

Thomas Huber

The Red Frieze

The paintings in this exhibition are all hung above a red frieze. When one looks at them, one recognises that this red frieze is repeated in the paintings. The frieze thus exists in the exhibition room and also exists in the space of the paintings. The exhibition site and the pictorial space are interconnected. When we stand before the paintings and look at them, we find ourselves in two corresponding spaces. The situation in the paintings can be transposed to the situation in the exhibition. We can imagine that what is depicted in the paintings could just as well happen here with us in the exhibition room. The observer can understand this as an invitation. In front of the paintings, the observer should make contact with them. The pictures are not merely objects on the wall anymore, to be observed exclusively in isolation. Each painting suggests a standpoint to the observer. The observer can, if desired, accept this and assume the offered role. The observer becomes part of the painting, is now, as we say, “part of the picture”. Looking at the painting, the observer also looks at himself or herself.

When we stand before paintings we are accustomed to asking questions. We ask, for example, “what does this picture mean?”. Imagine if the painting would ask back: “And what do you mean?”¹ We are also quick to pass judgment, to make an evaluation, and say: “That picture is lovely!” You would certainly be surprised if I replied: “You are lovely too.” We regularly exclude ourselves when looking at images. We usually make an effort to look at something from a safe distance, from a respectful distance. The goal is supposed to be, of course, to take in the painting in question and then to understand it. The painting becomes an object for us that we try to decipher, in order to ultimately be capable of passing judgement on it. Then we say, for example, “Yes, I like that painting. I think it is lovely.”

Observing a painting in this manner differs from the *experience*² that we could have from a painting. We only experience a painting when we are part of the observation, when we experience ourselves in the observa-

¹ Ad Reinhard, from the cartoon series *How to Look at Modern Art*, 1946.

² In his main work, *Ursprung und Gegenwart 1947–1952 (The Ever-present Origin*, authorized translation by Noel Barstad with Algis Mickunas, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1985), Jean Gebser describes the history of humanity as the mutations of successive structures of consciousness: the archaic/magical, the mythical, and the mental/rational attitudes of consciousness. These attitudes correspond to the *living through* for the magical structure, the *experience* for the mythical structure, and the *conception* for the mental structure. Gebser’s descriptions of the history of consciousness form the basis for the ideas in this text.

tion. We thus take part in the experience. We exclude ourselves, however, when we examine and evaluate. We turn the painting into a thing, which we register from outside, to then make a judgement on it.

Looking at a painting can be compared to a journey at sea. Our gaze sweeps across the image, just like the sailor guides the ship over the abyss of the water's depths. The water's depths, the dark abyss, is an image, a metaphor for the spiritual. When humans lived entirely in the spiritual they lived in the mythical age. Numerous myths have come down to us from that age in which journeys over water are described. Among these myths we are familiar with the story of Noah's Ark or Odysseus' travels at sea. The spiritual is, therefore, an *experience*. It is a journey on which we travel. The mythical belongs to a deeper level of consciousness in us, one which, again and again, unexpectedly flickers through our rational, enlightened worldview. It certainly does not occur when we think in concepts or operate with numbers. But when we encounter images the mythical forces itself upon us. Images are an accomplishment of the myth. For this reason it is often difficult for us to integrate images into our rationally determined consciousness. It is defined by the separation between observer and the observed. Put more abstractly, we speak of the subject-object division of rationality. The mythical, in contrast, "thinks" in images and thus from the inescapable interconnectedness of the ego and the world. Images, thus, are in their essence not capable of separating the seeing from the seen. We named this realisation of the inseparableness an *experience*. Experience is a remembering, a spiritual occurrence. It contrasts with *conception*, that is, the distancing, separating perception of the rational approach that predominates today. The disappearance of the mythical, however, does not mean that images have disappeared. We continue to orient ourselves to images, but have given them a new classification. While in an earlier mythical age an image was appreciated when looked at, now it is a conception. It has thus become an opposite, a thing, which we classify in systems. Art is one such system. A typical question that arises before a painting today enquires "is it art?" That a painting can be regarded as art presupposes that it is a thing that can be objectively looked at. Many pictures that we nowadays appreciate as art objects in museums were previously not art, since they were experienced, since no difference was made in front of them between the image and the observer. They were not regarded as an imagined thing and thus also not judged or regarded as beautiful.

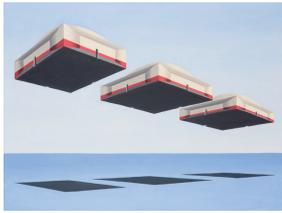
In front of the paintings displayed in this exhibition I am not calling for a return to the mythical age. Such a step, which would be a step backwards, would be fatal, in my opinion. Rather, I am concerned with pointing out that the image has preserved its two-faced essence from the age of the myth. The transformation to a rational consciousness sought to re-

move from pictures their twin Janus faces, to force them to assume an objective perspective. This was only possible by objectifying the image. Art history is proof of an over 500 year-long effort to classify images as objects in various categories. The changing philosophic aesthetic systems that have accompanied art history likewise situate pictures in systems. The objective of this ordering and systemising has been until today to objectify images, that is, to recognise them as things and then to understand them. This new approach to images has brought us profound and valuable insights into the visual. I am convinced that we should not stop with this art-historical classification and aesthetical systemisation. It will also not help us any further to overturn the existing classifications or to expand the systematics. We should instead use the insights we have gained to make a jump, to leap away from our dear, but also rigid, approaches. We should leapfrog over classifications and systems and thus leapfrog over thinking. An encounter with images beyond the compulsive classifications and systems in which they are tied down today is an opportunity for such a leap.

Let us return to the pictures in this exhibition. Above I claimed that one could have an *experience* in front of these paintings. The experience is characterised by the fact that the observed painting looks back at the observer. The experience is therefore a being-there, experienced as a being-inseparable from what is seen. This experience is a form of memory. It touches the interior, the life of the soul, the inner images, the inner turmoil of the observer. I said above that experience is a sea journey above the depths of the soul, as described in myths. The external images correspond to our inner images, to what takes place in our inner soul. The rational consciousness has exposed these images as projections, as ideals. We have learned to not see our images as a symbol of what takes place inside us, but to recognise them as an autonomous reality separated from ourselves. In this manner, inescapability has been removed from pictures, into which we were helplessly drawn in when we looked at them before.

Thinking as directed thinking, that is, the rational consciousness, has led us out of this interconnectedness. For this reason, the rational consciousness is at odds with images, since it fears in them the danger of a relapse into mythical darkness, into irrationality. Ever since the emergence of rationality the polemics against images have been legion. It is absurd, however, to want to forbid images, for then one would have to gouge out all of our eyes. Even then, there would be no guarantee that interior images would not continue to appear within us. Images are a part of our being-in-the-world that cannot be destroyed. Insofar it represents a first step when we accept images as a legacy from the mythical and thus acknowledge the irrational link to the world. We must accept that the integration of the mythical does not mean that it will be transformed

into something rational. The image cannot be deduced rationally and therefore cannot be objectified. When we look at images, then we do not look at a thing, rather we enter into a relationship with ourselves. Yet, since we have left the mythical and have arrived on the path of thinking at the end in the *logos*, we find ourselves in the amazing and new situation of seeing through ourselves. We do not only look at something, we look at ourselves. We can look over ourselves in the *experience*. This does not take place analytically, not by separation, nor by contrasting, but rather in an all-encompassing gaze. The pictorial situations in *Der Rote Fries* are an incomplete, never-brought-to-an-end enumeration of visual encounters. These are not only placed one beside the other in a series, but each one is accompanied by a text. The texts do not explain the paintings, rather they propose how the experience before the paintings can itself become visible and transparent. One should not read the texts with the mistaken expectation that one could then *understand* the paintings. Instead, the goal is that this bringing-to-awareness could make a sort of jump, a hop. One hops, one jumps, as described above, out of a long-established order. The jump, the hiatus, is comparable to a hiccup, which occurs when, for example, one's breathing is interrupted due to a fright, to an unexpected change in the habitual. When a joke is told it causes its effect in a similar way. Linear thinking mixes up the succession of steps and then stumbles. We experience this unexpected falling-out from established orders as liberating and have to laugh. Whoever experiences something similar before the paintings here will have gained something.



Where do pictures come from? Does intuition have a horizon above which it appears? As far as I can say, a visual idea appears immediately. Actually, it is false to speak of an idea, since intuition is not a thought, not abstract; instead, it appears as an image before the inner eye, that is, it is suddenly visible. Intuition does not allow itself to be forced. There is no path to it, not like thought, which sets out on a path, travels with thoughts, and arrives at a conclusion. If in thinking one approaches something, then inspiration comes towards one. If thinking is led by will and decisiveness, then inspiration is given as a gift to one. This requires confidence as well as patience. Sometimes intuition appears to be unclear, it remains shrouded in vagueness. That is not its fault, but mine. It could be prejudices on my part, the wrong attitude of expectations, or my routine that cloud my vision and block me. Then I have to practice patience once more. Is this not the same as creating distance to myself? Inspiration does not lie before me of course, but was placed in the centre of me. Therefore, I have to clean myself up, in order to make space for inspiration. If this is successful, then inspiration transforms itself into a determination. It becomes a command to act: Paint the picture! Paint it in this size, choose this proportion, use these colours! Inspiration is recognisable because it employs the imperative. The specifications are inalterable and strict. It serves no purpose to want to evade them, nor does it make sense to make them appear more friendly and pleasant by means of ornamentation. For this reason, I can only follow them. The result often surprises me very much. Then it is my problem to become friends with it.

2 | The Red Frieze

[50 × 75 cm]

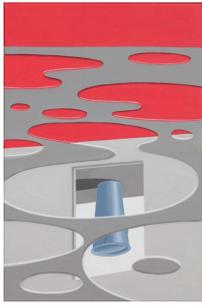


Is the German word “Fries” [frieze] masculine or neuter? I am not sure so I check: It is masculine, so “der Fries”. Despite the official designation I remain unsure as regards the declension of the article. I could also name it “Sockel” [pedestal]. The paintings, hung above it, would then stand on a pedestal. Is that appropriate? When something is placed on a pedestal, then it is elevated with a serious assertion. A distance is created. One has to look upwards, thoughtfully, at what is displayed. One should not look up at pictures though. They are something in front of us. One should encounter them on the same horizon. The frieze is therefore not a podium, rather an environment, a band, that connects and joins the picture and the observer. The frieze is the theme that runs through these paintings, similar to a melody that repeatedly sounds throughout a piece of music in different variations. The frieze is, essentially, the chosen key, which inscribes its own sound on the piece performed here.



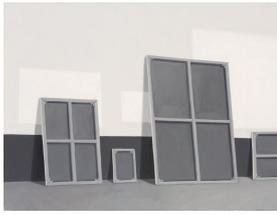
“Whatever happens in the reflection has to be completed in the original image.” That is the maxim of analogy magic. In a display case, in the visually exact model of a room with a red frieze, there are two heads. If one follows the magic trick, then the heads now stand before us more impressively and larger than we do in the exhibition room. Images are related to magic. They invoke magical remnants of consciousness in us. The magical recognises in the model and its reproduction not what is similar, but rather sees the relationship itself as the same. The magical does not distinguish between an animal and an image of an animal. In contrast, today we understand an image in relation to the represented object as similar. The image of a tiger resembles a tiger. Image and reproduction are two different realities. For the magical, the representation and what is represented belong to the same reality. Correspondingly, magical actions in the pictorial reality are also actions in one’s own physical ordering. Whatever happens to the image also happens to my body. These magical remnants are likewise preserved in language. We use them today as metonyms. For example, crown and tiara. The insignia of the emperor and of the pope have become synonyms for the persons or their power. The sign replaces the referent. What is said and what is meant are assigned to the same sphere of reality. A so-called contiguity exists between both of them. The phrase *pars pro toto* is also employed: an attribute of a person, for example the crown, stands for the totality of the emperor and his sphere of power. If the crown is toppled, the entire empire topples. In the course of the development of consciousness we have increasingly distanced ourselves from our images. From the indistinguishability of beforehand, that is, the complete identification with the magic image, the same image has today become an abstract sign for a function, which we can operate everywhere in everyday life by pushing a button. We just touch it fleetingly, at the most outward edge of our body, with the tip of a finger. We live in the digital age.³ We have shifted the contact with the world to our fingertips.

While the image could once not be differentiated from our bodies, today it has departed from our bodies. The image represents a reality completely separated from us. When we click on a sign, on a button today, then we forget entirely that we touch something we once wholly belonged to.



When something is, then it is always the consequence of something that preceded it. Is that not so? When we see a stone, then we assume that it somehow has come to be there. When we think about ourselves in this moment, then we have a history. We have come here. We are not simply here. Everything comes from somewhere; there is a reason why something, and that includes us, is here now. We tell our story, enumerate the reasons, the causes, the from where and why.

What is it like here? Puddles of water reflect the red frieze. There is a reason, a cause, for the reflection. It is the spilled water that reflects the frieze. That is logical. The puddles also reflect a painting of a bucket. Water is in the bucket. The bucket is reflected upside down. One could say that is why the water has fallen out of the bucket and has formed the puddles on the floor underneath the bucket. That is not logical. Water does not fall out of a bucket, it can only flow out of a bucket. Moreover, painted water cannot be poured out. But one can, however, represent this poured-out water in a painting. This now is logical. The water in the painting is in a bucket. And that is exactly how the poured-out water is painted as a picture. The puddles are also a picture. That is not logical, nevertheless. Where is the problem? The depicted bucket is located in a different picture than the depicted puddles. Buckets and puddles do not belong to the same pictorial reality. But if one looks again, then the intellectually differentiated, perceived realities in the painting find themselves on one level. The picture has integrative abilities. It does not argue through the logical “either–or”, but understands itself as “both–and”. Images do not separate, they gather together. Images have an eye on the whole. They bring together the seemingly irreconcilable into a whole. In this respect images are irrational, since they originate from a pre-rational imagination of the world. We do not imagine the world today any more, we represent it. Representation is an achievement of distancing. For analytical-determined thinking, therefore, an object is not simply there, rather it is separated from its essence and existence. Existence must have a cause that is to be found in a place other than where the existing thing shows itself. That is how we think. Images do not think, that is why there is no difference in them between cause and effect.



How much would the painter like to paint the evident. The painter's paintings should be nothing but exclamations: Look here, this is how it is! To be honest, the painter quickly gets tired of this aspiration. The unconditional depicting tires the painter. If only the painter could let the paintings, leaning on the wall and facing it, come to rest. This would be a great relief for the painter. Thus, the painter paints the pictures from behind. The painter paints the stretcher frames, made out of wood, paints the crosses that stabilise the painting. The painter is careful about the proper tension of the canvas, so the painter also paints the wedges that ensure this tension. And while painting, the painter always keeps in mind that good preparation will do the paintings good. If the painter did not pay such attention to the raw canvases then the paintings could not succeed. And the painter imagines the paintings had previously hung for a long time on the wall and presented their visibility there. Then they were taken down once more and now are placed with their reverse sides under their former places. The lighter patches on the wall testify to this. It would be a nuance in white, like a fleeting memory. Looking at these lighter spots, the painter has the idea that the slight difference could be the essence of that visibility that the paintings always attempt to present, so futilely and laboriously.

6 | The three art forms of painting

[76 × 45 cm]



This painting unites three different conceptions of the picture. Although a painting as an object is completely flat, it seems to open itself before our eyes and lead into an illusionistic depth. This imaginary spatiality was a discovery of the Italian Renaissance. The perspective construction by means of lines, as well as the lightening and darkening of colour, the so-called colour perspective, creates the virtual pictorial space. The picture is interpreted as a window, a portal, as a view outwards, or a view through reality, towards somewhere else. This Italian conception of the picture is augmented here by the Netherlandish one. Flemish artists regarded a painting as a sign, in part because they separated their painting from the architecture, from the wall, and painted their pictures on movable boards. That is why they called their craft “Schilderij”, that is, sign painting. One should not forget: the Dutch have always been traders and merchants. It was only natural for them to place such a sign above their market stands to advertise their wares. The sign as shop sign, that is, the Netherlandish conception of the picture, alludes to the Italian one. The painting of the north alludes to that of the south. Finally the Greek conception, the early observation of the image, is added here as a note: the sign’s shadow. Greek mythology relates how the first painting was created from the outline of the shadow drawn by a young woman on the wall when she departed from her lover.⁴

⁴ Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History* Book XXXV 1st century BCE



I recreate this painting, which is a view of a room. In this reconstruction I employ the actual angles of the depiction. The result is boxes in the form of pyramids whose tips are cut off. This allows us to see how we see. We can appreciate how the eye adapts to what is viewed. If a painting of a thing were itself a thing, then it would have to approach us in such a pointed manner.

A painting, however, is not a thing. It is an event taking place before the eye. The painting is an occurrence in which we participate: an event. By means of our participation what is represented in such a way turns to its own: it “enowns” itself.⁵

⁵ [Translator’s note: The author contrasts the Heideggerean terms “Eräugnis” (an event taking place before our eyes) with “Ereignis” (event); the neologism “enown” (in the sense of ‘appropriation’ or the ‘event of appropriation’), which translations of Heidegger have introduced, thus seems appropriate for “Es ereignet sich” (It occurs ‘itself’).]

8 | The disappearance

[90 × 120 cm]



This painting apparently hung here once. The lighter patch demonstrates the same proportions. Yes, here is exactly where this painting hung. Now it is gone, it has been taken down. Amazingly, it is still there, nonetheless. For the absence of the painting is shown us by precisely this painting. One can, therefore, imagine very well the light patch behind it. This painting recalls its own disappearance. Images are momentary. A moment of appearance, a brief pause, and then they are only a somewhat lighter afterglow on the wall.

9 | The horizon

[45 × 90 cm]



A plumber was hired to make this painting comprehensible to the observer. He was charged with installing the horizon in the depiction at the exact height in the pictorial space: A pipe from one end of the room to the other. Now one can figure out the representation and one feels more comfortable in the painting.



What is astounding about this painting is its depth, its pictorial depth. It is obvious of course that this was achieved in the same way one makes a hole: by digging.

Pictures are for this reason like dug-out pits. Only seldom has anyone thought that painting a picture, just like digging holes, produces a mound. The deeper the painting is, the larger and higher the picture excavation.⁶ One can imagine that in the artist's studio therefore not just profound pictures are made, but that with their creation the dug-out pictorial depth, the negative, fills the space of the studio with ever-larger mounds. This could become a problem for a productive painter. The more the painter works the less space is left in the studio. Here the astounding phenomenon, hardly ever considered, is represented in a divided painting. On the right we see the pictorial depth painted in black and white. It depicts the positive and is, therefore, just like in photography, to be seen as a positive copy. The negative, the painting excavation, and thus also its depiction is represented on the left half of the picture negatively. The cone's shadow is therefore not dark but inverted into its opposite and very bright. In the same manner the brighter side of the mound appears very dark. This depiction does not solve the growing crampedness in the studio, but at least the problem is made visible.

⁶ "Aushub" [excavation]; compare the phonetic proximity to "Aus-Huber" (the author's name) and to "Ex-Huber"; the negative alludes to his *exitus*.

11 | The vanishing point

[46 × 40 cm]



There is no doubt. Paintings are made for people. The painting always thinks about the observer, who then will look at the finished picture. The painter creates space for the observer and imagines how the observer will then not stand before the painting, but, encouraged by looking at it, enter the opened-up pictorial space. It is a deplorable habit of many painters to fill the pictorial space with the depiction of many figures. What a disappointment for the observer! How can the observer find room among the many people?

The lovely room has already been occupied by others. Here in this painting, however, space has been left for the observer of the painting. The observer has been assigned a spot. The observer finds his or her spot in the pictorial space in the intersection of the perspective construction, the so-called vanishing point. The painter has not forgotten the observer, he has kept a spot for the observer free.



“The pictures have to go!” A lot of ardent zeal has swept over images. Iconoclasm has run rampant in different cultures and in different epochs. It is the consequence of the increasing intellectualisation of our development of consciousness. The world has increasingly been viewed from a distance and thus more abstractly. The decisive inducement to ban images came from the emergence of monotheism, that is, the belief in a single, imperceptible god. He was image-less, but he spoke to people. Ever since then a hierarchy has existed between the word and the image. The word is closer to god, as it corresponds more to his imperceptibility, which can only be conceived mentally. The word is abstract. The unfathomable distance between the sign and its referent is demonstrated in the word. It is that distance between this world and the otherworld, which separates humanity from its single god. Religions based on images are much closer to their gods.

With the advent of Modernism, art history once again kindled an iconoclastic storm. In so-called abstraction art history committed itself to the art of leaving out. Everything in a picture had to be left out that did not correspond to the pure idea of art. Everything that contradicted the imagined purity of art was to be sacrificed to the abstract, and thus non-comprehensible, concept of art. The goal was emptiness, so bright and clear, that it glows like the empty spots here on the wall.

It is thinking with its inherent impetus towards abstraction that has ultimately led us to emptiness as the highest reason of existence. The god of religion, just like the concept of art, is abstract to such a degree that no image and no sign can approach it. The concept of art is, strictly regarded, invisible. What remains for art is, therefore, emptiness. Thinking does not only aim for the absolute objective of ultimate and constitutive things. Since thinking is on its way, it has to have a direction, it has the agony of having to choose. It cannot go down two or more paths simultaneously. Thinking makes the world into irreconcilable opposites. Good and evil, large and small, either or. Emptiness is still a religious conception, as emptiness corresponds to fullness. An empty jar can be filled up. Emptiness does not exist in an irreconcilable opposition to fullness. Thinking has even gone so far as to think beyond emptiness and allowed itself the question of whether anything exists at all, or rather, the existence of nothingness. It has led itself to an absurd alternative. In this way thinking has come to the end of its path, because it literally stands before nothingness. There, where there is nothing more to think, thinking consequently evaporates into nothingness.



Is this painting not very similar to the previous one with the number VII? One should ask oneself, why do many artists repeat themselves? Before there were some who in all their born days only painted the same Madonna with Child. These were then followed by those who always depicted the same landscape and it was not very long ago that there were some who again and again painted the same square, who covered their paintings with the eternally same lines, or continually pounded nails into the canvas. Of course, repetition increases the value of recognition of an artistic work. Is this the reason for the variation? It is also said of these artists that they have found their theme. Yet is repetition not actually the proof of a fixed idea, of a perhaps pathological compulsion of repetition? The production of one and the same motif a hundred times in varying sizes and colours could also be due to the fact that the artist is not capable anymore of abandoning the path once chosen. The painter wakes up every morning as a painter, has to always paint until the paintbrush falls from the hand. The painter has stepped up to the canvas to paint a picture, the ultimate painting imaginable. The painter cannot escape the idea that the last painting could finally be achieved. And so the painter begins anew every day, begins that single and ultimate painting, and at the end of the painter's life the painter has painted a hundred similar pictures, when the painter only needed to make one picture that should resemble itself and nothing else.



When he was young he was in his studio early one morning. It was located underneath the roof. Light streamed into the room through a skylight. A few days before he had brought a metal bowl with water to the studio to wash his brushes. Now the bowl was placed on the floor near the wall. The light fell on the mirror of the water's surface and cast concentric circles on the wall above it. As he, excited by the light's effect, approached the bowl, his steps made the floor and thus the bowl vibrate slightly, so that the light's reflections on the wall began to tremble. The image of the reflections and the bowl underneath them appeared to him at that moment as the most obvious expression of his conception of painting. If someone had asked him why he painted pictures, then he would have mutely pointed to the shimmering circles. That morning, however, he was completely alone in the studio. So he pointed to the reflections alone, only for himself.

15 | Being in the picture

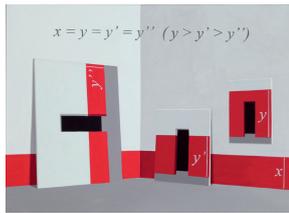
[60 × 50 cm]



“The observer should not stand before the picture, the observer should be in the picture.” Here the artist’s intention is particularly evident. As long as we look at a picture from a respectful distance, then we relate to it from an objectifying distance. This approach indeed allows a judgement on the picture in the first moment. One can evaluate it, compare it with other pictures, and make an effort to decipher its content. In such a way we understand the picture as a type of receptacle or box, filled with information, which we have to draw out from the picture. We then check if what is inside the box matches what is outside on it. This is how this painting sees us. It shows us in a rationally determined attitude as a subject that looks at an object. This consciousness, which dwells in such a distanced contraposition, is also described as dualistically divided. The rational outlook, guided by reason, rips the world apart into two realities, into the objective and the subjective, two truths that are incompatible with one another. There is the thing, as an objective matter of fact on the one side, and the impression it makes on us on the subjective side. The image as conception is an illusion. This is what is depicted here. The pictorial space becomes a seemingly absurd pyramidal construction, a strangely distorted box, which obviously is missing one side, through which one now is supposed to look into the construction.



Each picture has an annoyance ready. This is demonstrated at its edges. On four sides it simply ceases. Above and below, right and left, it comes to an end. What is there beyond them? Reason simply ignores these boundaries and self-evidently extends the lines that lead from the picture across these borders. Yet the representation initiated in the picture can only be continued to a limited extent. The imagined space is only visible in one part. The characteristics of the space beyond the limits of its depiction remain speculative. The truthful artist does not want to let the observer stay in this vagueness. So in the picture the artist portrays the space – shown in one part solely – as a whole. The space depicted in the picture is once again represented – turned on its side – so that one can acquire a view of the whole. In this way the picture fulfils the commitment it strives for even beyond the edges, beyond the circumscribed reality.



The proportions of a depiction of space never coincide with the actual proportions of the depicted thing. Many people have reproached the picture for this condition. It is from its very beginnings a deception, they maintain, when something namely as simple, as fundamental, as the dimensions of a thing is disregarded. How should one trust a picture that does even not correctly depict a circumstance as simple, as determining as this?

This reproach, already formulated by Plato, is contrasted by this picture with an equation. This is meant to make clear that a picture is always to be read in relationships in regard to the object of its depiction. These are not chosen arbitrarily or with falsifying intent, but follow understandable rules:

The painting hangs above a red frieze. Its height is 100 cm. The same frieze is depicted in the painting. It is designated with x . Therefore, it has a measurable referent, the frieze painted on the room's wall. This referent is equated with the signifiers y , y' and y'' . $x = y = y' = y''$. The depicted friezes are each interrupted by a door. In this way the human measure is introduced into the picture. When we look at the door openings we inevitably assume that these are high enough so that we can pass through them without hitting our head on the casing above. Because of the different dimensions used to depict each door, the proportion of door to frieze varies. The assumed original size of the frieze of 100 cm differs. The frieze sometimes appears larger and then again smaller. These relationships are expressed in the bracketed equation: $(y > y' > y'')$.

Kurt Gödel formulated the incompleteness theorem. It states that in no axiomatic law can the axiom, which lends the law its framework, be irrefutably derived from itself. Each equation starts from assumptions that cannot be indisputably proven in the proposed law itself. This becomes clear in this painting by the assumption that each doorway represents the human measure. The perceiving mind becomes an unspoken precondition. One can thus say: Each abstractly formulated law requires human reason, which is what first perceives it. This corresponding mind, that is expressed in reason, is formulated in a mathematical equation, yet cannot be derived from it. The mental principle is visible in a mathematical equation, yet not to be detected in it. What the mind is cannot be explained by geometry.



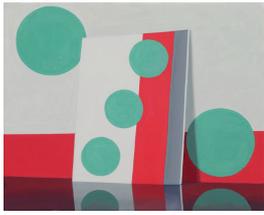
Two women friends stand in front of the painting. “I like that painting,” says one to the other. “Look at how the light falls so softly through the window into the room.” She points to the blue shadows that the window frame casts on the embrasure. Then she observes the brighter section delineated by the sunlight falling on the plank flooring. “It reminds me of Vermeer,” she says now. “Vermeer always has a window through which light falls at an angle into a room.” Her friend next to her looks at the painting more attentively now. “But the woman is missing. Vermeer always has a woman who looks out of the window.” “Don’t you see it?” asks the first woman. “I am the woman who stands before the window and looks outside.” The second woman steps back in order to see her friend and the painting in one glance. “You’re right,” she says with a smile, “it is really like a Vermeer.”



“And what do those things there mean?” someone asks me. “Oh, please don’t ask,” I reply. “When you visit someone at their home you don’t ask what each thing that is lying around means, do you? Let me advise you, as a discrete person you limit yourself to silently observing things out of the corner of your eye and come to your own conclusions. That is what I do when I am in other people’s homes. I rein in my curiosity. I know how to behave. This should also apply when standing in front of pictures. Why do precisely these questions always have to come up before pictures? Why do I always have to provide information about my paintings, give explanations about the things depicted in them? Why do you even assume that I could inform you about them? Why do you look at me so strangely now? Well then, if you really want to know. It is a problem of space. I have very simply stored those things in the picture. That is all. They stood in my way! They have stood in my way for years! For years they have been lying in front of my eyes and occupying me. Why? I don’t know. But I cannot bring myself to throw them away. I don’t have the heart to give them away. For this reason, yes, just for this reason, I have placed them in this picture, you could say I have taken care of them. Each time I began a painting before, these things stood in my way, stood around at the beginning of the painting. Don’t ask me how they came to be there. It was truly exasperating, believe me. I moved from here to there, but they bothered me everywhere. I simply didn’t know what to do anymore. That’s why I have stored them here now, cleared them away, have got rid of them here in this painting. That’s how simple it is, it is a space problem, nothing else. Do you understand?”

20 | The green point

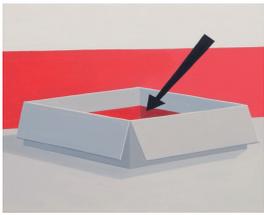
[40 × 50 cm]



I become the slave of my own rule. Each painting should be related to the red frieze, thus in each painting there must be a reference to the red frieze. The red frieze! The red frieze again and again! In each painting the red frieze once more! It is enough to drive you mad! Once again this horizontal line, this red band running from left to right. The same thing in every painting. Always the horizontal line. I would like to have it another way, vertical, for example, from top to bottom. That would bring some variety to life, to the painter's life at least. That is why I have now rotated the picture by 90 degrees. Something strange happened then. One of the green dots disappeared. It has simply disappeared. This was something I did not expect at all. Well, since it has disappeared, I have not painted it, I mean, I could not paint it. I do not want to spend my time on disappearing things. In this I am a minimalist. Painting is strenuous enough. If I had to paint what disappeared, instead of painting what one cannot see anyway? What would I do then? That is why: I leave the dot to you. You are the observer. Imagine the dot, if you prefer. I can assure you that it is not there. I should know, shouldn't I? After all, I painted the picture.



The water. He is into water. He is into water, because as a painter he is mindful of cleanliness. A clean studio means that the pictures too are clean, they are painted cleanly. No splatters of paint, no dirty spots. And if an accident happens, then he cleans it up. He cleans it up with water. At least, as concerns the studio's floor. In the painting that can unfortunately only be done indirectly, via a roundabout way. But he has found a trick. He paints a bucket with water, places it in the painting, and then the painting can be cleaned up. That is, the floor in the painting can be cleaned up, there where the paint has dripped. But not just paint, he cleans up any dirt lying around. Crumbs, dust, cigarette ash, everything is cleanly washed away with water. The result is striking. A clean picture, a clean floor. Everything is so clean that the frieze is even reflected in the floor.



Signposting is indispensable in pictures. One owes this to the observer. You should know where you find yourself when you look at the picture. For the observer is not only in front of the picture, rather the observer's gaze on the picture brings him or her to that place opened by the depiction during the looking. What does the observer see here? A red frieze. The red frieze could have been painted all around a large room as a pedestal. It could also be a sparse decoration in a remote room. Or the frieze could be located in a damp basement and has been applied there solely for the reason of halting the humidity rising from the floor. How should one know where one is when one stands before a picture? No, the depicted room is not a bright and large room, not a small room, and not a basement hole. Spatiality is quite an abstract conception. It is actually a box, a carton. You can close it, place it under your arm, and take it home.

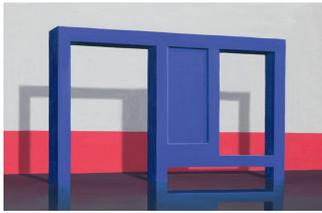


“Man is present”. I have often read this above pictures. These attributions have a heroic sound. They speak of the sublime, the “sublime is now”. The pictures are, as far as I can remember, expansive and large. You experience yourself before such pictures, you are thrown into the expanded colour space. You lose yourself in a sea of colour. You are overwhelmed by the painting. But I could never decide on a large format. This painting is in fact the smallest in the series. It is truly very small. Should I really give it the title of *Man is present*, or the simpler *Here*, or *Now*?⁷ Actually, I could simply state that the observer should step to one side. A friendly but firm request. He is standing in front of the light, that is obvious. If he would go, simply go away, then the painting would stand alone in the light. One could see three stripes, bright and distinctly. Then, however, the question of the title would become more urgent. “Man is present” would not suit it anymore..

⁷ Barnett Newman, *Here I*, 1950; *Now I*, 1965



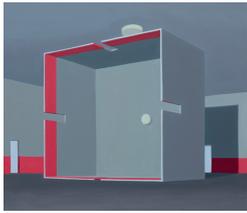
Such observers is what one as a painter wishes for. Those who can identify with what is depicted. People who get enthusiastic about pictures. Yes, those who get so excited by pictures that they adapt to them. Isn't that a lovely word? "The adaptation". Such people do not merely look at a picture, they can sink into a picture, looking at it in such a way that they themselves become the picture they are observing.



This is the exhibition gaze. It is the picture gaze of artists who see the possibility of hanging their painting, or even several of their paintings, in any spot. Perhaps this is a professional illness, certainly it is a questionable fixation of the artist. Such a gaze is possibly even an expression of an exaggerated need for admiration. The artist sees a wall and immediately sees his or her paintings hanging there. If one wants to have an impression of the need for admiration expressed in the exhibition gaze, then in any case this framework is very evident. How else should one envisage a gaze onto pictures that are not yet even hung on the wall — but are already imagined? We should agree on understanding such a framework as being the picture exhibition gaze of the ambitious artist. The framework is every artist's desire for an exhibition, mutated into a monument, elevated into a monument. It should therefore be considered whether in the future it would not be more coherent to set up these monuments, that is, these frameworks, in the exhibition halls. Then the intentions of each artist would be expressed more directly. In order that this exhibition practice does not become too boring for the interested audience, it is completely conceivable that these frameworks could be varied in form as well as in colour. They could be so designed that when changing from one exhibition to another the audience would nevertheless be entertained in a very varied manner.



An exhibition situation: two paintings are hung before a red frieze. “Neatly arranged”, is what anyone would say. “An unpretentious, simple, clear hanging,” is what anyone would confirm. Even the annoying signs have been dispensed with, in favour of clarity, so that nothing disturbs the total impression. In this sense, with this very conscious regard to the simplicity and bareness of the presentation, all the other paintings were hung over the frieze as well. Here the hanging does not differ from the hanging of other paintings. But then... I have no idea what got into me. Was it my craving to explain, which has always been exaggerated, my undoubtedly overstressed didactic Eros? What was my intention with all this? One should see the connections. The purposeful and cleverly conceived correspondences between the painting and the context should be made apparent to the observer. The depiction and the depicted, and ultimately the situation too, in which the depiction is depicted, should be depicted. I thought of all of this beforehand! I admit, I was worried that the observer could oversee my sophisticated intention, what is more, my subtle and intelligent installation. That is when the idea with the roof battens occurred to me. Admittedly, it was a lot of fun. But now, the reconstruction of the chain of associations, intended and thus prescribed by me, the subsequent construction of the paths of insight before the paintings, now muddle up this picture awfully. I admit it. Now you cannot see the paintings at all due to all the explanations. The didactic models obviously clutter up the view of what is important, when they should in fact emphasise it. Applying systematics to pictures appears to turn into the opposite of what was intended.



At the edges of pictures is where language begins, that is, speaking about them. The picture is a world and so is language a world too. The question always arises of whether the boundary between them is unbridgeable or if the border maintains open crossing points, where word and image can encounter each other. I am convinced that both of them, each in its own way, is bound to the mind. The borders exist. Both image and word, however, are under the horizon of the mind. They extend like two continents under one sky, which provides both of them with the same air (the *pneuma*, that is, the spirit) to breathe.

The pairs gathered here—the painting with the text that answers it—are conceptions of how image and word can find their way to a mental accord. My juxtaposition of image and word differs from the discourses that are carried out in art. This should not be regarded as an affront, also not as a vain effort to want to provide oneself with a particular and distinctive artistic position. Rather, with these examples I am much more concerned with leading a discourse beyond—outside or over—art. The starting point for this is an image, located in a history that began long before art and, in my opinion, does not have to find its end in art.

In some of the commentaries to the paintings I have made clear that the image preserves essential elements of previous levels of our consciousness. Confronted with images, these levels of consciousness are once more aroused. If we are impartial, then we realise that for example an older consciousness is still virulent in us. In one passage above I named this the mythical. From today's perspective we judge the mythical consciousness as irrational. We orient ourselves in the present-day world according to the rational consciousness. Reason is our guiding principle, because we have learned to think. We want to understand things. We formulate our understanding of the world in abstract concepts and classify these into systems. We have created an infinite number of systems, superordinated and subordinated ones. One of these many systems is that of art. The concept and the system are categories of the intellect. They are the guarantees for our conception that rationality and reason fulfil our highest mental principle. Correspondingly, we subordinate the image to the intellect. In the same way we have put our language, our words, at the service of the intellect. Images and words have truly become objects, things, which we dispose of. We have objectified the world. Thus, we understand the world as an objective fact, which we answer subjectively. The whole, the universe, has since then divided itself. There is an unbridgeable opposition between the self and the world. In the last 2000 years this dualistic worldview has established itself as an immovable cer-

tainty, such that we apparently cannot escape it in all of our behaviour and thinking. There are, however, gaps, fissures in this consciousness. One of them is the image (others, for example, emotions or experience, will have to be left aside here.) These gaps irritate reason. That is why it represses them. The systematisation of the image in art is one of the most impressive achievements of the repression of our intellect. The image, for example, a completely different whole than the whole that thinking imagines. The image is *in* the whole, thinking stands *before* the whole. If the image is vision, then thinking is a conception. The rational consciousness, which is a conception, has, under its regime, discarded looking as irrational. The image too is to be made into a conception. The image, rooted in the mythical, is an ambivalent occurrence. It does not strictly differ between looking and being looked at; it is thus not dualistic, but unitary. *The image is in the whole. In contrast, thinking stands before the whole.*

We live with the self-evident tenet that our present-day consciousness is supposedly more intelligent than the previous structures of consciousness. We live convinced that as rational beings we must be closer to the mind. Looking at something, as is expressed in the image, that is, in a non-rational attitude, is close to the mind in another manner. We have gone through various levels of consciousness. It is the arrogance of the last level reached by us, rationalism, that leads us to believe this level has come closest to the mind. For this reason thinking presumes today to regard all the previous levels as inferior, as underdeveloped, to disavow them, and to repress them.

We should, as a first step, recognise that previous levels of consciousness remain in us. We should discover and uncover them. In a second step we should recognise their regime. We should value these submerged and repressed structures, each as an accord with the mind. The archaic, the magical, the mythical, and the mental are designations for these levels within us. The terms themselves, however, are not decisive. What is more important is to accept that these seemingly irreconcilable levels exist simultaneously. Only for our rational consciousness, which is a deciding, a judging, a dividing consciousness, do these levels appear to contradict one another. The need for recognition of all these levels can lastly be achieved by an intellectual effort, that is, through thinking. In this way we would only repeat and confirm the claim to exclusivity of the rational. In this respect, these thoughts here, or these reflections on what has been presented here, are merely a very limited aid towards finding a way out of the diktat of the intellect. The transparency of different, seemingly contradictory attitudes of consciousness can only be reached from a tolerance towards ourselves. The result, this indulgence, is an ordering in which there is no truth anymore. For the conception of truth is *ultima ratio*. The truth, however, is merely the reflection of that rational behaviour

that conceives of the world. One may recognise here to what degree we are bound to rational thinking, which thoroughly forces us, again and again, to desire to retain the valid in rationally comprehensible categories. It is difficult for us to step over the certainty of thinking.

At the core of this essay is the comparison and the interconnectedness of image and word, of the image and of looking at it. The train of thought unfolded here is meant to lead to this constellation. It cannot explain it, yet prepare a foundation for it. Starting from this realisation, may it be successful in leaping from it to achieve the perspective that, dependent as we are on words, could be designated as the transparency of the edges.