

Die Blumen des Bildes Andreas Spiegl

To say David Roth is a painter is true as he actually does »paint« pictures but then not, because in his artistic practice he has always engaged in the question, what painting means, where its confines lie, to what extent this term can be maintained and where it is transformed into something entirely different and the act of painting goes beyond the genre of painting.

What is a painting, what makes a picture become a painting? The materials one uses, tools, brushes and palette knife, or is it a matter of figurative or abstract forms, oscillating between image and depiction? What kind of relationship has painting with the world it refers to and wishes to speak about? Is the familiar conception of abstraction and figurativeness and of classifying a painting as one of the two sufficient for characterising it? How to describe David Roth's »Flower Paintings« where flowers turn into paint brushes? His flower paintings do not depict flowers but in fact come into being through their traces, by the impressions they leave behind. They are incorporated into the painterly process as both motif and instrument at the same time.

By using flowers as paint brushes Roth defines his environment as a utensil, and thus characterises a concept of reality which appears in his painting and as painting. He does not only paint but allows his motif to participate in the formation of its painting. These are flower paintings painted by and with flowers, like some kind of co-production, we already encountered in earlier works by Roth. Remember those »tableaus« created by and on hikes, where Roth dragged canvases behind him with the resulting traces »making« the pictures, self-portraits of a trail, the artist and the path he walked collaborating? The paintings may appear »abstract«, yet the painting's instruments are representational – wild flowers, »Fleurs Sauvages«, Roth picked in France or on the bank of the Danube, both motif and paint brush. Even his form vocabulary, the lines and colour fields are evidence of a dialogue with the history of painting and reality's »self-will«, persuaded to encode itself into the idea of art and intervening into the traditional division of roles between author and work.

The process of formation begins if you like already with the »picking of brushes« indicating a time concept that begins pre-opus, locating the painting even when there is no trace of a picture. Roth's burning of paintings to create new works from their ashes may be another story, however, it does point out this artist is willing to paint with time, accept the process of change inherent in it. You will also find this painting with time, conscious of temporariness, in his small-format paintings based on fragments or remnants of paintings and revisited months or even years later to be developed further, re-directed to a different way of looking at things.

Roth continues on this route in rearranging his presentation again and again, thus displaying a changing ensemble, the brushwork now altering the site. In this sense Roth paints with paintings instead of flowers, picking them from his oeuvre, from the wall, to once more ask about painting, does it consist of single paintings or is it the process emerging from the relation between them and given expression beyond these, visible merely when you also see the space and place between the paintings and are prepared to understand reality as an image forming constantly, possibly even as a painting sans picture, which is another story, though.

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Translated by Laura Ruth Gaffron