

# Annekathrin Norrmann

Annekathrin Norrmann's works should not be seen simply as paintings, as much as they are those very things, nor even as simple combinations of painted and three-dimensional elements, which they also often contain, but rather as a synthesis of the two. This was also true of their creative point of departure, collage. The artist develops her pictorial ideas on the basis of the formal problems contained within collage technique. Small collages of heterogeneous materials provide the impulse for larger works, but without directly preparing for them, in the sense of being a model. Making collages of found and also partly worked fragments of the most varied provenance is not simply a matter of combining one element with one or more others, but something new arises from it, namely a synthesis. A fragment of a photograph or of a text loses its function, and thereby its communicative character, when it is removed from its purpose and juxtaposed with coloured pieces of paper or even coloured itself, and it is thereby released to be recreated and thus open to an uncodified mode of perception. The colour and spatial potentials of such collages can lead the artist to works of a larger format, in which, however, the pictorial problems are posed differently, because in this case the fragments which have already been found and selected for the collages must be once again found and made material, that is to say, painted.

And so, on the basis of a particular effect specific to a particular collage, for example a colour tone or a spatial blurring, a large format picture can be created, which exhibits no formal similarity with any of the collages, but which takes the problems formulated in the collages as its theme and reworks them. The pictures, unlike the collages, are almost always in large format and exhibit a wholly different kind of presence. A small or medium-sized format would be all too reminiscent of an apparent representation of something else, rather as Leon Battista Alberti in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century defined a picture as a kind of window, through which one could look upon a different type of reality; with the side effect that one comes to overlook the pictoriality of the representation. In theory this is also achievable in abstract painting, in which, perhaps, a small area of colour may be (mis)understood as a reduced representation of a large area of colour. A large format picture does not allow its difference to be overlooked, but impresses itself upon the viewer as a genuine reality related to the viewer as an individual. One no longer sees the representation of pictorial elements but only the reality itself.

The pictures are not preconceived, which is to say that they do not exist in the artist's mind in their entirety before the beginning of the work. However, she may have a more or less vague notion of her aim, but the route to it must be tried out, even at the risk of not merely insignificant but sometimes decisive changes. In extreme cases it can happen that even a part of the often multipart works may be exchanged for another and harmonised within the new whole, if this seems necessary. And so certain combinations come together only over a period of time, since not every close relationship works. What we know as a simple basic experience in everyday life functions in the same way in the world of aesthetics, but here there is the possibility of ideal solutions which life rarely offers.

Putting individual parts together is similar in principle to the process of collage. It is the actual compositional achievement. The multipart pictures do not offer a range of combinations at will. Certain elements are not simply interchangeable with others, distance relationships cannot be changed at will. Although the basically open pictorial structure allows its components to be interchanged to a limited extent, this remains dependent upon the picture's setting. A low room can justify a minor change in the relationship between the components, and indeed with itself, or even permit such a change, which would not be possible in a room with a higher ceiling. Although the artist aims at open-frame, rather than closed-frame pictures, she is still working with compositions, not with simple combinations. Composition implies that the heterogeneous pictorial elements are brought together in an ordered framework constituted by themselves, imbued with the nature of necessity; it is therefore in no way interchangeable at will. The coloration, as the basic factor of these compositions, is mostly, apart from a few exceptions, diffuse and subdued. Highly differentiated grey, brown and green tones dominate alongside black and white, mostly interspersed with colour. They too are created, like the entirety of the picture, slowly and through numerous stages.

The colours must first, as it were, find a relationship with each other, for which reason the artist frequently changes them, beginning with a not too precise layer of colour which becomes denser over time. However this does not result in an intrinsic straining after effect, as it were as an imitation of a certain surface roughness through the medium of the paint. This is, however, thinly applied, even if it is in many layers. This results in the areas of colour appearing soft, frayed and in a relationship of spatial competition with the others. Effects that are almost paradoxical can therefore arise. As with collage, where perhaps a light, strongly coloured, clearly contoured piece of paper is covered by a diffuse fragment, and thereby its effective spatiality can be thrown into question, there are also spatial lacks of distinctness in the pictures. The colour impression refers to a space without perspective and not measurable, which has rather to be characterised as a space of atmospheric light and colour, because, measured against our traditional, scientifically-formed concepts of space, it is unreal. Further disturbances to our historically secure sense of space arise because a diffuse, untactile, seemingly distant field of colour is situated within the real three-dimensional area of the picture, which can be integrated into the composition in the form of boxes. A real, precisely measurable square can be treated with diffuse colours and produce a "mist effect", with which its real spatiality collides and its nature as an object is called into question. Disturbances therefore arise in the relationship between (physical) real space and (artistic) non-real space.

These are not entirely new phenomena in the history of western art. The dominant verticalisation of the areas of colour through the use of striped elements and the spatial indeterminacy in the contrast of the diffuse area of colour reminds one involuntarily of the American Colour Field Painting of the 1950s, particularly of Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko. And the conflict between the real space of the coloured base and the atmospheric space of the colour has been elevated to the sole principle of painting since the 1960s by Gotthard Graubner. Finally the principle of collage has been known since Cubism at the latest and is now a key

element in any art education, even in junior school. The achievements of such artists are nowadays well known to any art student (or at least ought to be), if not as exemplars in the postmodern self-service store, then as measures by which to judge one's own potentialities. Today therefore the influences and precursors in art history and in art criticism, gladly and almost freely adopted, with which positive or negative assessment criteria can readily be associated (on the one hand the acquisition of influences by quoting the great names and thereby carrying forward their "legacy", on the other hand the hardly creative dependence of one's own position upon others' achievements), can be used only very sparingly. Modern artists can easily acquire the formal achievements of the whole of art history and employ them for their own purposes without adopting their intrinsic intentions. The strong ethical claims of American Colour Field Painting were valid at its inception in the 1950s, and have since become a historical position, which it is not easy to simply adopt. The same or similar means can, of course, still be used to achieve quite different aims, valid for today. In Annekathrin Norrmann's painting for example the human measure is crucial, while American Colour Field Painting exceeded it. Unlike their refusal to communicate (and thus the enforced self-referentiality of the viewer) she is interested in the possible communication of the viewer with the picture, in which the viewer can recognise an equivalent, although "more complete" because aesthetic and ideal, vis-a-vis. Her painting can be understood not as a once discovered theme (or scheme) with variations, but as a constant examination of the pictorial elements for their use within an evolving whole. This corresponds entirely with the principle of collage and is furthermore a model for every kind of creative activity: there is a supply of forms, whose parts have to be individually related to each other and combined into a composition, which only a picture, and never banal reality can achieve.

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