

“Dietmar Brixy – TEN” (Finissage, 19.10.2014)

Opening speech, Dr. Martin Stather

For ten years, Dietmar Brixy has lived and worked in an old pumping station. The time at the station has passed quickly. If, in 2004, the landlord had been able to foresee everything that would happen there, he might have reconsidered and carried out the renovations and remodelling himself. But it's too late for regret and besides, the visitors to this wonderful landmark in Mannheim now have cause to celebrate Dietmar Brixy's dedicated effort to renovate the historical building and make it liveable, while preserving it in the process. This is reason enough to feel an immense gratitude toward him. Thanks to Brixy, this site has become a beacon of regeneration and art in Neckarhaus and Mannheim. The artist lives and works here, a fact made all the more impressive as the law allows.

The ten years have passed rapidly, but it was time well spent. In the interim we have all become older and greyer, but there has also been a great deal of artistic development. One must respect Dietmar Brixy for making his home a bona fide art centre, one that also serves other artists. Here in the pumping station, he regularly exhibits a wide range of artwork by his colleagues. Like any curator, he holds these artists in high esteem, engaging them in artistic discourse and providing an opportunity for them to present their work. These exhibitions are not limited to the Mannheim public, as this site has become well known and respected beyond the city limits.

Dietmar Brixy's own work over past several years has not lost its sense of vibrancy. It continues to change and develop, offering the viewer new perspectives and insights without losing the vital thread that runs throughout his work. Over time, human figures have all but disappeared from his paintings, and yet they still lie at the heart of his artistic practice. This may sound like a dubious claim, but it is not. People and their sensory experiences still form the focal point of Brixy's painting, playing an integral part in his portrayals of nature.

In the last two years, Brixy's work has taken another leap, a pleasant change in my opinion, even though it was triggered by an unfortunate event. His mother, to whom Brixy was very close, passed away. It is possible to find echoes of this loss in his paintings from the time. The mood is sombre, the colour reserved, black is introduced into the palette. Only recently has his work taken yet another leap – becoming lighter, providing space for new ideas, developing a sense of spaciousness that is flooded with light, offering room to breathe once more. They are magnificent new paintings that invite one's exploration and roving visual discovery. Here he works with brush, palette knife, and his own hands, capturing painterly expanses of colour that free the imagination. Nine years ago, I spoke about his new series of vine paintings:

The new series of vine paintings by Dietmar Brixy is certainly in a league of its own. The first question however, is surely how it is that a painter whose work we thought we knew suddenly ceased to paint scenes inspired by distant places, and began to paint his immediate environment: the Pfalz, his place of origin. First came a new home in a familiar locale with his grand acquisition of the pumping station, a project that fully occupied him for years, allowing him hardly any time for artistic work, unless one includes the exterior and interior architectural renovations he made during this time. Once the project was completed, however, Brixy was able to dedicate himself to his actual surroundings, in this case a large, mature grapevine the artist had acquired but not yet transplanted. He quickly set to work, and today we are among the fortunate few first to witness the results.

Today we are confronted by completely different paintings, topographies that articulate the artist's desire to paint. They feature linear structures as well as interwoven and open surfaces distinguished by a new, seductive range of colour. A tour through the exhibition offers a small-scale retrospective of sorts, allowing us to travel back in time and recognise any number of connections between the old and the new: a number of visual themes that have continued to assert themselves over the years, and others that have vanished from sight. The new-found sense of colour in Brixy's painting opens up new horizons, creating different textures and a new openness that works in tandem with the form, at moments nearly dissolving the borders of the image itself. To a certain extent, colour and form develop autonomously on the canvas, coming into play almost independently of one another. Brixy reaches a degree of abstraction here that does not necessitate figurative reference.

A diverse range of approaches to colour unfolds before our eyes. More than mere visual intoxication, Brixy carefully gauges his use of colour, engaging in a colouristic tradition that sets one colour on top of another – small dabs of paint that build up larger surfaces – thereby emphasising the depth and texture of the material itself. Meanwhile, his technique of scraping throws the paint into relief and exposes the layers of colour beneath, achieving at times chameleon-like colouration in relation to the layers above it, a colour space that is constantly changing. While an unmistakable dynamism courses through these paintings, they nevertheless achieve moments of peace and contemplation. If this style seems to know no boundaries, the selections he presents always reveal a conscious setting of limitations that allow the picture to open outward. We congratulate Dietmar Brixy on the dynamic development of his work, and thank him and his partner David for taking us on a tour of the artwork and their home. We hope that the project will continue for years to come.

Dr. Martin Stather