

Nature and reminiscence

Ernesto Baltiswiler's paintings are hermetic, self-contained visualizations of processes which do not lend themselves to conjectural interpretation unless we regard them in their entirety. Here the occasional reference in one or other of the titles may help us to associate the painting – however mistakenly – with ordinary reality, but how can such titles as “In i skogen” (In the Middle of the Forest), “Segelskuta i storm” (Sailing Boat in a Storm), “Minne av Spetsbergen” (Memory of Spitzbergen) or “Ficklampa i skogen” (Flashlight in the Forest) help us if we cannot in any way relate them to pictures which, in their very autonomy, waive all that is visually representational, associatively depictive?

Whilst on the one hand the beholder can immediately sense the harmony inherent in Baltiswiler's paintings, a harmony created by the balance composition of shapes and colours, he cannot on the other hand rely on them for any indication of what they might depict or what he might expect to recognize in them. And yet they do awaken in the beholder a sensitivity which reaches beyond the mere sensation of balance and harmony. They are suggestive of moods and atmospheres which bring back memories to the beholder. Here Baltiswiler's work clearly results from the discussion on the 20th century painting, avoiding every apparent artistic naivety and immaturity. Whilst he uses colour and form in a multitude of ways, as amorphous patches or clearly defined shapes, in rhythmical composition or in ambiguously transparent, gradually disappearing blends, Baltiswiler at all times conveys a complexity of moods and feelings, awakens in us memories and associations and, last not least, involves us in a retrospective experience of the complex process of the artist's work at the easel, a process in which not least the picture itself has a part to play in its own completion.

Ernesto Baltiswiler's paintings invite our eyes to embark upon a journey, a journey which is forever in search of further orders in the woven texture of individual patterns. Indeed, such orders also bring structures and textures into our way of seeing things; they rhythmize our visual experience. Leitmotifs appear where colours dominate and retreat in varying intensity, guiding the eye along the main lines of vision, autonomous orders within an autonomous structure, orders which reflect nothing but the artist's intention to create and the interpretations which our modern culture puts on every colour, every sign. The painter Baltiswiler involves us again and again in the constant process of creating meaningful constellations, colours and shapes in layer upon layer, row next to row, clearly defined forms that dissolve into nothing, contrasts emphasized here, there denied. If we, the beholders, follow this process in the picture, then we really are "in the picture". We witness, for example, the juxtaposition of green and red on a white-gold-ochre blended ground - transparently clear - and sense how our accepted notion of complementary contrasts gives way to the perfect harmony of opposites which admits of no stridency. Painting is not, it seems, governed by any laws which in a work of art cannot be revoked.

Baltiswiler's paintings manifest an extreme subjectiveness and collectedness. And they also clearly identify the artist with a painting tradition which relates to visible things without making them the visual content of the picture. What is seen and experienced - and here his main source of inspiration is the Nordic landscape - is merely the starting point of a creative process which is realized through reminiscence, empathy, sympathy, re-creation. The resultant harmony which pervades his paintings has its origins in the way the artist Baltiswiler views the world. Whilst he recreates in his paintings all the things he sees and experiences, he gives way to their suddenness, lending them an independence all their own and leaving them to their own devices.

Ulrich Krempel
Düsseldorf, 1992

Translation: John Brogden