

Erwin Bohatsch

8 April–12 June 2016

Erwin Bohatsch (*1951 in Mürzzuschlag, Styria) numbers among the most important Austrian artists of his generation. The Albertina is now honouring his varied output, esteemed internationally since the 1980s, with a solo exhibition. Bohatsch's oeuvre is characterised by a constant back-and-forth between figuration and abstraction, between colour and non-colour, and between line and surface. The present exhibition encompasses a multifaceted kaleidoscope of Bohatsch's unique and consistent output over the past four decades, thereby shedding light on the ever-intense dialogue between his work as a painter and as a graphic artist. One can also observe how the artist deals with the still-loaded question as to painting's currency – in formats both large and small, and on paper as well as on canvas.

Within his generation, collectively known as the *Die Neuen Wilden* ("The New Wild Ones" or "The New Fauves"), Erwin Bohatsch occupies a position all his own: he was not represented in the exhibition *Hacken im Eis* ["Hacking in the Ice"] in 1986 at Vienna's 20erHaus, which was a significant event in terms of forming a group-consciousness among post-war Austrian painters: with Herbert Brandl, Gunter Damisch, Josef Danner, Hubert Scheibl, and Otto Zitko, that exhibition showed the contemporary "wild" painterly stances of young Austrian artists. But in Bohatsch's artistic oeuvre, one can see that even back then he was interested less in an explosive vein of expressive painting than in achieving a sensitive balance in painting and in painting's distinct possibilities of colour. Though not proceeding in a conceptual manner, Erwin Bohatsch circles around essential questions of artistic creativity, thereby alternating between various sets of poles such as the abstract versus the concrete, the colourful versus the monochrome, and characteristic brushstrokes versus the suppression of any individual style. Since the mud-hued figurative works of the 1980s, his oeuvre has witnessed the development of biomorphic bubble- and droplet-shapes featuring iridescent colours and often quite strong light-dark contrasts.

While the artist takes on fundamental questions of painting in his creative output, his decision to teach academically reflects his conscious choice to go a step further and examine the very discourses on these questions. Since 2005, he has led the abstract painting class at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. But even so, he feels closer to artists such as Luc Tuymanns and Raoul de Keyser – and to their questioning of painting's essence, of its methods and possibilities – than to the Viennese painting tradition: Bohatsch loves the tension between abstract expressionism and painting that is strictly conceptual in nature.

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The collection of the Albertina includes over sixty of the artist's works: these range from his initial, still-figurative period in the 1980s to his newest work groups and recently done prints. And this retrospectively conceived presentation focuses for the first time on Erwin Bohatsch's drawings, monotypes, and watercolours. These represent one of the – not yet widely recognised – golden threads running through his oeuvre, serve as important witnesses to the process by which he works, and also embody the contemplative exploration of the various artistic challenges being taken on. Furthermore, it is particularly in such works on paper that Bohatsch permits himself artistic freedoms that, in his paintings, can often be detected only beneath the surface. His small-format works on paper allow him to experiment in a way that is unconstrained by the creative limits of large-format painting. And it is no coincidence that his recent, likewise small-format paintings are based on his experiences from such intimate drawn work.