

From Image to Performative Gesture

Medial superimpositions in the work of Florian Nitsch

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Florian Nitsch's works make use of the aesthetics of painting, which rely on other media and incorporate various techniques to make traditional utensils — such as the brush — appear obsolete. What initially looks like painting are color coats and surfaces, which are based on the screenprinting process and fed by photographic motifs that move into the background in order to be superimposed by various geometric layers of color.

Whether Colorfield painting, Minimal or Pop art, all these movements of 20th century American art influence the work of Florian Nitsch, who adheres to an amalgam of opportunities within his artistic practice, and finally also uses the iPad for performative gestures. The resulting screenshots are part of the artist's medial considerations. Although not committed to a particular format, the work is characterized by working on diverging media levels that aim at different moments of perception in an interplay of recognizable motifs and abstract surfaces. The artist formulates possible forms of reality that are subject to various identity transfers and juxtaposes these levels of visibility. In numerous works, a transparent film is the starting point for the constituting images. Nitsch therefore starts from the zero point or negation of visibility, which is needed to make any kind of image formation possible. The transparent film refers to the surface of the photographic dispositive, whose visual realities are then made possible via screenprinting. The painterly gesture which the work evokes is applied in further steps — after the transparent film has been made opaque by screenprinting techniques — or even remains permeable in some areas. The artist applies layers of paint to both the front and back of the transparent film, which determine the different glossy or matt levels of the color fields and consequently make the work appear as three-dimensional objects.

As mentioned above, the individual layers of color, which are located on top of the photographic screenprinting surface, are not applied with a brush, but with a roller. Here, Nitsch produces images in an almost industrial manner, in which serial sequences occur, transitions often flow into one another, and paint residues or streaks mark the production of this process as imperfect spots. Parts of visibility enter a visual relationship with the viewer, who may spot motifs, yet a predefined reality is not given. The artist refers to the perception of everyday scenarios, which he experienced for example during a residency in New York City. The post-industrial character of the urban environment, which bears numerous industrial markers of the last century, is manifested in some of the works, in which ephemeral formations emerge in order to visualize ubiquitous motifs of this city. The different architectural formations are reflected in the works when layers overlap or different temporal levels occur. In the sense of a multimedia aesthetic, the works ask questions about models of perception and the use of two-dimensional media haptics, which generate moments of three-dimensionality via multiple image layers.

The works of Florian Nitsch are characterized by a performative character, which makes the process of superimposition visible as a painterly gesture. At the basis of this artistic approach, both drawing and text play an important role, since Nitsch repeatedly incorporates handwritten text fragments, which are arranged as objects and spatial installations. Assembled as modules, the artist emphasizes the object-like nature of the

individual parts, which are often presented in an exhibition context as architectural spatial structures. As a result, he uses all media in their performative and spatial potential and at the same time opens up a wide spectrum of artistic representation. The fluidity of media language manifests itself in the formats of his works in order not to allow predefined schemes of perception. Moreover, the proportions within his work refer to external conditions such as the possibilities for installation inside the exhibition space. Formats vary from 10 x 15 cm drawings on photographs, 110 x 160 cm paintings on transparent film, 2 x 3 m screenprints on canvas, up to 5 x 10 m sculptures.

This induced process of fluctuating media parameters has recently led the artist to act in performances in which drum-beats accompany his live drawings and projections on stage while new formats of presentation arise. Music is also considered a source of inspiration for the artist, especially Dub from Great Britain, which makes Nitsch's artistic process oscillate between painting, text and technical gadgets that combine screenprinting and the iPad. In his live performances, there is a transition between writing and drawing, with the lines emphasizing the changeability between text and image or between image-text and text-image, leading to a kind of *écriture automatique* in which text-images and drawings spontaneously come into view. Created as visuals, which can later be understood as video clips, they show how the artist intervenes on his iPad with the pen and how different degrees of thicknesses of the lines emerge. Here again it is not a brush, but rather a technically controlled apparatus that achieves certain optical effects. Eventually, Nitsch transfers some of the screenshots from these performances as pictorial artifacts onto canvas to return to the primary medium of art — painting.

The gesture of performance transfers the painterly defined action potential applied by Nitsch during a creative process onto the stage. It shows the artist as a physical subject, who, at the beginning of his career moved himself into the field of pictorial representation via photography and a brush, but with the advancement of the technical possibilities and their perpetuated reproducibility, uses the iPad pen as a digital brush. In this way, Nitsch renders his artistic oeuvre a new visibility, which starts with painting, but generates a change of perspective through its digital orientation.