

Art as Magic

Dietmar Brixy at Galerie Falkenberg
by Michael Stoeber

Theodor W. Adorno's definition of art is beautiful, although conceptually bold: 'Art is magic delivered from the lie of being truth.' This short sentence juggles three extraordinarily complex and ambivalent terms. If Adorno's dictum about truth, as we might assume, alludes to traditional, historical theories of art concerning representation and reflection, of course he is correct. Modern art no longer seeks to 'reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible' (Paul Klee). Its truth has become an internal one, it has become eminently subjective and idiosyncratic.

This transfer of the truth to a locus within the artist, within his or her personal world of perceptions and feelings, is fully on display in Dietmar Brixy's artwork. Over the years, the artist's perspective has become more present. Brixy has subjected the visual world and external reality to an increasingly powerful transformative process, a fact that his canvases attest to in their intensified abstraction. However dramatic this process may be, Brixy's paintings remain grounded in the artist's experience of the visible world and an artistic confrontation with it.

This is especially apparent in his paintings from the last twelve years. In 2001, the painter purchased an old Neo-Gothic pumping station in Mannheim, the city of his birth. He has since converted it into a spacious studio and home, and won several awards for monument preservation. For the past several years, Brixy has opened the building to the public for regular exhibitions of his own work, as well as work by fellow artists. He also enjoys gardening, and has carefully planned a magnificent garden around the house, with specially chosen plants, shrubs, and trees. The garden serves not only as a sanctuary for silence and meditation, but also as a source of artistic inspiration.

The titles of Brixy's paintings series make clear how important the garden is to his work: 'Grape Harvest', 'Roots', 'Grow', and 'Eden'. The title 'Eden' in particular suggests that *in hortus conclusus* – within the enclosed space of his garden of paradise – Dietmar Brixy has found his own personal Eden. Here he has discovered a lasting impetus to paint and a constant source of inspiration for new images. The garden's influence can also be seen in Brixy's two most recent series of works, 'Discover' and 'Surprise', of which a selection is currently on exhibit at Galerie Falkenberg in Hannover.

In the 'Discover' series (2012–2014) – *nomen est omen* – Brixy continues his artistic explorations in the realm of colour. In these black-ground paintings, the artist's virtuosic handling of paint unifies a number of contradictory artistic notions: figuration and abstraction, surface and space, inside and out. Making use of sculptural gestures, Brixy kneads and squeezes the paint, then lets it pour out again so that it flows across the surface of the canvas. He pairs Baroque extravagance with expressionist action painting, a refined Rococo-like sense of colour with psychedelic hallucinations, and sets forceful painterly gestures alongside the most delicate detail work – all of which unite to form a singular synthesis and impression.

Though the fig and palm leaves that Brixy occasionally presses directly into the paint can be clearly discerned in some of his works, the references to nature and the garden in the new 'Surprise' series (from 2015) are sparser and less distinct. New colour spaces open up, showing greater depth than before. The 'Discover' series depicts whole cosmogonies as interior worlds. Even though the paintings are still composed of many overlapping layers of colour, their impasto quality and their plasticity have retreated in order to create room for painterly gestures.

The result is a new tonality in which the dissonant colour palette of past work has been replaced by a much calmer one. Brixy surprises viewers with more visual harmonies. Opposing qualities – such as loudness and

quietness, tumult and calm, stillness and movement – are more easily reconciled with one another than before. It is as if the artist wanted to offer an encouraging antithesis to the disturbing social and political upheavals of the present. Understood in this way, Dietmar Brixy's work confirms Adorno's definition of art as magic. The artist is a magician and seeks, as Brixy himself once said, to transform 'the heaviness of life (...) into something limitless and gentle'.

Captions:

'Art is creation from a whole'

Old Pumping Station Neckarau

Discover| 2014, oil on canvas, 70 x 90 cm

Studio in the pumping station