an image—that the viewer does not necessarily desire a full interpretation.

Thus in his images Mohr concedes to Adorno when he speaks of wanting to comprehend "a reality that is also the reality of the image, the color, the composition, and the way in which the canvas is treated," without making sure of discursive language structures.

What is finally visible on the picture plane is initially a consequence of wanting to depict an object as well as possible. However, what in the end constitutes the meaning is a visual phenomenon that has undergone the process of painting and cannot be pre-defined.

Mohr reveals how art is initially an expression of manifested reality, then a substitute for it, and finally a counter-world. He expresses his artistic personality by claiming autonomy for himself and an aesthetic state of being at-one-with-himself. However, the important element of distance is also present, this constant breaking with the real facts with the confidence "that the picture knows and says more than one could actively interpret,"

Whether the atmosphere in the pictures is that of day or night, they always resound with a cool "housey housey" electro-pop rather than the techno ding-dong of a sweat-inducing dancefloor, which drives the old spirits out of the pores of the canvas. The waves of global crises crash over us every day, Mohr swirls figures and beats around in synthetic spheres and on stages rotating in the background. Pictures such as Wirbel (Twirl), Strahl (Ray), and Multiples Auseinanderdriften (Multiple Drifting Apart) are fascinatingly magnetic and have a velvety-soft meditative effect.

In one aspect, Mohr does indeed distance himself from Adorno: Mohr avoids dissonance. The category ugliness has no place in his artistic approach.

Mohr prefers a pleasantly temperate visual climate: a great deal of milky light, airiness, occasionally a black sun, but never a storm in a high voltage cable or anything that otherwise creates a brachial mood.

What points to "social alienation," in contrast does indeed find its correspondence in Melilla and Lampedusa, as analyzed at the beginning. And of course the antagonisms of social reality that still await a solution recur in Mohr's pictures, however first and foremost as immanent problems of form. He does not take the easy way out when it comes to creating visual representations as a possible form of communication, as a proposal for a counter-world that exists within the mind, an aesthetically rounded further planning for future progress.

When is Mohr content with a picture? "When I succeed in pressing all the converse elements into a harmonious conglomerate."

Mohr's pictures are painted shifts in perspective, admissions to a new simplicity and to drilling deep artistic holes in a period of long-term uncertainty.