

Frank Bauer 2002-2005

THE CONSECRATED CHANCE

some thoughts on the painting of Frank Bauer

by Heinz-Norbert Jocks



Basically, what does "photo realism " mean". By using this term you categorize something that, in the end, cannot be captured so easily. There is still something that insists on existing, which - carelessly used - will fall by the wayside because it overshoots the mark of catching reality nearly photolike. It is, indeed, more than some boring tautology, and also far more than an antiquated competition with photography. Anyhow, this holds for the special case of Frank Bauer; one might insinuate that he is a photo realist with a certain sympathy, for pop art. Now, first of all, he is a passionate painter who seems to be stepping out of line merrily, and one who, in his student time, was trained by Gerhard Richter, which means that all the doubts about the medium were drummed into him. In spite of this, he stands up for painting like someone who falls back on it because it is his innermost opportunity of making sure that he exists and has to place himself in a world into which he feels thrown as a being unfamiliar with itself with essence preceded by existence. With agreeable lightness he returns to the traditional possibilities of painting. And he does so in a way so natural hardly anybody today would dare to.

A strange thing, Frank Bauer approaches any motif with his Nikon. He takes pictures of his world's motifs before he will paint them - like someone who cannot help it or is not willing to. That means, he perceives the things in his private milieu, which he later considers worth painting, only if they are brought to him through an objective, a medium. In this, he is a complete child of his time. Confronted with his collection of source material, we at first seem to be watching somebody who is engaged if not in topping the preciseness of the model but in letting his hair down by means of brush and paint. No details are skipped over, no blurredness is left out, no colours are changed afterwards, no shades ignored be they as tiny as they may. Drawing even with the photographic pattern obviously goes as far as the visualization of materiality as well as the materialization of clothes and shoes, skin and hair.

In doing so, Frank Bauer never aims at congruence but by creating a picture always raises transient moments to the level of eternity. Everything he does is intended to be a logical play with colours and shapes, an adventurous oscillation between sharpness and blurredness and, by the way, irritations introduced by the back door. Thus, for instance, he makes edges appear so sharp that the blurred background of clouds will suddenly topple forwards.

And if there is a failed photo with something significant in it he will not retouch or beautify the failed detail but accept it as an extreme challenge to find out the failure like a downright detective. At the beginning there is the question of how the photographic failure can be translated into successful painting, which with each brush stroke, i.e. step by step, will fix the photograph's unspectacular traces of reality. Coincidences or accidents, which surprisingly turn into necessities, in this way receive a different visibility and a non-cosmetic beauty. Thus the photograph becomes transcendent. Everything is deliberately put in the picture so that it receives a touch of a fake stage-managing. It seems as if the painter consecrates the incident afterwards, then loads it with an aura and a meaning and in retrospect welcomes it.

Nearly everything assembled in the photo will find itself on the canvas. The inscription on the cigarette packet as well as the title of a Suhrkamp pocket book. The shades on the face of a black-wigged doll as well as the strap of a top dangling down the body. The finger positions of photographed hands as well as the sad, empty or absorbed look of a person portrayed. The structure of a glass sugar caster as well as the colours of two roses in a white vase with a vertical legible Japanese inscription on it. The ashtray with crushed cigarette ends as well as the crease in a book's page or the not too complimentary expression on the faces of bleary-eyed party goers who apparently challenge life. Precision according to the pattern, however is not at all treated as a fetish. There is nothing compulsive about it, it just has to be in accordance with the picture.

The people portrayed right out of the centres of their- lives are captured with such precision that we may well believe to be among them. But, in spite of that, we realize that Frank Bauer's painting, instead of directly referring to reality brings everything about according to the second nature of photography. Things in the photo which are beyond the range of the depth of field present themselves blurred on the canvas, too. Everything remains at its proper place the way the camera has cut it out from the course of time. Nevertheless, painting works like a strong filter of

the mind which only then creates the meaning of everything. Bauer's painting throws a light on the darkness of the moment lived.

However, the power of painting does not at all come clear completely in this way nor is its content sufficiently touched. Like Nan Goldin, who uses her camera to report from the centre of her life with all its happy and unhappy moments, Frank Bauer paints so as to make us participate in the lifestyle, the fragility, the expectations of bliss and the falls of his generation. This phenomenologist of a generation's perceptual views pulls us into the suction of directness and we feel like voyeurs in a cinema who read pictures like books.

FROZEN PAINTINGS

Frank Bauer's Ice Landscapes

by Melanie Puff

A lonesome landscape within the mountains, fragmented and full of ice. In a dark valley, closed in between frozen mountain complexes lies the village, a together of dirty and filthy houses. Skeletons of trees come out of the snow. The near forest is a dark wall: "wordless, only the wet snow speaks putting a kilo weight burden on the feet - understandable yet, but always breaking the communication. The silence. " Whoever wants to get out of here, will only be able escape the mountain walls by train.

Frost on the buildings and on the mountains, frost on the soul and in the psyche. Thomas Bernhard's first novel "Frost" leads the reader into a frozen world whose atmosphere creates an icy feeling that moves through the body, from the feet up to the heart and into the head, until nothing is lively any more. Paralization. Even the smallest motion seems impossible. Every thought goes in circles. Emptiness. When all your feelings are gone. And life seems to repeat the same movie over and over in slow motion.

But "Frost" is not only the title of Bernhard's novel, it is also the name of a similar dark ambient-techno piece by the Berlin based techno project "Monolake". While reading the first one and listening to the second one, Frank Bauer created a series of landscapes which he also named "Frost". They are silent landscapes, very similar in their structure and their atmosphere. Without human beings and all covered by a thin layer of ice. Painted in earthy colours and with greyish, foggy tonalities for air and water. Landscapes which know human cultivation, but now lie empty and lonely in their frozen sleep. No motion, no movement. Everything is frozen.

Frost becomes hence the guiding theme for an emotional state of mind that has become characteristic for the newer paintings of Frank Bauer - and that was maybe also secretly to find in the older ones. Whereas the landscapes express a loneliness that has no words, a state of being closed within oneself, the portraits and the sceneries of everyday life also show people and things in a state of separation, of not belonging together. What at a first, superficial glance seems to be an easy, happy meeting of friends in party- and leisure time situations, has on

its opposite the inescapable knowledge that even the most intimate and happy meetings have always moments of strangeness and the impossibility to communicate.

Frank Bauer's paintings are photorealistic impressions of a certain lifestyle - but they also bear a process under their painted surfaces where emotional states of mind are transported into images. And these emotional states of mind are often full of contradictions and irritations. At first glance they don't want to fit into the represented scenes. You have to look behind the facade of the faces and events. Then you will find extreme emotional states, on one hand full of fear and loneliness, and on the other hand unable to realize this feeling. This tension is inherent in the paintings: one feels that the happiness can always turn into emptiness and loneliness. Behind the surface of the seemingly extensive joy of life you will find states of deepest sadness and isolation.

Loneliness is a constant emotion in many, of Frank Bauer's paintings; but it doesn't prevent the paintings from a simultaneous search for intimacy, for warm feelings and love. You will hence find love and loneliness at the same time: the first as a diffuse craving and hope, and the second as a clear and merciless emotion. This tension creates a movement in the paintings: it is like a search, a wandering for the small line of light at the horizon, which you will find in the paintings: on the one hand as the diffuse light of a nearby sunrise or the ray of light coming through the fog in the frost landscapes; and on the other hand in the portraits and everyday life scenes in moments of ecstatic happiness for instance in a rock concert, and also in form of a coloured background full of warmth and light in the Beergarden.

Frank Bauer's paintings transport an ambivalence. It regards the contradictions of emotions such as the inability to say in words what you feel. The paintings become illusion and shelter at the same time: on the one hand everything seems possible, seems to be one in this lifestyle of cool self-assurance - but on the other hand this lifestyle can easily turn into a trap, into exactly the wall that separates Bernhard's village from the rest of the world and leaves it in darkness. Where the train in Bernhard is the only chance to escape the darkness and monotony, painting in Bauer becomes a chance to explore and overcome the borders of the self and of its relations with the others.

In this sense all of Frank Bauer's paintings are landscapes.- emotional landscapes that are less a photorealistic expression but moreover a symbolic hint to emotional states of mind that have become characteristic for our society. Something the

"Frost" series expresses in a very delicate and fragile way, whereas the other paintings bear it as an atmosphere of irritation and impression of strangeness. Behind the facade of perfection and Coolness you will find the experience of separation and loneliness. We are in a world full of empty glances, mirrored sunglasses, abandoned tables and white and sterile rooms. A world, whose emotional poorness is covered by the fact that it is full of colours and things which surround the persons. Covered only, but not altered or changed. Where the frost obviously covers the landscapes and forces them into an eternity of motionless frozenness, here the states of loneliness and frozenness are covered by colours and accessories. What the frost landscapes and the lonely forest at night can't and won't hide, is something the paintings would like to avoid: here, nobody wants to be lonely; and above all nobody wants to realize how lonely he really is.

But there are these moments of alteration: only as a hint, but they have a strong impact on the atmosphere of the paintings. The frost landscapes have this moment where the sun hits the ice and makes it melt in them. And in the Beergarden, soon people will come to sit down at the abandoned table, as well as Inga in the DamenundHerren Club will soon find a company. It is possible to change. Frost is only a thin layer of ice. What is frozen under it, can easily be defrosted again - so easy that it comes very close and cosy together at the warm light of the campfire. And so easy that it is able to experience this ecstatic moment of the rock concert, where everything seems to be one. What seems to be another story or another emotional state of mind, is in reality exactly the thin line of light at the horizon. A fragile line that can easily and quickly disappear again - but it shows us that there is an exit from loneliness and paralization.

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