

In Search of Lost ColorTimeSpace

The artist Maria Maier was born in Amberg and lives in Köfering near Regensburg. She finds her motifs in that region, but also in New York, Ireland, and Cuba



Photo: Uwe Moosburger

Whoever wants to approach Maria Maier's oeuvre can choose an easy variant: a stroll through venerable Regensburg with its countless churches, clan towers, castles, and parks. Whoever ambles with open eyes through this historic world heritage in stone will see a powerfully colored plaque on almost every important historic building.

These graphics are at first glance unprepossessing, but on a closer look all the greater an influence on the city's appearance, belong to Maria Maier's series "Stadtzeit-Zeitstadt" ("Citytime-Timecity"). They adorn parks and squares, as well as churches and outstanding secular buildings. The plaques always show the floor plan of the building where they are installed and, associated with it, a large number of other floor plans of comparable constructions in the city.

By concentrating on floor plans – i.e., the seemingly immutable geometric foundation of construction art, this series takes on something objective, almost timeless – and is nonetheless rooted in temporality. What the series "Stadtzeit-Zeitstadt" shows is the city as we see it today: an unbelievable reservoir of stories that was, however, mostly shut down, at least concerning its architecture.

These timely/timeless forms take on a life of their own through the powerful colorfulness in which Maria Maier has conceived

them. The color-spaces meet in rich contrast; for example, deep blue floor plans are contrasted with the radiantly pure yellow of the background. In their seriality, these works recall the basic principles of Pop Art: color meets form, and even slight patterns of variation produce the greatest possible difference between the individual pictures. But unlike Pop Art's celebration of consumer society, Maier's works honor art itself, that constant striving for the secret of the connection between forms and colors.

These graphics from 1995 do not even begin to exhaust Maria Maier's extensive oeuvre. But the basic principles of her artistic journeys of discovery seem inherent here, as if in a nucleus. Her works delve with great seriousness and at the same time with astonishing aesthetic lightness into the parameters of form, color, space, the series, variation, and not least time. This tireless search for the right – or also the wrong – relationship between these categories shapes her work in various media. Thus, "Zeitenflug 73" ("Time Flight 73") from the series of that name from 1994, i.e., one year earlier, also exemplifies her tremendous will to give form. Blocks of color, arranged out of seemingly endlessly shifting nuances of one and the same hue, collide here, just as do thick and thin contours; and the structures of paint meet the materiality of the substrate. Painting and graphic art – the artistic medium repeatedly becomes the expression of a reflection about the possibilities and limits of art itself.

A Cosmopolite

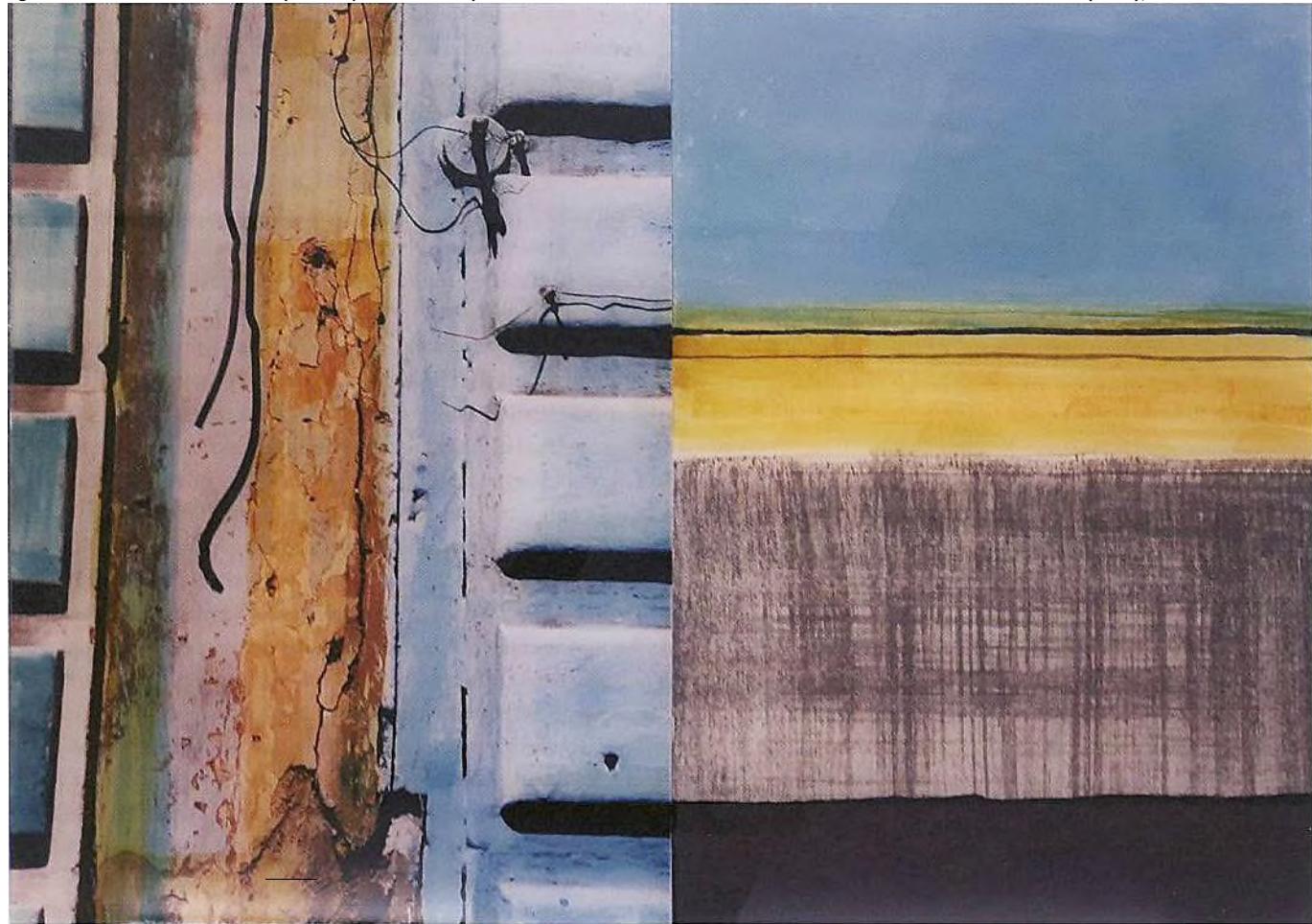
But the real limits of a doggedly portentous national art are not valid here. Maier is a cosmopolitan artist who finds her motifs in New York, Ireland, and Cuba, among other places. The native of Amberg can draw as much power and inspiration from the ruinous charm of Cuba as from motifs from the Regensburg area that has been her home region for many years now

After studying Art Pedagogy and Art History and working as a teacher for several years, in 1992, Maier began working as a freelance artist. Her résumé shows many solo and group exhibitions in museums, art associations, and galleries in Germany and abroad. Her most recent stations were New York, Paris, Moscow, and Vienna – and, again and again, her Upper Palatinate home region. Today, her works are found in many important collections and not least in public space.

If our first glance at Maria's work falls on the graphic art and the painting, at the center of her oeuvre so far stands another genre in which she is establishing a firm place in contemporary art discourse: the painted and overpainted photograph. The starting point for Maria Maier's photographic works is in found object and spatial constellations. Whether these are metropolitan stairway constructions, as in her series "T-Raumspuren" ("Room Traces/Dream Traces"), or Cuban back courtyards in the colorful, sensual series "ZR K- Giving Color" (Ill. below), real – i.e., at the center of her artistic interest stand visually and haptically experientable objects.

below: From the series "ZR K – Giving Color"

right side: "Fürstliche Favoriten" ("Princely Preferences") for an exhibition in the Palace of the Prince Pückler Park in Bad Muskau (2019), detail



But the painterly reworkings lend the photographs a new aesthetic all their own. It is surely not saying too much that this revaluation of what is real is the specific signature of the painter and photographer Maria Maier. These aesthetically enchanting pictures confront us with seemingly marginal and possibly worthless, because purely functional traces of our civilization – nameless flights of stairs, silos, or highrises. But these symbols of progress that, in the pictorial context, also become displaced mirror images of our society are, unforeseen, ennobled in combination with components from other media. They become the centerpiece of highly aesthetic compositions and hint at the great mystery of form.

Again and again, one sees here formal pictorial solutions and strategies that reveal structures in a surprising way. The circular silo kaleidoscopes can serve as an example here, as can the series “E-Mission” (cf. title picture), which turns the shimmering tangle of high-voltage power lines into the delicate brushstrokes of an abstract composition.

Object or Abstraction?

If one grasps abstraction as an orientation toward forms and structures and as the interplay among surface, form, and color, then Maria Maier’s compositions can clearly be understood as being abstract. But all-too-hasty attempts at art historical categorization cannot capture Maria Maier’s pictorial language. Of course, one can trace a line from the great still lifes of the Baroque to the Surrealists’ alienated cult of the object. One also senses a whiff of the color experiments of the Abstract Expressionists in Maria Maier’s works. But these comparisons merely incorporate the works in the history of ideas. Her pictorial language always remains autonomous and inimitable. Precisely because of their intensely serial character, these works sketch an independent view of the world that cannot be explained with chains of art historical models.

In recent years, her works have often conspicuously donned floral garb. The major exhibition “Blütezeit” (“Flowering Season”), which was shown from 2014 to 2016 in Regensburg, Daugavpils (Latvia), and Speyer, among other places, bears pictorially powerful witness to this. In her painting, Maria Maier takes up the delicate play of color in sumptuous flowerings. She contrasts the richness of natural phenomena with that of creative, artistic power. With her painting, she captures the ephemerality of blossoming magnificence in a work of art and enters into dialog with nature’s inexhaustible wealth of colors and forms. Here, at the latest, the poles of abstraction and figurativeness lose their meaning for the artist’s work.

In essence, Maria Maier now seems to have reached a temporary destination in her search: in an art that interrogates the found object about its repertoire of forms and colors and makes it the starting point of an aesthetic reflection about art itself. Her most recent works – circular collages of photographs of flowers and painterly components for an exhibition in the palace in the Prince Pückler Park in Bad Muskau – display hydrangea flowers (Ill. above), which are understood less as an object than as a repertoire of color and form and that become a spiritual exploration of the color blue.

There can be no doubt: Maria Maier has meanwhile found herself and her art. That means, however, that we can expect plenty of surprises and shifts

from her. For just as the pool of colors, forms, and combinations appears inexhaustible, so too is her oeuvre up to now, which has mostly developed in the Upper Palatinate region – and which may even require this landscape as shaping substrate – but which points far beyond it: to the down-to-earth placelessness where great art has always frolicked.

SEBASTIAN KARNATZ



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Erinnerung an Gisela Conrad
LITERATUN Anna Weill, Jaromir Konecny
und Siegfried von "regesack VT
RANSTASTUN401 Januar bis März

Title picture: Maria Maier, E-Mission 13

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