

Holger Bär

11,500,000 Dots

1 October, 2022 - 18 February, 2023

After the abstract images of Holger Bär's last gallery exhibition "Painting With Numbers" of 2020, the current exhibition showcases works resulting from Bär's years of exploring the color theories and optical principles of Pointillism. The paintings of the "Engadin" series, first exhibited in 2015, had already pursued this line, with the present works demonstrating a further development and refinement of this approach.

The main work of the exhibition is a four-part painting measuring 3 x 8 meters of a water lily pond—in conjunction with the portraits of Monet also on view a clear homage to the great Impressionist. Bär's work, however, clearly owes more to the Pointillism (or Neo-Impressionism) of Georges Seurat than to Impressionism, i.e. to a more scientific approach to the color and lighting effects that the Impressionists had tackled more intuitively: the work "Bathers" and "La Grand Jatte", re-creations in Bär's own technique of seminal works by Seurat, are a clear acknowledgment of this. The specific way in which the computer-controlled painting machines work—machines developed and refined by Bär himself over decades—, basically suggested a Pointillist approach from the very beginning: for in a manner similar to an oversized plotter they paint by placing dots of (oil or acrylic) paint on the prepared canvas. The completed picture results from the amalgamation of these countless dots of paint into a visual whole. But while the early pictures were limited to just a few colors and therefore appeared monochrome (such as the "Prussian Blue Berlin" series), Seurat's particular Pointillist approach from the late 19th century inspired Bär to revisit and reexamine the way he had worked with the new color theories of his period. Thanks to the technical possibilities at Bär's disposal—means that Seurat could only dream of—, in particular computer technology and his own dedicated algorithms, he not only succeeded in reviving Seurat's approach to painting but also in empirically proving the theories he relied on. Because where Seurat still had to work intuitively and with approximations, Bär can now consistently work according to the precise specifications of these color theories.

The main principle of the Pointillist style of painting implemented by Bär is that of optical (subtractive) color mixing. Similar to modern photo printers Bär's machines paint with eight basic colors: ultramarine blue, light blue, vermillion, light magenta, green, yellow, as well as white and a dark gray (the latter in deviation from Seurat's approach). Unlike with printers, however, where the individual dots are written as small as possible and are therefore hardly or not at all visible for the naked eye, the dots of paint in Bär's pictures are opaque and clearly separated from one another, and therefore distinctly recognizable as such. Since the dots in photo printing are translucent and overlapping or stacked on top of each other, a subtractive color mixing already occurs on the carrier material itself. No such no color mixing can be observed in Bär's canvases, neither subtractive nor additive (such as in computer screens):

all other hues perceived in the painting are only created in the eye or brain of the beholder, who thereby provides an active and indispensable contribution to the formation of the image. The images, however, only coalesce from a certain minimum distance, when approached more closely they begin to dissolve into their individual dots. The principle of optical color mixing is thus impressively and conclusively demonstrated. At the same time, it can be stated that despite their first appearance Bär's paintings are not (photo-)realistic, but analytical: they do not depict a reality where colors mixing occurs everywhere before it is perceived, but dissect the light reflected from objects into its constituent parts and effect the color mixing in the act of perception as a kind of optical illusion.

It is interesting to note that Bär, in the paintings of this exhibition, is also taking his cue from the Impressionists and Pointillists with regard to subject-matter. Their special interest in lighting effects was closely linked to the new movement of painting *en plein air*, i.e. outdoors rather than in the studio. Nature as depicted both in the paintings of the Impressionists and in those of Bär, however, is not the sublime, wild nature of Romantic painting seen in opposition to culture, but a nature profoundly tamed and shaped by humans and modern civilization: artificially created and designed urban parks, cultivated fields, developed banks of rivers and lakes serving as sites for recreation and leisure. Just as the pictures, by means of their painting style, create optical illusions, nature appears reduced to an ideal image and spectacle for a fundamentally urban culture.