

Faurakism –

The Poetry of the Subconscious in the Art of Kerstin Irene Menzer-Reich (KIMR)

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*„When colors are
trickling away with time,
Intermingling,
Unsheathing
Shapes
or entities –
I catch them then
just as I try
to run with luck –
So neither of them fade
after this point of time
Mindfulness
offers space
to the ephemeral
and I'm tracing it–
just like a dream.“*

Kerstin Irene Menzer-Reich, "Ecstasy of Colors" (2014-2015)

In her poem "Ecstasy of Colors," Kerstin Irene Menzer-Reich (KIMR) expresses her perspective on the creative process. Menzer-Reich is a self-taught artist who was born and raised in the GDR. "Faurakism," her unique artistic approach, has been developed during a time span of approximately ten years. The term "Faurakism" consists of the artist's initials and her invention "Faura." It designates a practice that dynamically combines silk painting and the element of random. According to Menzer-Reich, the choice of colors and the formation of shapes bring hidden aspects into our world, visualizing the subconscious. As a concept, "Faura" connects the terms "color" ("Farbe"), "aura" ("Aura"), and "ecstasy" ("Rausch"). The light-induced sensations turn into a state of ecstasy that is used by Aura, the airy goddess of the morning breeze, in mediation between the earthly and divine. Finally, the Faurakimer style--another example of the artist's creative usage of her initials—is the method chosen by Menzer-Reich to depict the images generated by Faurakism more effectively. Currently, Menzer-Reich prefers working with oil on canvas, applying a sophisticated glazing technique to portray the flowing softness of silk as accurately as possible. Menzer-Reich particularly emphasizes the representation of the subject of her art in all its originality.

In the discussion centered on the original artwork and its replicability by today's technology, the science of art assigns a decisive role to the concept of aura, introduced by Walter Benjamin (Broer *et al.* Bd. 5 1997:317). The inimitable aura distinguishes the original from any copy, regardless of its technical perfection (*ibid.*). Menzer-Reich's colorful silk formations possess this aura, as well as her artworks in the Faurakimer style. The latter are no mere reproductions of her silk formations; these artworks are originals in their own right. The choice of the section to paint and the translation from the three-dimensionality of silk to the two-dimensional space of the canvas impart unique charismatic power to Menzer-Reich's paintings.

Faurakism is based in Menzer-Reich's gift of tracing subjects for her art in structures of everyday life such as trees, flowers, a pile of stones or crumpled paper by means of imagination and the deep subconscious. This gift of imagination has been nourished by Menzer-Reich's childhood. The artist's early years were characterized by numerous concerts, frequent visits to the opera, ballet and theater performances, each of them—a vivid experience. Menzer-Reich recalls a crucial moment during her visit to the Old Masters Picture Gallery in Dresden. There, she saw the Sistine Madonna by Raphael before her fifth birthday: "This image, this

feeling, the painting's warmth, charisma, and beauty have accompanied and influenced me throughout my entire life." Later on, as she had reached the age of eighteen, Menzer-Reich received a gift from her parents – a flight to an important cultural center of Russia, Saint Petersburg. Remembering this journey, Menzer-Reich regards the myriad of impressions that she collected during sightseeing, particularly during her visit to the Hermitage, as a stunning and outstanding experience.

Moreover, Menzer-Reich took an interest in French Impressionists. The use of color by Claude Monet and Edgar Degas fascinated and astonished the artist; the dreamlike, playful mosaic of color that produced a new image with increasing distance inspired Menzer-Reich. This playfulness of color is also present in Menzer-Reich's paintings. Viewed over a longer period of time and from different angles, the paintings reveal new shapes and figures. Additionally, there is another similarity to Degas' work: the relationship between fabric and motion. Thus, Degas stated that the dancer is just an excuse for painting beautiful fabrics and rendering motion (Broer *et al.* Bd. 4 1997:204). Consequently, the effect of light on iridescent cloth stimulated Degas to capture the fleeting movements of dance. Likewise, Menzer-Reich's Faurakism places silk in the center of the creative process: the artist's hand confers motion and color on silk, documenting the emerging shapes by means of photography and painting.

While Impressionism as an artform that tries to capture momentary impressions (Broer *et al.* Bd. 5 1997:9) is echoed in Menzer-Reich's work, there is an additional expressionist component. Broer *et al.* define Expressionism as the art of expression, an art form that is characterized by a break with the past and the determination to do something entirely different from preceding works and genres (Broer *et al.* Bd. 5 1997:9). The artist, regardless whether it is a painter, a poet or a musician, first and foremost focuses on expression (Deuchler 1975: 145). Correspondingly, the painting of the motives generated by Faurakism is not merely an impressionistic rendering of color and light. Rather, the rich interplay of colors expresses thoughts, feelings, daydreams, and memories.

Faurakism unites impression and expression, reality and tendencies toward abstraction, when it produces artworks in the Faurakimer style; the ephemerality of the relief-like, painted silk arrangements is turned into material, objective reality by means of photography, even if this arrangement occurs spontaneously without usage of concrete prototypes. This seeming paradox can be understood as an answer to the statement of the German expressionist and leading painter of "Die Brücke," Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. In a letter from the 11th of September 1931, Kirchner wrote of his belief that many laws of vision are not yet commissioned by art, since they have not yet been consciously perceived (Broer *et al.* Bd. 5 1997:17). According to Kirchner, abstract art is a self-delusion, because all art is abstract, since its language is derived from reality, and even the wildest imagination utilizes shapes somehow perceived at some point and at some place (*ibid.*). Because Faurakism applies the technique of silk painting in a new, unexpected way, it recruits a new law of vision, quite in Kirchner's sense, for the purpose of art.

Functioning as a law of vision, Faurakism represents an approach for visualization of an inner world, evocative of methods established by Kandinsky. Kandinsky has designed a grammar of shapes and colors to express the inner world of an artist, using music as his role model, since music possesses a non-objective canon for the representation of diverse feelings and notions (Broer *et al.* Bd. 5 1997:86). The interplay of color and silk is as intuitive as improvised music. This intuitive aspect reaches the viewer on an emotional level. Menzer-Reich emphasizes that individual perception is crucial to her; her works are intended to provide a stimulating impulse helping to open up to one's imagination. The viewers are encouraged to engage themselves actively in observing and feeling the artwork in front of them rather than relying on an explanation by the artist in the role of passive listeners. The perceived image eludes full analysis, since the meaning changes in the process of viewing and discovering the represented shapes. Each artwork is thoroughly ambiguous.

The ephemeral character of images that is achieved by the flow of silk and the choice of colors strikingly differs from Menzer-Reich's perception of painting. To her, painting is by no means always easy; rather, it is accompanied by a dichotomy of hope and fear of failure. Menzer-Reich regards the intense engagement with color and canvass as an uneven road fraught with pitfalls; yet this engagement also possesses therapeutic qualities. Menzer-Reich calls painting her art therapy, which is a common ground she shares with the French artist of the Nouveau Réalisme, Niki de Saint Phalle. Niki de Saint Phalle considered her art as a therapy that helped in her healing process by translating her feelings, fears, violence, hopes, and joy into artworks (de Saint Phalle in Broer *et al.* Bd. 5 1997:263).

In spite of the difficulty of painting in the Faurakimer style, the intuitive spontaneity of Faurakism as such is still crucial for Menzer-Reich. In contrast to the attention of Faurakimer style to faithful reproduction of the underlying motif generated by Faurakism, the motif itself exhibits compositional freedom. Compulsory principles of composition play virtually no role, thus putting Faurakism in relationship to Informal Art (or: Informel). This art movement is characterized by rejection of fixed compositional rules (Broer *et al.* Bd. 5 1997:199). According to K. Thomas, Informel pursues immediate expression of mental impulses by spontaneous rhythm of lines and spots of color (in *ibid.*). Similarly, Faurakism's immediacy is achieved by mood-related choice of color and shapes. Current sensory perception, conscious or not, sets out the actual direction of both silk and colors.

Furthermore, by utilizing the element of random and highlighting the subconscious, Menzer-Reich's art displays a conceptual closeness to Surrealism. Deuchler describes the surrealist artist as a medium of creative force that operates within the artist (Deuchler 1975: 163). The surrealist artist or poet is devoted to the visions emerging in the subconscious in order to transport this hidden subconscious in its full richness to the area of imagination and to make it representable for visual arts, bringing into play randomness as a creative factor (*ibid.*). In a similar vein, silk can only be more or less consciously folded. Its materiality prevents total control. The flow of color is also partly subject to the elements of random and ephemerality like a daydream emerging from the mental depths. Though daydreams, silk and color can be shaped and directed to a certain extent, they escape full command. Herein lies the poetry of the subconscious, skillfully explored by Menzer-Reich.

Works cited:

Broer, Werner und Walter Etschmann, Robert Hahne, Volker Tlusty. *Kammerlohr Epochen der Kunst Band 4: 19. Jahrhundert – Vom Klassizismus zu den Wegbereitern der Moderne*. 2. Auflage. München: Oldenbourg, 1997.

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