

From: *Moritz Neuhoff: Apparent Magnitude*

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Virtual Painting

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What form can painting take today to maintain an even footing with our media environment and our media experiences, which are increasingly characterized by visual alienations? Most media images are not only touched up, cleansed of ostensible flaws or blemishes, digitalized in terms of color and sharpness, they are also increasingly virtual through the montage of diverse realities or layers of reality. This 'cleansing process' and use of montage create a subliminal insecurity due to the increase in artifice, the lack of authenticity.

In recent years, we have witnessed a revival of gestural abstract painting styles. Is the cultural logic behind this resurgence a yearned-for return to honesty? But is it possible to repeat the shift towards subjective painting that was undertaken as a response to the rejection of social ideologies and false utopias in the nineteen-fifties?

Moritz Neuhoff's paintings are a reply to this ambiguous development. They operate with the assurance that painting precisely equates to what it can accomplish through the physical process of applying paint, while at the same time radically undermining that process. In this dialectic between actual physicality and virtual appearance, Neuhoff resorts to the characteristic core factors of painting: light, color, space, movement and, finally, materiality itself.

The light in his pictures comes neither from an internal or external source, nor is it reflected light. It much derives from present-day perceptual experiences with large screens, in which the light emanates intangibly behind or from pictorial elements. The intangibility and latent instability of this light is conveyed in Neuhoff's pictures. They feature an iridescent, immaterial glow that, detached from the physicality of the gestural shapes with their form shadows, acts in the ground or background. In terms of their palette, Neuhoff's pictures are restrained, they do not boast with a full spectrum.

Neither do they focus on color contrasts. His colors are muted, lurking in their latency, and only after careful inspection do they reveal their full range. Not borrowed from nature, they do not relate to the colors of our product world with its artificial surfaces either. They convey the impression that the color is simulating itself, rendering itself elusive. The color constantly shifts in its hue, the unreal light refracts in the color. At the edges of the shapes, the colors frequently transform into fine colored fringes, into other chromatic values. Neuhoff's palette does not approximate the conceptual values of the primary or secondary colors - they cannot be described as yellow, or blue, or red, or green. The colors appear as if the painted picture itself had the capacity of a medium such as a display screen, in which, due to the back-lighting effect, they appear insubstantial, free-floating and, in the freedom of inexhaustible possibilities, on their way towards the never-seen-before. Furthermore, the colors in many of the pictures appear as if involved in a chemical mixing process, where emulsions and other chemical mixtures swirl the colors and force them to drift.

Neuhoff paints his pictures in glazed layers. This allows him, with the subtlest of dark accents, to apply a form shadow to his shapes, lending the figuration a pronounced physicality. He can add various light areas to achieve an immense spatiality, which he enhances through additional blurring. This spatiality, however, never becomes concrete. The spaces shift behind one another without ever achieving a clear, tangible alignment. With this effect of floating in depth, the space also gains a fictional quality. The perplexing aspect of Neuhoff's spaces is additionally reinforced by the paradoxical placement of sharp against blurred edges, whereby the blurry areas seem to lie in the upper layers of the painted surface, while simultaneously reading as resting in the depths.

The bold painterly movement in the pictures seems to result from bodily gestures, while also showing the world in all its motion. Here, Neuhoff deliberately juxtaposes different scales. With the structures resulting from the movements, we are never quite certain whether these are enlargements of something under a microscope or reductions of something seen from a great distance, or how the act of painting has been capable of engendering them. Moreover, it is often impossible to decide whether we are dealing with an active movement that has a beginning and carries on from there, or with a frozen

moment of an incident distributed over multiple centers. Because, particularly in his large 10-foot (3-meter) paintings, the structures appear so deceptively real in their painterly liveliness, one cannot but imagine that only a giant with completely alien tools could have painted the picture. At the same time, the movement sequences cannot be interpreted as individual movements, neither as an accumulation of individual movements, but as rhythms of motion. In urban graffiti, available wall surfaces are filled in a coordinated painting process to articulate the varying speeds of the city. This type of movement drive is not a personal movement, but one belonging to the public space, which also appears in Neuhoff's pictures. This switching between real movement and virtual appearance is also evident in the changing visual experiences between distant and close-up perception: what from a distance might seem to be aggressive convoluted shapes are at proximity transformed into gentle material textures in Neuhoff's pictures.

The manifestation of virtuality is not limited to the core elements of painterly representation, their overall material appearance also delves into the mimicry of media-related qualities. Whereas, from a distance, one believes to discern a distinctly plastic application of material due to the dark form shadows, close-up, one realizes that the picture surface is flat. The painting eludes its own material basis. In the perfection of the illusion, one no longer assumes a painterly authorship, but a digital print, a photograph of unknown origin with a mysterious subject.

The oscillation between subjectivity and objectivity of the movements also creates uncertainties in the interpretation of certain forms. While some gestures and traces are reminiscent of graffiti, others evoke exposed organic or sedimentary micro or macro layers, others again, self-citations from the realm of painting. This results in a blend of contemporary youth-culture tropes, of visual references to scientific imaging and of self-expression in painting.

Because Neuhoff's painting consistently quotes from the complex history of differing paint application strategies, while simultaneously dematerializing their appearance, the term meta-painting is apt here. Neuhoff's painting adopts a more subtle approach than many other contemporary positions in this regard. It does not display its negativity potential in the form of an anti-painting strategy that revolts against the strategies inherent to painting. Neither does it adopt the strategy of 'bad painting', of a feigned non-mastery of painterly practices. Neither is it

machine painting, which celebrates the faults of the mechanical as a painterly impulse. It proceeds more self-assuredly from a position of complete availability of all the elements of painting, by consistently making its painterly actions elude the actual representation, reflecting and articulating semblance as semblance, while still engaging in an exploration of our vision in a dialogue with itself.