

The Happy Thoughts / Personal Reflection on the show 'Freie Bahn ins Glück' by Michaela Eichwald

by Michaela Moravčíková

2023

If I may, I will take a detour around the text and impressions from the exhibition. But first, even before this detour, let's imagine what the detour might be. When I visualize the word "detour," it appears as a line slowly going around a point, and that line decides if it will no longer describe the imaginary contours of the terrain; it will speed up and go after the point. I think that this wrapping, or, in other words, messing around, is actually what all artists, seekers, and hunters constantly do. Thanks to this circumvention, the contours of the forms are created, so let's keep in mind the motion and the boundaries which this word brings to us. Now, the beginning.

As we know, the world, as much as words, is determined by differences. Something is different from something else. That's how we know what is what. But we more likely like the similarities. I preferably like "something like this but completely different." When I started to think about the show, one surprising image began to approach me. I saw this wanderer coming down the hill with a dog walking beside her. It was a woman from a novel, 'Die Wand'/'The Wall' by Marlen Haushofer, whose name the reader never learns. The novel is about a woman who goes for a vacation to the Austrian mountains. She wakes up in the morning, and there is a transparent wall that closes her off from the rest of the world, which is apparently dead. Her only companions are a dog, a cow, and a cat, and she has to face loneliness, fear, isolation, and nature. Yes, I thought about this particular book but turned it inside out. Where every situation ends with luck and a happy ending. There would have been people at the borderline of the story talking to each other. Her harvest would have always been successful. She would have known that there is a happy ending, so she wouldn't care anymore, and she simply would enjoy the walk with her dog. So I have this romantic picture of a woman wandering around the countryside in solitude - which is invariably present in artistic practice, especially during creation - looking over the plants, shapes, and transparencies of forms, and having herself a good time. She is there with an easy mind that is underpinned by humor. I like to think that Michaela Eichwald was or saw such a woman while she was painting this series for the Neue Galerie Gladbeck. The titles of the paintings refer to this sentiment too. They have a very light-hearted sense of humor. They are sincere and do not mislead.

I was really lucky with the timing of my visit. I arrived on a fine Indian summer Sunday afternoon. The sun was slowly losing its power, and, together with the stained glass window in Lesesaal, the colors of which were reflected around the room, it created a very special setup. So, with the knowledge that all the work was created on the side of Gladbeck, I immersed myself in the 'countryside feeling.' I didn't read the titles at that moment and saved the game of matching for home.

The first painting I saw was 'Nachts auf der Brache.' It spoke to me like a lace curtain at grandma's. Very gentle layers of curtains with a pink newborn form, connected to some, also not really old-looking, bright part. I told myself, 'Okay, this painting is innocent; what cannot be innocent about grandma's curtains?' Then I stepped back, and all of a sudden, without so many details, it shifted. Since I find the borders of the color fields very important when I see Michaela's work, I paid attention to the pale yellow shape. It turned into a frog, swimming backstroke, soaking up this pink shape as if through a straw. I think the tricky part is the right upper corner.

Another painting, 'Al Formo, Farbe, Fläche (+ Vorsokratiker),' had it all, like the title says. It was something really gentle. It had a similar atmosphere to when you unfold a napkin and then want to make a pouch for something small. With the finest purple inside without any purple at all. I liked this painting; it was very generous and at the same time, it hid something very small. (My working title for this painting became 'The Folded Napkin.')

'Abschied von Gladbeck' looked like a whole storyboard. Like at the end of 'Die Wand,' but with people. The areas which look like they are puzzled together, hold their own secrets which we can't hear because we are behind the glass wall, and it is also rude to listen to other people's conversations anyway, right? Even though it's paradoxical, because in the small towns, everyone knows everything. I don't know how Michaela manages to keep the gaps between the forms empty (not always) and prevent them from looking weird at the same time. With this painting, I had a strange urge to come and paint the next part of the story.

The next title, 'Klausur,' opens a lot of correlations; I am not going to go into any of them. I will just write my 'furry' link to the painting - 'have you ever seen a glass table above you and a cat lying on its belly?'

'Blitzartige Gelungenheitsüberzeugung' was like a quick piece of information, noted by my eyes as they followed the contours of the 'Gelungenheitsüberzeugung' belly.

The painting 'Optik Haptik alles top' had the consistency of jelly. You had a feeling that it was hard to get in. That you had to lick the surface with strength, but once you broke in, the time and gravity changed, and you were floating inside. This entering leaves the echo, and this time not pre-Socratic but Archimedean: 'any object, totally or partially immersed in a fluid or liquid, is buoyed up by a force equal to the weight of the fluid displaced by the object.' Anything entering the space stretches the border. Nothing disappears in the volume, and my volume must be reflected on the surface of the body of jelly. There is also a repetition of shapes and weird shallow depth floating with me.

'Das Material formiert sich als Gegenüber. Welches leben will wie du.' A woman from 'Die Wand': who wants to live like you?

From the main gallery hall with the board-form concrete walls, I transported myself into a sunny, colorful meadow. Paintings like 'Animationspraxis Gnadeneichwald,' 'Sehen was man nicht weiß,' and 'Wie gut kennst du das Zurheide-EDEKA-Feine-Kost-Frischecenter? Relativ gut' were also enjoying the meadow.

I won't delve further into 'Animationspraxis Gnadeneichwald' after learning its title, but I truly enjoy imagining that, amidst all the delicacy of suggestion, a smiling, happy creature emerges from the cabinet of curiosities. Perhaps it was created in honor of the windows in the room, and the right shape emerged either from a long moment of observation or recollection."

'Sehen was man nicht weiß' - this painting might reveal that small hidden thing from 'Al Formo, Farbe, Fläche (+ Vorsokratiker).' It uncovers the inside, and that inside is nice, crumbling into a shiny dust, and the cosmos as a whole may be considered alive. The grid of the opposed stained glass window made it into the painting, completing the mirroring of micro and macrocosm.

'Wie gut kennst du das Zurheide-EDEKA-Feine-Kost-Frischecenter? Relativ gut' was a well-chosen contrast to 'Sehen was man nicht weiß.' It felt grumpy, grounded, real, a bit irritated here. It reflected the more organic window. Hairdressers standing in queues in EDEKA, the shopping window. The purple-masked armadillo must have overtaken everyone in line.

At the end of the exhibition, I left the gallery and saw children playing football with their dads, and my boyfriend joined them. I lay down on a circular bench under a tree and, with closed eyes, watched the sun's rays and listened to the joyful sounds of the game.