

catalogue 2001 - City-Gallery of Wendlingen
Paintings, drawings and objects

By lending the world his body, the artist turns the world into a painting.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

"In the visual arts, a fundamental chance is available for people to make the way they feel about the world apparent and to reflect upon the sense of perception and the consciousness of the age.

The intent of contemporary art is to act as an aesthetical provocation in the output of ideas and to reveal the present-day state of thought and action.

The artist, Michael Starz, is concerned with the opening up of stagnating perceptual and orientational patterns, with the contemplation of concealed potential and with the activation of a sensually determined, intellectual capacity. His work can be encountered in the synthesis of unrestrained impulsiveness, controlled reflection, risk and calculation, which are witness to both a radical subjective and elementary development. In his complex artistic work the painter sounds out, over and again, the co-ordinates of human experience and the world we live in.

He does not aim to define definite, tangible subjects but erects ambiguous, abstract picture frameworks from his own repertory of very personal forms and symbols. Only occasionally does vague reference to the elements of the visual world come to light. Whilst the artist's inner vision manifests itself on the page or canvas, the realism of the, for the most part, merely suspected objects in the picture, loses its tangibility. The compositional framework does not exist from the outset but becomes apparent after the completion of the painting. Starz approaches the last, valid picture form in gradual steps, usually after many resumed working sessions. Ultimately, an unimaginable number of previously conceived states are stored under the diverse surfaces of the finished painting.

The sensation of energy-filled motion is captured in his smaller-sized drawings as well as in his larger-than-life-sized canvases. This dynamic force evolves, substantially, from an impulsive, form-breaking painting ductus: The artist's own emotional view-point becomes evident towards the created work in ecstatic, quickened, physical movement. The brushstrokes, the traces and marks of his forming hands and fingertips are not primarily characteristic of the painted object, but, above all, the expressive precipitation of his changing emotions to be felt by the onlooker. They produce forms which can be conceived as tracks of movement and traces, not only of the human body, but also of the human soul.

An unmistakably physical execution of his work manifests itself in his eruptive, almost brutal gestures. The body comes into play as bearer and mediator of subjective, psychological emotions, as transmitter between the material world and subjective realms, as a medium of frenzied ecstasy as well as determined concentration. Thus, the beholder's physical experience and sensory perception are challenged by the cosmos in Starz's paintings: They need to be experienced, to be understood in the tension and the complex rhythm, in the changes between figuration and abstraction, in the rich effect of the material used. No one spot in his works of art gives the eye a

hold; they demand a constant roaming, rebounding, never ending kind of observation which stimulates reflection on one's own relationship to the world and constantly leaves the viewer to his own resources. The open layout of composition, its complex way of coming into being, the variety of points to hold the eye within the picture and the many different possibilities of reading it, all these things reflect the artist's perceived richness of reality in the visible world and appear as a response to changing situations.

Very often, concise lines of rotation collide violently in the picture. Powerful shapes bear witness to the balance of unruly forces. The elements of the picture form constellations in which a flowing, hovering or swimming, a crouching, falling or stumbling are vividly apparent. They gravitate through a space with indefinable boundaries, whose distance is determined by the irrational, by experience. The canvas is turned around during work so that „top“ and „bottom“ lose their meaning in the picture framework; as the colour formations spread, the floating atmosphere joins with a borderland realm liberated from gravity. Here and there, through casual accents, Starz allows a wash of colour to gel to a figure: Natural forms, or the rudiments of such, appear unexpectedly. The viewers discover birds, boats or plants, they imagine heads, torsos or phallic symbols whose context, however, remains devoid of any rational conclusiveness. The suggestive rhythm of these archetype pictures allow scope for individual interpretation and associative completion. Nevertheless, in a mysterious way, the positioning of the essence of the picture is determined, its movement is fixed. The forms „take course“ even when no certain destination is in view. Occasionally, strangely odd, technoid, foreign elements, in the form of mechanically outlined colour patches, push their way into the structure. Like barriers they seem to check the profusely growing, organic form development, to initiate dramatic encounters and conflicts.

An impetuous, at times ungainly application of paint with an unpretentious, thick paintbrush is characteristic of Michael Starz's oil paintings. The intrinsic value of the type of paint used plays a leading role in, and is an essential component of the statement made in the picture. Just as the whole creative procedure develops its own dynamic force, so the sensual, haptic stimulus of the colour substance makes itself independent. The picture surface evokes notions of organic growth, of geological structures in the complexity of its thick paste-like layers. The awareness of the three-dimensional values goes hand in hand with the identification of the figuratively characterized in the picture.

The furrows in the colour streaks produce varied reactions to the lightening conditions of the moment: gleaming, almost sparkling parts are placed next to areas of creamy, matt texture, the crusty mass of the oily matter marks bodily accents in smoothly spread, more uniform areas.

Starz's chosen palette of colours also creates an impression of movement charged with tension. The artist intensifies the expressive value and the emotional effect of the colours by using contrasts and discord: Different intensities of a red, as the most prominent bright colour, often heighten the expressive force of the structure. Yellow ochre suggests earth; salmon-pink, flesh; ultramarine, sea or sky. Basically, however, the construction of the picture is born by black. Placed on a light background, the black usually results from a tangle of massive, dark, bundles of lines which are interspersed with spots of underlying colour, in a subtle, varied way. Thus,

Starz's black gains a radiating, as well as an absorbing power, a dimension, of inner spaciousness, as well as hermetic concentration. The darkness seems to be alive, fertile, shimmering, dramatic.

Quite commonplace objects he collected and waste material often provide a source of inspiration in a sensitively ordered colour scheme with its unpredictable textures. They challenge the artist's fantasy and sure three-dimensional instinct and act as a complement and counterpoint to the painted work. These found objects fire the production of fetishist sculptures. With their additive structure, equally incidental and striking elements and variations emerge. The amazed onlooker becomes aware of the appeal of eroded surfaces, of rust, patina, weathered wood, of flaking, yellowed settings. The individual existence of organic substances becomes the theme, but the artist, at the same time, also refers to the polarity of coming into being and decay, to creation and destruction.

The physical force of these crude objects and the ambivalence of the effect of their surfaces are mirrored in his latest large-scale works of art on paper. Starz arrives at most unconventional results in his pictures when he allows liquid oil and charcoal, chinks and pasty masses of pigments to react with one another on heavy, hand-made paper. Here, he takes the contrast between a rich, indistinct spread of colour and scanty, criss-cross lines to an extreme. A deliberate, archaic style determines this artwork. The individual layers mark out obvious moments in the changing course of time, they indicate the rhythm and sequence of an event. Constant, new variations on a theme are defined in this block of work which was produced as a series, in the course of which, reference to the visible world is left to the onlooker's individual perception.

Hybrid creatures consisting of heads, lumps and body framework meet in head-on hierarchy. Exactly this ambivalent magnificence of their appearance emphasizes the impression of a metamorphic change, as if they were just about to disintegrate and fall. Again, the picture statement is first revealed to those who, on the basis of their own personal perception, project themselves into the forming process.

Michael Starz places people in the centre of his art, people who stand their ground by acting, forming, and reflecting upon things in the world around them. By making a record of his subjective observations of life, he acquires the basic parameters of human feeling and existence.

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(English Translation by Anthea Fritsch)