

A painter's research into painting –
An attempt at clarification

Von By Marianne Hoffmann

“Everybody is an artist” Joseph Beuys claimed, but not everybody has had the feeling that this applies to them. The actual number of artists in comparison to the world's population is still, at best, minimal. Not every person who paints is a painter and thus an artist. This also applies to every viewer. But what about a formally trained artist who during his numerous scholarships, pronounced, along with his fellow students at the Academies of Art in Munich and Dusseldorf, that: “painting is dead”?

If something that humans feel a loss for has died, then it ought to be preserved. Christian Frosch's career as collector, archivist and preserver began in 1997. The basics of his painting research are material testimonies to painting and their fundamental principles. Anatomisch-Pathologische Sammlung Malerei (Anatomical-Pathological Collection Painting, also known as APSM) was then founded. In medicine, pathology is about the research and teachings of causes (aetiology), forms of origin (pathogenesis), the cause and effect of abnormal, isolated phenomena

– so-called symptoms. A brief definition explains pathology as “teachings of abnormal processes and conditions in the body (pathological anatomy) and their causes”. Frosch has positioned his field of painting research here.

He started by seriously collecting objects that play a role in the everyday life of the painter. With an intellectual precision, an ability to construct a professional archive, and a knowledge of the fundamental components of painting – such as colour and the importance of colour composition to create a convincing visual statement, – Frosch started to store all his collected objects in jars and put them into showcases, lining them up according to their nuances of colour. He bought his bottles and jars in specialist art stores, “pickled” the objects in oil or distilled water, and set them in rows according to their colour effect. The compositions, complementing

each other in their colour, form and rhythms, suddenly took on the effect of a three dimensional painting. And as if this wasn't enough, he even went on to collect and archive, no matter how apparently unimportant, those classic, almost clichéd atelier objets trouvés: cigarette butts, left-over colour and aspirin! So the character of the Pathological Collection had been established and the questions regarding painting answered. Thus the painter, Christian Frosch, had taken the first step into an analysis of painting, based on socio-psychological aspects dealing with how painting is influenced, without actually wielding a paintbrush. And as if this radical approach wasn't enough, along came his next lot of surprising ideas. After his 250 jar Anatomical-Pathological Collection, Christian Frosch went on a search to find a new form of painterly expression. Painting of the 21st century was still waiting to be discovered. The influences and ideas coming out of Düsseldorf and even Leipzig at the time, were seemingly of no importance. The main attribute of a researcher is curiosity mixed with a dash of patience, and patience, in turn, ushers in the ability to observe. A close observer discovers that which people haven't seen or found before, or have just simply overlooked. Quick results are not the point. Individual discoveries are. Without factual, historical support Friedrich Schiller would not have been able to write "Wallenstein" or Goethe his "Torquato Tasso". Without already existing materials and components, Christian Frosch would not have found the background information necessary to his painting research, and with that, the possibility of forming everything into a new whole.

"If a sponge filled with a great range of colours, is thrown against a wall, it leaves traces in which a wondrous landscape can be seen". Well! That's what Leonardo da Vinci thought, placing great confidence in the imagination of his fellow citizens. The type of imagination that one needs when questioning the sense or non-sense of Christian Frosch's so-called colour tests, where he presses paint samples from different manufacturers between glass and preserves them. Thus

making it possible, for the first time really, to compare colours in this way. No one Prussian Blue likens the other. During his stipend stay in the Villa Romana in Florence, every day at 10.a.m. he distributed smears of colour onto sheets of glass using a different postcard of Florence each time. He then moved the glass across the paper. The postcards doublefunctioned as spatulas. The process was repeated every day. This strictly conceptual and seemingly completely abstract work produced astonishingly poetic images. Landscapes full of poetry, similar to those that Leonardo thought to see in his sponge imprints on the wall.

Jan Thorn-Prikker writes: "The impersonal procedure has the character of a personal affirmation: above all of a defiant insistence on art. Creating a painting without actually painting. How far can one really go? How can it actually be realized?" Titles like Klön (Clone), Farbabstrich (Colour Smear), oben/unten (up/down), Interdeck or Paperdeck don't really provide the answers.

In his series oben/unten, Christian Frosch pulls apart pieces of wood stuck together with colour, using all his bodily strength to do so. In the pulling apart, stalactites and stalagmites of frozen colour are formed, as well as elusive runny pools of colour. The frame that the artist has constructed to perform this act of force is perfect for documenting the strength of the colour in its refusal to be torn apart. The result is so fascinating that the viewer immediately falls under its spell.

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All these experiments give such a different slant on everyday things. They weren't created for us to take them too seriously. An element of the comic is everpresent, reminding us that the artist

is trying to prod us out of our stultified way of thinking and coax out a smile.

Why otherwise hang buckets of paint on walls – sans labels – that let the light in on worlds of colour which when looking at them from above, appear to be cratered landscapes

or newly dried-out river

beds full of smeared,

sensual vermilioncoloured

layers of goo?

Christian Frosch has discovered that when

drying out the colour under constantly similar conditions the results depend on the quality and price of the product. It dries either very drily, cracked or creamy. This is all about research and the hope of more future, creating new “root positions” and the anticipation of wholly unexpected results.

The Anatomisch-Pathologische Sammlung Malerei (AnatomicalPathologicalCollection painting) has developed in the last ten years. Out of this has come the AtelierLaborMuseum (StudioLaboratory-Museum).

This was first shown in E.ON Energie's building in Munich. Picture a number of constructed rooms. Just as in a museum, the visitor could wander from room to room, picture to picture, from laboratory to artist's studio and back to the museum. In some rooms the presentation likened a local history museum.

The material mix and their results had produced a completely original new piece of work.

Clement Greenberg saw art's reduction to any meaning in the material itself as progress, but also as an heroic end-of-the-line scenario. For Christian Frosch, the question is: What is painting? Perhaps the answer lies in his new series of work called MV Malversand and PV Papierversand.

He has created the space for his conceptual research into painting. At the outset of his projects, he doesn't know what awaits him. Whether these results are what he wanted is ultimately left up to the judgement of the onlooker.

Man's inherent curiosity and his passion for collecting things all become visible in his AtelierLaborMuseum. And this is not the end of it. “History always has two sides to it”, Golo Mann has said, “that which has happened and that which is seen by the person looking at it and trying to understand it from his place in time. The past lives, it sways in the light of new experiences and newly posed questions.”

Looking at Christian Frosch's body of work up till now, one can assume that he is still asking himself a lot of questions in the hope of finding the answers.