

PAUL HÄHLEN

Abstract lyrically-poetic aesthetics Introduction by Silke Barg

“If there is a time in modern history in which art takes over the role of indispensability, then that time is now”, said Giuseppe Santomaso on the occasion of his 80th birthday, four years ago. Then he said: “However, I say that art does not refer to sales products that are subject to the law of consumption profits, but rather, to the imagination which wets the lymph of being - in a time when everything is being called into question - even the very concept of time, but not yet that of being in existence.”

Since 1978, in this turbulent time of change, Paul Hählen also began to develop his paintings in the direction of abstractionism. This was done not simply because the general trend was going in that direction. Rather, he described to me several times of how he fought and wrestled with himself on the inside, in order to go in this direction, swaying back and forth for years. It is obvious that he wanted to replace the inherited idiom of his painting with today's idiom, but only in a well thought-out and tested way. For example, just as James Johnson Sweeney said that his pictures had something anthropocentric about them like the earlier paintings by Afro, so it was with Hählen's painting. However, scientific knowledge about the physical world of the micro- and the macrocosm also started to manifest itself in the means of visual art being shown by Hählen.

And despite the abstractionism, Hählen has remained a traditional artist. His paintings captivate by their use of colour, rhythm, spatial interactions, light effects and harmoniously balanced compositions. Thanks to his open-mindedness, his intuitive visions radiate a liberating and uplifting effect toward the viewer. Instead of using expressively solemn overemphasis, Hählen employs extreme sensibility, also bringing in tension too through the balanced contrasts, especially in the shapes. Moreover, he animates his pictures through spontaneity, such as by leaving in there certain coincidences which “sit” well, or by skilfully incorporating them in a very clever way. So on the one hand he works with a gifted talent, and on the other hand with random good fortune - and it this synthesis which can really be described as being lyrically poetic. He condenses subjective experiences, perceptions and fulfilments into general tangibilities by taking into account regularities in the perception of colours, shapes and design. Moreover, he consistently remains aesthetic, speaking to our senses by means of elegant and tasteful representations. The words of Mörike really fit his works, when he said: “That which is beautiful seems to be blessed in itself.” He doesn’t actually paint as such; rather, he uses the brush, the spatula and the sponge to compose lyric and poetry. You could say that he is at home “in the mind and soul of a higher room” (Novalis) and that he understands “the magic formula of poetry” (Valéry), by means of which knowledge he is able to sensitize the senses of the viewer. The spirit of his work is life and joy. Sometimes he works himself up to be passionate. Only rarely does a tragic tone resonate alongside. Often, by means of sophisticated tenderness, light and shadow, colour and form appear as though being spherical in

unlimited space. Only a relative few have learned to see and perceive like Hählen. But it is worthwhile getting to know this.

In his work “Le Phénomène Humain” (The Phenomenon of Man), Pierre Teilhard de Chardin talks about the child who must first learn to distinguish the many pictures that penetrate his still virgin retina: “Before a man could discover mankind (i.e. rediscover him from a new viewpoint), it was necessary for a whole new series of ‘senses’ to arise.”

“Sense for the unlimited space in both large and small, which divides and expands the circle of objects storming us on the inside of the sphere of a ray not yet determined.”

“Sense for the depth that busily moves events back through unlimited sequences and over immeasurable temporal distances, a kind of a gravitational condition which constantly tries to push the past together for us on one single side.”

“Sense for the number ...”

“Sense for the proportion which has its own way of capturing the physical interval distances which by means of dimensions and rhythms separates the atom from the nebulous, the smallest from the endless.”

“Sense for quality or novelty.”

“Sense for movement, so that the irresistible developments which hide themselves behind great slowness, become obvious. In truth, it is the most perturbed agitation under the veil of calmness, something brand new which always appears as the same monotonous repetition.”

“Sense for that which is organic, which discovers the physical connections and understands how the superficial acting as a succession and collectivity agent, forms a structural unit.”

“ ... and may our optics be robbed of the threefold illusion which fools us with smallness, plural and immobility. Then the person will effortlessly take center stage, just as we said he would. The temporary summit of an anthropogenesis, which for its part is the crown of a cosmogenesis.”

A number of contemporary painters have intuitively come to the same idea, namely, that there is a relationship between man and the cosmos. Hählen also belongs to these contemporaries.

In the picture “Sensuous Spherical”, is to be surmised what Teilhard de Chardin meant with his “Sense for the unlimited space in both

large and small, which divides and expands ... the circle of objects storming us on the inside of the sphere."

Another way of "seeing" shows up in the picture "Mediterranean". It is a poetically compressed picture of the memory that contains the report of an optical experience in its emblematic depictions. The title "Mediterranean" is not an impression fleetingly captured from the south, but rather, a poetic reflex which, upon active reflection and remembering of the events, coagulated together in a picture, becoming a dreamily remembered "image" that wished to hold onto the fundamental shared accord from the changing impressions. Fields of white light surrounded by brownish and gray areas and being held in place by shadowy darks, suggest almost ruinous vaults and capitals with a hint of an oriental vase fragment. The right-hand side of the picture gives the impression of an almost serious resonance, while the left-hand side unfolds in a cheerful and joyful way through the bright triangle. Klee would have designated such optical experiences as being an "abstract with memories".





The “Blue Dream” picture likewise flashes up memories. There, unexpected associations mix together with visual experiences from long ago - perhaps even with things seen on the then world trip in 1963, which forced themselves back to the surface from the subconscious decades later. The two circular lines indicated, act like cosmic waves, which appear and then disappear again into space. Thanks to such visions, Hählen can hold onto poetic poetry through his painting, a poetry that would otherwise sink into a never recurring past. He achieves the experience of the widely-spanning expanse by means of geometrically divided rectangles in a way of seeing which is subordinate to the human spirit, and which reveals peace and seclusion. Time and again, architectural laws and arrangements also emerge from his earlier occupation as an architect.

Even in the picture “Archaic”, an orderly division of surface areas can be seen, which could hint at a certain association with a structural floor plan. On the other hand, the dark and coloured areas are surrounded by bright, dispersed, light-piercing colours in such a way that the imaginary object nevertheless remains informal. In this connection, Hählen once confided in me that sometimes he has even destroyed certain details in a picture, so that no formal associations to subject matter would arise. He consciously wants his abstractions to remain informal. This is a process which time and again brings with it joyful liberation, through the implementation of the viewing experience.

May 1991