

## Loss of certainty and insecurity of feelings

Eckehard Fuchs' art does not seem to fit into familiar categories and to stand aside of current trends in painting. On the basis of an objective representation he creates a visual cosmos steeped in suggestive gestures and complex symbols. The essential elements of his artistic attitude, as well as the basis of his themes and pictorial worlds, can be traced back to the period of his master's studies. Since then the search for representations of disrupted communication and warped human behavioural modes has been at the centre of Eckehard Fuchs' interest – initially in the form of an artistic coming to terms with his own individual perception of reality. Works dating from this time show pictorial narratives communicated by way of figurative representations, whose spatial construction and lively colourfulness initially displayed comic-like visual traits. A few years ago Eckehard Fuchs' images were interpreted predominantly as a confrontation with the human inaptitude for communication, without the describability of what was being represented ever being called essentially into question. Through ever more complexly encrypted contents the artist has in the meantime developed his motifs towards the direction of general metaphors for the ungraspability of the world in its totality, for the decay of world views into prism-like, kaleidoscopic bundles of unrelated perspectives and ways of seeing. Vague suggestions come to the fore instead of assertions and descriptions. A tendency led Eckehard Fuchs' development away from pictorial composition based on a narrative situation towards a greater stress on painterliness, without his representations thereby losing their atmosphere of reverie. The remaining narrative hints now recline in the impression of time being abolished and in the frozen dynamics, in the artist's view which allows in the image a moment to stand still amidst what is going on. Formal adaptations now underline foremost what is open or carries suggestiveness within the content: a more expressive pictorial language demonstrates tendencies for dissolving finitely interlocked forms into looser systems of planes. In terms of paint, solid *alla prima* areas are laid in next to both glazed and hard forms derived from drawing, with stressed cross-hatchings. The figures no longer act as if on a stage in front of barely defined backgrounds. They retreat into the spatial fabric, float or move about in non-coherent pictorial spaces, coalesce with another or with the colours and forms of their surroundings, melt into space or else appear fragmented through the blurredness of painterly description. The space takes on a heightened meaning, figures act as part of a continuum. With the opening of the

pictorial space into a system of planes and spatial situations, the characterisation of the figures is in part transferred upon elements in the surroundings. To comprehend this displacement it is worthwhile to take a look at the artist's mode of approach. He utilizes the classical pathway of painterly genesis. In the beginning is the graphite drawing, in which ideas may be held fast and tried out. This is enormously important, for it is in the individually drawn separate scenes that the actual pictorial inventions take place. Earlier this was followed by work with pastel and collage from coloured strips of paper, in which Eckehard Fuchs experimentally ascertained the spectral effects of his pictorial motifs. For several years now he has used watercolour painting instead to further probe his sketched compositions with the brush. The medium of watercolour, whose potential lack of contour is in opposition to drawing, is certainly also responsible for the relaxation of forms in Eckehard Fuchs' paintings on canvas. In this more liberated mode of painting Eckehard Fuchs also constantly plumbs facets of the interactional patterns inhering between humans. Though symbolically encrypted his actants nevertheless appear as "empty brackets" for behavioural patterns and intellectual attitudes. The general ambivalence of the pictorial compositions insinuates that questions as to the completeness or correct allocation of limbs in the image, as of figures flying apart have as little chance of being ultimately answered as those concerning the linear resolution of the cryptically constructed plots in the films of David Lynch. Here the contents do not come across as post modern and in-the-know when faced with „fissures“ and quotational layering, postmodern is moreover the interplay of formal quotation in expressive variation.

Almost every form in his pictures is derived from an own invention, even physiognomies are as a rule recalled from memory or else conjured up and constructed without recourse to working in front of a model. Eckehard Fuchs' pronounced imagination and inventive power refutes the conception that objectivity has to be as monotonous as reality. Formally schooled on visual codifications culled from right across the history of art, he opts for different paths for his visual discoveries. Points of reference for his visual atmospheres and individual forms may lie just as well in the caricatured exaggerations of William Hogarth's prints, in the painterly social analysis of Pietro Longhi or in the ambivalent atmosphere of the pictures of Balthus and the symbolic world of Max Beckmann. Above all he adopts aspects of expressive magnification found in Romanesque and early Gothic works of visual art. Such representations Eckehard Fuchs "reads up" preferably in Northern

Italy, where in many places one may admire the works of such excellent medieval sculptors as Benedetto Antelami or Wiligelmus. These he approaches with a purely formal interest and fills their expressively robust gestures, whose meanings have often been lost in detail, with for him familiar, everyday, modern and contemporaneous content. Important to him is the supposedly mysterious and at the same time simple and primitive within the formal language of the works from which he sets out. They give him points of reference for the development of his own image of the body which is frequently conditioned by suffering and pain. Compiled in this manner, such plays upon the history of art Eckehard Fuchs mixes with visual analyses of typical and commonplace human behavioural patterns. It is equally likely that observations on social constellations and events will bob up to the surface, as made clear by the associative supplementation of two media photos to his picture entitled „Ohnmacht“ [Blackout]. Similar to deformed sculptures robbed of their details through weathering, Eckehard Fuchs' figures still play out their role, interacting with mask-like expression and emotive gestures. An important part of the expression is the elaboration of the gesture by means of bodily extensions such as nets, bandages or foliage. This calls to mind the function of the attributes in the representation of saints within Christian art history, however within a codification stipulated by the artist. Through the ambivalence and openness of the representation the narrative inside the image is made unclarified, but what is symbolic in the gesture is underlined and amplified. In several of his newest works there are plot scenes such as an old fashioned pottery workshop, the crankshafts of a mechanical flour mill, or else a labyrinth, as well as costumes on the figures recognisable as historical quotations. In this way Eckehard Fuchs shifts the emphasis in his critical analysis of art history from the formal, concerning bodily poses and gestures, towards the actual content. Impulses are also offered to him by the emblematics of the Renaissance and the Baroque periods. Without prior knowledge of the figurations and without there being texts to complete the representations or dissolve them, their hieroglyphic-like encryption of statements within personifications, attributes or in depicted symbolic actions, appear as a corpus, which necessarily carries meaning and content, but without this being accessible. This dealing with historical intellectual exercises ought not to be understood as nostalgic exoticism, but rather as an attempt to approach a language which can no longer be comprehended, and of making this incomprehensibility into the theme. In this way the supra-temporality of what is

represented becomes clear: It plays no role to what era we may attribute what is being shown, for the references are to be sought in our sensitivity and in this they are not tied to concrete events. The all surrounding Babylonian gobbledygook of our own desire, which connects us to our fellow beings, starts to manifest itself – it is not just by chance that the silhouette of the Tower of Babel appears next to the labyrinth. The figures which act inside the images take on a context which lies within our imagination. The quotation and the hint are a kind of deduction from what has been snatched out of a momentary constellation, which do not propose to relate the complete story. One „deciphers“ the conflicts of the pictorial characters and the latently riddled goings-on in Eckehard Fuchs' images only by steps, similar to a discoverer in the jungle, who has to tear down the obstructing greenery which had for a long time concealed the evidence of a demised culture. Readability of the body language and interaction in Eckehard Fuchs' painted and drawn figures is possible to the same degree that we may still interpret the artworks of now unfamiliar cultures, without recourse to their religious or mythological context: By means of the generally understood significance of gestures it is in equal measures made both visible and concealed, what for example holding fast, enveloping or shoving away may signify. And so closeness can just as well be aggressive as well as a friendly approach, or else the starting point for taking leave or fleeing, whilst an embrace can at the same time be understood as an affectionate or as a paralysing clinging gesture. Bodyless heads and headless bodies however clearly stand for incompleteness (or interpreted in terms of psychoanalysis: for loss). The paradoxically suggestive round dance full of disharmonic physiognomies and gestures fluctuates between references to buried formal traditions and the day to day madness of our times. The inner context of the work is the artist's observation and individual confrontation with the world, filtered through the knowledge of the traditions of artistic pictorial genesis. Eckehard Fuchs frequently utilizes the visual motif of the mask, assumedly as an expressively strong indication of the fact that things are not what they appear to be. Behind the masks, more often than not, there are further masks or else masklike faces with indifferent and often expressionless facial features, so that no conclusions as to references to a particular story or a known symbolic world materialise beyond the image. Notions concerning the marionette theatre, with its strongly expressive, often exaggerated, deformed and even frozen and unchangeable grimacing masks intrude. One could surmise that the relationship between colouring and what is represented functions

like an idyll and its interference, and it is difficult to say whether in these representations a positive or a negative mood and statement predominates. The question would appear relevant and justified in consideration of such an elemental approach, because Eckehard Fuchs has constructed his own personal iconographic system, whose inner cross-references he attributes and varies alone. Next to the already described network of formal references and quotations, painterly digression from realistic depiction as well as the often suggestive picture titles, are also germane to his system of codification. This strategy for causing uncertainty about one's own awareness means that the contemplation of each individual picture each time becomes a new adventure. His "Casa Parallela", a 3D modelling project of the spaces in which the artist has temporarily lived, worked or exhibited, has been pursued now for the last eight years, and stands formally beyond the concerns of his painting which is little interested in the description of concrete places. It is nonetheless a pivotal and cardinal point in Eckehard Fuchs' work, because what he represents in his drawings and paintings, is derived from his sensibility for a world which surrounds him, with all of its now typical and oh so human problems, misunderstandings and setbacks. Things personal or concerning relationships can be found (e.g. "Geliebtes" [Beloved], "Kämpfende" [Fighters]) as well as observations looking round at the commercial art world ("Lorbeer" [Laurels]), or examining social phenomena ("Schlachtruf" [Warcry], "Ohnmacht" [Blackout]). The different fields of his artistic interest constitute a system of orientation, for which the labyrinthine stringing together of successive spaces can be seen as the metaphor for a reality which has no spatial and temporal connection tying it together. The artist sees his work as a mirror in which time and place interchange with one another. The act of linking up the models of the different spaces stands for his ability to present things which are beyond usual logic, before our very eyes. Johannes Schmidt