

About the Picture Spaces of Jaakov Blumas

Renaissance Spate. Tiltings. Irritations.

Art is always a co-production between the work and the beholder. The painter Jaakov Blumas, resident in Hamburg, Germany, goes as far as to assert that pictures which merely stand in a shelf simply do not exist. Thus he passes the responsibility for the significance of pictures on to the beholder. In the 18th century, the philosopher George Berkeley already said that any kind of being defines itself by perception: "esse est percipi". But art as an objectified and therefore indirect form of communication includes in its essence that only the beholder makes the picture come to life. Art, including historical art, is never comprehensible by itself: in order to see a piece of marble as Venus or an *al fresco* layer of paint as a message of salvation, even in order to interpret a cross, always extra-sculptural training and narratives are called for. Certainly this will lead to problems: namely, if such narratives are missing, art is considered to be incomprehensible; but if these narratives are omnipresent, all lines crossing in any way will appear as the well-known cross symbol and each impression in stone as a mythical place of sacrifice. Once, the subjects of art colleges included the development of the artistic-physical perception by tilted figures. Tilted figures are geometrical lineaments allowing different spatial interpretations which for instance, so it seems, suddenly make the background tilt into the foreground and vice versa. Thus stairs can be depicted ascending and descending at the same time, as in M.C. Escher's drawings. Nowadays computer programmes offer almost any variation of shapes without evoking any material irritation. However, within the more and more pressing rate for visual attention it is forgotten how special and fragile our constructions of perception actually are.

Even the visual ambiguities of the tilted figures merely function within the system of central perspective which has been developed since the 15th century. Indeed, our usual understanding of pictures amazingly and unchangeably still rests on the spatial construction of the Renaissance. Although from the very beginning the "right perspective" was only a model, moreover, compared to the real two-eyed viewing clearly a false one, this linear construction remains dominant in spite of all the intensive trials to break it which were attempted in art since the classic modernity. Yet much earlier, Mannerism and Baroque had made space and its perception dynamic by rotating axes and elliptic constructions with several foci. In connection with this the vagueness of the fantastic etchings of Piranesi's "Carceri d'invenzione" depicting ladders leading into emptiness and ambiguous space layers, where one detail could simultaneously be present at two places in space, had a special effect. Already the melancholic title shows a power of invention which in spite of utopian models remains incarcerated. For more than two-hundred years these have been disturbing, unreasonable demands, as one may feel today considering some destructive architecture of Zaha Hadid, Frank O. Gehry or Daniel Libeskind.

In such a non-constructive sense Jaakov Blumas's pictures have indeed something architectural about them, and he himself can well think up extensions of built-up space. But it will not be enough for him, that some pictures contain space hinges which are mentally hard to open, that as a result some shapes in pictures tip over, that a bark framed oval shape can be seen as a hole in the picture space leading into depth as well as a disk suspended in front of it. For Jaakov Blumas it is at least as important to generate complexity by superimposing different speeds. Speed with respect to the perception of a static object is determined by the relation of simple and resistant shapes, by the

difference between the colour values and the various kinds of surfaces.

At first sight, irreconcilable contradictions in the picture have an inhibiting effect: easily recognizable basic shapes like rectangle, circle, and diagonal are reflected in every experience of an inconsistent combination, and the drawing structure emerges from the colour system. "I am including irritations into a simple arrangement in order to make people realise that this picture cannot be understood in one piece nor in one language", is Jaakov Blumas's comment.

Language. Hymns. Paradoxien.

In regions which host different cultures it may happen to a traveller that more than one foreign language can be heard on the radio. Long before one can understand any of it the different stations can be differentiated and categorized. Without knowing the meaning one is sure what it is: Portuguese or Spanish, Arabian or Hebrew. Obviously recognition and comprehension are two different things, but this difference is often forgotten in relation to pictures. Pictures of any kind are subjected to the unreasonable demand that by recognition they ought to be simultaneously understood. In connection with the constant acceleration of the speed of perception, advertising messages and pieces of art, logos and pictograms are falsely considered to be unconditionally understandable symbols which are universally and interpersonally comprehensive and valid. Yet if these symbols miss out on the stories, the hood of symbols will lead to a visual illiteracy while the language though recognized has not been understood. In the event that these symbols become compulsory alter all, a new myth will easily arise. Jaakov Blumas's pictures show a clearly recognizable individuality in spite of the fact that almost all sectors of art are already occupied. But they are not supposed to sneak into consciousness like trade marks and then adopt the functions of myths there. To the contrary, they are intended to be an invitation to question the look, and they are indeed hymns to ambiguity. Against the current strong competition the medium of painting unfolds its three most important forces in a surprisingly unspoiled manner: the slowness in making a picture which finally will demand patience from the beholder, the timeless,

standing presence of the entire picture which offers beginning, middle, and end at the same time, and the specific permanence which focuses the user and the pictorial object into a common space and confronts them with each other. The encounter with Jaakov Blumas's pictures always necessitates a second look. If one tries to remember one of the seemingly simply constructed pictures over two minutes and then turns around in order to copy it in form of a sketch, one will hardly manage to reproduce the structure correctly. Since the contents of the pictures is indeed symbolic, but it does not have a meaning in terms of interpretable semiotics. Pierce and Saussure define in their theory of symbols three basic differentiations in a balanced triangle: syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. I.e. firstly, the internal structure of language, secondly, its relation to the world, that is its ability to denote things apart from itself, and thirdly the aspect of social application within the field of communication. Transferring this to Jaakov Blumas's pictures we are faced with a mostly reasonable syntax: we recognize his style and hand, we recognize his vocabulary and its structure. The painting per se and the special individual style can clearly and recognizably be determined. Moreover, the components of this pictorial language are an open secret: there are layered surfaces, there are distinctively smooth surfaces and shiny ones which adopt different forms of plasticity either by themselves or in their position towards each other. Further we recognize limitations which serve to separate colours as well as lineaments which autonomously generate shapes. As to pragmatics, within the field of art it is absolutely possible to read and use this pictorial language, to communicate about and by it. Yet as far as the field of semantics is concerned, it is apparently comparable to Etruscan writing: We can read it, since it is written in Latin, we know the word categories and the basic structure of its grammar, names turn out, but we do not know the meaning of the texts. Jaakov Blumas also uses the metaphorical expression of language in order to comment on his art: "I paint precise things which I don't know, but feel, in a language which I know, but don't understand."

This deals with paradoxies which can only be materialized in art: mathematically measurable Spaces of the unknown, a combination of special poetry and hyper space technology, science fiction-type physics without instructions for it. In view of increasingly more complex cultural techniques, though, one is less prepared to go without instructions, and to gain experience merely by sensorial duplication alone. For looking at pictures one certainly needs basic visual vocabulary, too. But the meaning of a good picture cannot definitely be determined even by Support of an entire shelf of visual encyclopaedias - fortunately not. Since only that which is resistant to full incorporation by a Single act of interpretation can Claim future interest.

Get in. Change. Perceive.

If one encounters with Jaakov Blumas's pictures in an impartial way they first of all Show an uncomplicated effect: There aren't any pathetic, surrealistic break-ups between the motives of the pictures urged on the beholder, there aren't any Fauvist mixtures of depiction and Ornament puzzling one's impression. Nevertheless, they will not allow an aha experience. Since even though the geometrically structured pictures appeal to already available experience, they are still not compatible with it. It is clearly recognizable that different keys to the access can be found, but there is no interpretation in terms of a somehow definite answer. The pictorial colour surfaces and the rational constructions hide thus a cryptic intelligence of the picture, an "acutezza recondita", as it is demanded by the theory of art since Mannerism. Here it rests on the different Speeds and languages of the painting techniques, develops between the simultaneous perception of different pictorial spheres and hard lines within a picture space which on the way to imaginary geometrical places where new solidarity between apparent incompatibilities arises indeed cannot be crossed without changing. At this point changing is more than a metaphorical expression, since many Works are composed of several picture panels.

Thus as always, the edge of the picture simultaneously constitutes the real end of the object of canvas and wedged stretcher, as well as the Limit of the picture space as a window to Imagination. In combining several picture Panels the borderline relates to the rest of the straight lines, the edge becomes a line and as a result a normal element among many others within the structure of the picture. Furthermore differences can be detected more clearly because the necessary comparison makes some pictures appear in duplication. Yet even such already complex spaces of ambiguity will often not continue to be limited to the four Corners of the spread canvas: Added narrow arches extend the picture, effect repeated additional changes of dimension and pull the otherwise neutral Background of the wall into the construction of the picture, whether in its pure nature or even in a colour especially determined by the artist. In addition, pictures of extremely wide formats often seek to draw the attention of the beholder. Because without her/him everything is void. It may be repeated: art always is a co-production between the originator and the observer. Looking from the artist's point of view Jaakov Blumas's urbane biography including Lithuania, Israel, and Germany may constitute a personal Background for his great interest in the variety of the Parameters of perception. But mainly this kind of painting – difficult to grasp as well as stimulating – is one of the perhaps most important creative offers for training that can be made to consumers of art. The original meaning of the Greek word aesthetics is nothing but the theory of perception. Strictly speaking, the aesthetic Producer Jaakov Blumas is a scientist of perception.

Hajo Schiff, 2000