

Observatories for Progressing

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Delicate showers of dots, huge windows gradually disappearing under layers of snow, landscape painting relics faded to brushmarks, action painting grounded on Far Eastern meditation, neo-Pointillism in the age of the digital revolution: there are a lot of associations that crop up when you enter a room distinguished by works of Rudolfine Rossmann. One would like to indulge in them with the greatest pleasure, in the associations, that is. In the pictures, too, of course, wouldn't the associations inevitably do injustice to them: the pictures show the viewer the way, but it is up to me where I want to follow them and where not, and it cannot be ruled out that I might simply tuck them under my arm and now and then set out in a direction not intended by the pictures at all.

Seen in a sober light, Rossmann's large-format works present themselves as agglomerations of dots applied with different intensity and in equally different density. Intellectual painters' analyses such as those by Wassily Kandinsky or Paul Klee have stylized the point as the world egg of fine art. The Pointillists around Seurat were certainly crucial for preparing the lane of approach for scientific thinking into the space of painting, though the relationship between the two sides brought together, an achievement to be welcomed all in all, is not always clear. For both art and science contribute their strengths and their weaknesses to this liaison, and disregarding the package insert may cause undesired side effects because of this mixture. What a nuisance when the package insert is missing.

So let's take the world egg, the dot, as the hub for maneuvering through Rudolfine Rossmann's universe in this textual attempt at a linkage. Yet where does it take us? Into a recidivist's shower of dots who knows no other dot, onto a fluffily consolidating blanket of snow, cold shock guaranteed, or to the leftovers of an artwork dating from an epoch closed long since that can only be exploited within the walls of a museum, or do, after all, patterns persistently calling for regulative repetition conflict with the wildness of nonchalantly splashed traces of color? The initial pleasure in the works' eloquence drowns in the jumble of questions arising from their subsequent enjoyment.

The fourth of March 1840 was a historic day: There was a meeting at the Society of Physicians in Vienna which included the physician Joseph Barres, who brought a slide preparation made according to the most recent insights, the optician Simon Plöbbl, who arrived with a newly adapted microscope, the physicist Carl Schuh, who guaranteed brighter conditions with his improved gas light, and, finally, the mathematician and physicist Andreas von Ettingshausen, who captured the now possible outlook—or insight rather—on a Daguerreotype plate he had found in Paris. You see the cross-section of a clematis stalk—provided that you read the inscription.

Actually, a pattern of snowflakes about to melt unfolds from the delicate shower of dots in the middle. In the following year, Joseph and Johann Natterer extended the microscopic view and daguerreotyped the Corpus Christi procession on Vienna's Josephsplatz from an elevated position. The passing people and horses dissolve into spots which are only framed to a familiar view by the walls behind them. Executed in a technique which used in such an unsophisticated manner lays claim to coming "closest" to its subject in its presentation, both pictures subvert the engrained habits of seeing with this simple trick of a very close or a rather far point of view. All the same, the two brothers had not yet chosen a viewpoint that would have been high enough to make the objects and persons completely break up into structures.

This was achieved by László Moholy-Nagy in the pictures of his book "Von Material zu Architektur" (From Material to Architecture) published in 1929. The elevated view of an intersection in New York is merely restrained by the still too big automobiles in the first reality, while the picture of a rye field definitely turns into a sea of shimmering dots enclosed by the geometry of the fields' layout. Two years before, Kazimir Malevich had already decided for this vertiginous height to underpin his Suprematist revolution with the remaining structures of a man-made landscape in the publication "The Non-Objective World." Numbers 32 and 33 of the series reveal a viewpoint suddenly withdrawn into the familiar everyday world again, and we look very far "up" from "below." The "inspiring environs" or "reality," as Malevich calls these photographs, show—dots. Not quite, perhaps, because the dots are created by a squadron of airplanes. Nevertheless, the planes remain dots more or less. But it could also be a shower of dots...

At first sight, this detour to photography has nothing to do with Rudolfine Rossmann's art, nothing at all. But it concerns our habits of looking and, thus, our habits of interpretation—and, thus, her art. The photographic examples show how decisively the actually banal reference to closeness and distance affects our mode of perception. Something simple, something thoughtlessly taken for granted may pull the rug out from under us or make us rise to undreamt-of heights. It is at least this insight that the dot showers from landscape painting relics of a late action painting era under a digital regime immediately provide.

As Rossmann's works never depict an object, they may lay claim to being called "supreme art" in the sense of Malevich's supremacy. Yet, they are not part of this Russian lateral painter's tradition stemming from the flowering of classical modernity. The absence of an object makes the viewer not succumb to the temptation of capturing something he recognizes in the picture with a name or term. The works overbid conceptual enclosures by soaring up into the realm of

drawing and not persisting in mere description. The viewer is confronted with pictures that elude definition, that refuse fast pigeonholing with an unwaveringness manifesting itself on the canvas dot by dot. This is why it does not make any immediate sense to attach a text to them. They will evade this dependence, slip away, disperse.

Though strictly renouncing the tempting symbiosis between concept and picture, Rossmann's works do not escape our perception work's modes of functioning. This is to say that we cannot resist the temptation of adjusting those indefinable streaks to the shapes in our memory, which holds true for any structure and any spot on a white wall, to refer to Leonardo's advice for his pupils. Only when you begin to speak about it—even if just to yourself—these now shaped streaks are supplied with the respective concepts. The key point in this process is the sequence of how we digest what we see, how the viewer completes the work of art. By making use of this peculiar interplay in a very precise way, Rudolfine Rossmann makes the viewer rise to those sublime heights where "pure painting" has its habitat on the one hand, while again granting room for the most daring associations on the other. Non-figurative painting for the sake of non-figurativeness would forfeit its claim to be regarded as art as would the mere reproduction of nature. As we may lose ourselves in unknown variations of forms and myriad gradations of color, Rossmann's pictures make us proceed into the infinite expanses of the universe hung with planets above us.

In the interplay between top view, close-up, and view from afar, the large-surface roundelays of dots reveal themselves as observatories for those progressing. In its corporality, the star as a dot on the firmament serves as a point of orientation, unreachable, but showing us the way here and now. This is why Rudolfine Rossmann captures it on canvas or paper.

The dots, quite unobtrusive compared to the powerful objects in many paintings of other artists, guide our eyes across the huge, universe-related formats with a natural certainty. As stars we look at from an observatory assemble to form celestial formations, the dots accumulate to wandering, overlapping, fraying clusters. While we come upon the Big and the Little Bear there, we may find the trotting and the galloping horse here. And now and then, a meteor appears forcing the perceptual process to have another try.

Interpreting the dot as a cosmic egg, we come to understand Rossmann's small-format works on paper as an infinitely consolidated string of subtle marks. But this is only what the analytic approach suggests. Actually, these lines are a permanent exercise in the art of clearing hurdles. Of overcoming the delicate starting point to change to a form of line converting the initial circumspection into an enthusiastic gesture; of arriving at a sharp division of space—a hazardous enterprise considering the almost minuscule expansion of these tiny universes of paper. Thus, this change of format and technique repeats the leap between close-up and view from afar in a way similar to the rhythm of diastole and systole. Why roam to distant lands when the orientation marks of painting are so near is the question Rossmann's works seem to ask under the starry firmament. What an offer, put forward dot by dot!

However, the dot will once again elude those viewers who try to identify the guidelines of the paintings' agglomerations in the analytical text. For, if one carries the analysis of the dot through to its end with the adequate mathematical methods, it will remain in the mind as an ideal-typical nothingness. If there is no point, you cannot come to the point. This is what the text teaches us. In painting, however, each dot offers a new explanation of the world.