

The Objects' Own Life Oscillating between Space and Surface – on New Works by Eckart Hahn

by Jan Nicolaisen

At the moment, paintings are enjoying a resurgence of popularity on the international art market. This phenomenon is due to many causes, but primarily to the quality of the pictures offered, once more bringing to light the great potentials of painting as an art form. In a visual world dominated by flat screen aesthetics and streamlined smoothness, the painted picture reaffirms the primacy of the three-dimensional space. Guided by his imagination and experience, the viewer can enter into the world which the painter has opened up to him and let his eyes and thoughts wander. This is the magic of painting, known and praised since the Renaissance. The title of a small size painting called "At Home" by Eckhart Hahn (2005) illustrates paradigmatically this power of painting. An old-fashioned toy plane is heading towards a flowered wall which occupies the whole background of the picture. The skewed perspective on the plane, its wings glimmering from the thick dabs of white paint (the century-old impasto technique to capture the light), brings about the illusion of three-dimensionality. The weave of the canvas and the flowery pattern on the pale monochromatic fabric add a decorative element to the picture. The juxtaposition of figuration and abstraction creates a tension which fuels the toy flyer as if with kerosene. In the painting, the painting itself is treated as the paradoxical place where painter and viewer are in their house, that is "at home".

Eckart Hahn's painting style has evolved, with figure and landscape participating more actively as performers in his pictures. The surreal arrangements have become more complex. This added complexity does not only concern motifs, but also the formal, technical and aesthetical dynamism. Thus, lately, the artist works on large size tusche drawings which, in black and white, remind us of etchings without being such. As picture carriers, silk raffia or papyrus give the drawings a particular tactility. The painter has always attached much importance to this haptic dimension. The picture's sensuous surface invites the viewer to enter into the labyrinth of the painting, it is not a closed surface, but an opening which attracts magically - with an uncertain outcome. The textures speak their own language which we do

not understand at first glance, they are separated from the things to which they belong. Factories, people, mountains and landscapes are covered with cloth, sewn up, as if hermetically sealed. Sealed worlds. Man and nature are condensed into grotesque allegories. Here, there is a note of pungent criticism. Thus, Hahn's predilection for pupated, amorphous creatures is not self-indulgent virtuosity, but it is not an exercise in ecocriticism either. On the contrary, the surfaces emits dynamic signals in order to heighten, and mislead, the perception of the viewer. They in the first place express the painter's sensibility in his never ending quest to find the essence of figurative painting. *Are* objects something other than autonomous creatures living their own life? It does not matter if it is a mountain, a tool, a chair or a tablecloth. The interiors enclosed in boxes - paradoxically outside spaces at the same time, that is both private and public - evoke attempts to break free, but where? The covers awake the desire to deconstruct in the true meaning of the word: to remove and shake off layers in order to free the original stratum. But: where to find it?

The drawing "Skin Merchants" (2005) shows two men in working clothes hauling big bales of skins with bars. In a manner recalling the Leipzig painter Neo Rausch's radiant narratives whose influence on Eckart Hahn's work is perceptible, the skin could constitute a metaphor for the craft of the painter who forms the special "fabric" of the picture out of physical fabrics and imaginary arrangements. It is neither surprising nor reprehensible when the painter's gaze goes from Reutlingen to Leipzig to register what is being done there. To stand alone means to compare and to demarcate oneself in a conscious manner. In contrast to the paintings by his colleagues Neo Rausch or Matthias Weischer, addressing more the picturesque aspects of the picture, Eckart Hahn's works are characterized by a photographic accuracy. Typical of photographic perception, this accuracy does not come so much from his training as a photographer, but from his double-edged concept of the picture as questionable reality. Indeed, the crystalline structure of his figurative paintings presents a faked limpidity which we, immediately, perceive as counterfeit. We move within these pictorial spaces with heightened senses and collide into the hermetic surreal narratives.

Hahn dramatizes through modifications of scale, like magnification and miniaturisation, the juxtaposition of heterogeneous elements creates toy worlds which are not playful. Objectivity and emotion enter into a surprising symbiosis. The cold grey of the mountain crests in the

"Massif" (2005) and the pale white light in "Sunday Afternoon" (2005) illustrate this point in a vivid manner.