

Nicola Barth's Visual Big Bang Theory

by Sandra Mann

Nicola Barth's latest works oscillate between the Abstract Expressionism of a Cy Twombly and the Surrealism or Dadaism of a Max Ernst. Like Max Ernst, she uses a variety of techniques, i.e., she uses colour sometimes impasto and sometimes as a glaze. Though she makes less use of frottage, she scratches structures into the wet colour with the back of the brush, draws in pencil on and into the paint, reapplies impasto colour or lets wet colours run. Sometimes she even punches holes into the painting ground with a fine needle.

From a contemporary painting point of view, she shifts towards a Jonathan Meese position, whose 'playful approach' has been an influence on her. In her newest works she places herself in the company of Hermann Nitsch, Anke Rohrscheid and Albert Oehlen. In some of her paintings she takes a figurative approach as cheeky and free as André Butzer. Above all, nonchalance and colour intensity are her strengths.

When she glazes white paper or canvas with oil, the pure colours shine with exquisite force. The images balanced on the threshold of figuration impressively succeed. Some of her works have a very direct erotic element which strongly slides into the figurative. These images, too, retain the nonchalant quality with which they were developed.

Her newest works are strongly reminiscent of organic forms. They are monochrome, their effect comes through the painting technique and her way of dealing with colour. She uses pure colour, blood red, a deep indigo sea-blue, a glowing, golden sun-yellow, and green in all shades. There is a tendency to always want to recognise something figurative in these images, hence we see a lion's head, a bird, stones, maggots, sea anemones, blood plasma or viruses. Organic associations. Or perhaps they are neuroses, as with Franz West? "If you could make neuroses visible they would look like that", West once said about his work, which Barth greatly admires.

Nicola Barth writes about emotional conditions such as, for example, boredom or laughing. Emotional conditions are also reflected in her work. Her images also contain, however, a modification of sensual impressions, such as taste, on a visual level: a series of works painterly transforms the delicatessen of a starred chef.

When she paints she starts quickly and impulsively, completing "86%" of the image. The remaining 14% can take three days to complete. She says, "That's the difficult part, deciding where the last pencil line belongs" and finally "letting the work go." In effect, the first part of the process follows In-

formel principles, straight from the gut, the rest is the reflective but independent principle of Nicola Barth.

The best images come when she fully lets go and gives herself up completely to painting, with no concept and her thoughts far away from the canvas: "simply letting it be painting." Then visual big bang theories happen.