

## **Dieter Bogner: Gunther Skreiner, Pictures 1976-86**

The interested viewer of old masters has the habit of scrutinizing a piece of art for the form of its applied signs (figures, objects) and for the way they are arranged in a formal unit (composition), employing a method of formally orientated picture analysis used by art historians. The intention is to get information about the means used by the artist to describe the contents as well as about the factors that account for the expressive qualities of the picture. Composition-sketches often help to clarify these visual phenomena, showing roughly the intended distribution of the flow of mass and movement or in detail the appearance of the different signs.

In constructive and analytical art, much attention was given to these formal aspects of picture-interpretation: the essential aims of the art historical method, perfected parallel to the origin of abstract art, became a central theme in modern art. The artists developed, intentionally, individual 'picture laws', which they exposed, or encoded in such a way that they had to be deciphered analytically, or they hid them behind their subjective choice of material so that, completely in the traditional sense, only the 'pre-drawing' (scheme, program) could enlighten the process of creation. The knowledge of a 'principle' was imperative for the viewer if he desired an insight, beyond a purely individual delight in forms and colors, into the interrelation of the artist's original scheme and his spontaneous ideas.

Gunther Skreiner's pictures of the past 10 years oscillate between two extreme points: extensive exposure of the 'principle' - developed in the sixties and later further elaborated, where spontaneous ideas were utterly eliminated, and secondly, subjective freedom of creation in the pictorial translation of the systematically built composition. The choice and treatment of material is accordingly diverse: the dominant factor is sometimes the sign, at other times the texture or, as in the most recent series, the color. This range is possible because Skreiner, in accordance with structure-thinking, takes the picture only as a concrete 'substitute form' for an abstract basic idea which can be expressed in the most diverse ways: as pure form or color, as light or sound. Here the essence lies in the problem of superimposition and penetration caused by the oppositional relation between the form of the composition and the system of the signs, a problem that has always been immanent for the artistic creativity process. The thorough investigation of this 'topic' is the crux of Skreiner's work.

In the process of creation Skreiner combines two diverse preconditions: a complex compositional structure which divides the picture into two irregular geometrical cells (fig.) and a linearly developing system of simple signs (I-Λ). These elements help to visualize the structure of the picture, and in turn set the even sequence of signs into rhythm. Both factors of definition are variable within a pre-conditioned field. By means of combining these two factors of definition by superimposition, Skreiner creates a state of tension upon which he then elaborates.

Whereas the first figure shows the 'principle', the following three groups of pictures of the past ten years show several 'variations' of this 'topic'. Variations occur in the relation between continuous exposition of the predetermined conditions and spontaneous decisions made during the act of painting. This is closely related with the choice of the means. Where the signs are to illustrate above all the cell structure (theme of the composition), the most reduced form of description prevails: the sign and the interval. Where, however, sign constellations within the different cells get linked (due to individual decisions) and become tape-like stripes or lacework complexes which fill the cells and thus form a kind of fabric made up of individual pieces, the case is different: unsensual black paint is the suitable material. Only the relief-like structure suits both the formation and the differentiation of form. Despite the breaks between the parts they add up to a homogenous whole.

The later pictures show much more individuality. The early ones seem to be the reaction of the 'systematician' to New Painting: the elements of the unvarying sign-systems are translated into the free brush-strokes of a painter, they do not reveal their orderly origin. The sensual element of a dynamic choice of color pushes the intellectual structure completely into the background. Herewith the second point has been attained.

Skreiner points out that at times he engages more in the composition- and sign-system and in its visualization, at other times he works on the 'interpreting' of the formally developed relations, in a mutual cross-pollution of intellect and emotion. The 'wild' appearance of color in his concept was transitory; a new combination of form structure and color concept resulted producing pictures with a new content.

On a rectangular frame we can now see two large fields of color separated by a space. Arranged casually, the familiar signs (pre-programmed however, like before) float in front of these fields without appearing to be connected in any way. The colors assigned to the signs do not convey an effort to correspond with the basic colors and also do not contrast strongly with each other. The essence of the composition of the colors lies in disconnection and incompatibility with traditional color laws. The essence of the aforementioned formal principle, i. e. the superimposition of a totally diverse sign system onto a composition-structure and the manipulation of this state of tension is conveyed by the choice of colors in these pictures. Whereas the former treatment had led to harmony of the composition, that means to the release of the tension, and contrasts were seen as complementary parts of a superior unity, now in turn non-associated juxtapositions of the dissimilar

elements emerge unbroken, and the viewer is confronted with a situation which has not been solved; he gets no hint for its repeal in a 'higher' instance. Skreiner's original theme (compositional structure and sign-system) has remained structurally unchanged. There was a change, however, in the 'Interpretation' of the contrast in view of this unaltered principle. The sudden breaks visible in the most recent series signify one phenomenon of contemporary art which is reduced to concise forms and materials: artists increasingly work at a means of expression marked by a pluralistic co-existence which neither tends to assimilate the autonomous parts into a superior whole, nor blocks any attempt at communication; the autonomy of the individual is guaranteed, but at the same time the establishment of relations by means of a pluralistic field of associations is feasible as well as desirable. The most recent development of art (comparable to aspects of modern society) threw numerous restrictions overboard which had dogmatically fixed 'Modern Art' such that it had become unmovable without however assimilating the individual positions into a diffuse mixture, and thus a new way of handling the artistic means evolved, to which the most diverse 'modi' of the past also belonged. The communicative juxtaposition of the disconnected and incoherent is a central style phenomenon of the 'Moderne' which was further enriched by the vast reservoir of forms and contents of history. These three groups of paintings by Gunther Skreiner show that the late seventies did not bring about a total break, but an interrelation between stability and renewal.

translated by Eva Griss and Frank Newman