The Artist Is Online

Text by Anika Meier

Practices in Contemporary Media Landscapes," an essay published on the platform "[Anti]Materia." Whereas visitors are typically warned not to touch the artwork, they are now asked to "please interact." "The physicality of the exhibition is condensed to the device and the gestures of device-specific navigation," Wallerstein wrote. In the KÖNIG GALERIE app, the commands "walk," "jump," and "look" allow the digital visitor to steer the avatar through the gallery. The visitor must constantly re-align the field of vision. He or she must decide how the avatar is to look around and view the works of art. And how are we to describe these works—are they paintings or sculptures? Explaining his work process, Rossner says: "A controller that passes the position of my hand in 3D space on to the computer converts my movements into lines, which are in turn transformed into volumes. Objects emerge that are both paintings and sculptures. In the digital realm, the boundaries between different art forms begin to blur."

And what happens to painting on canvas in the digital age? As one currently reads everywhere, painting is back. Or, perhaps, painting was never really gone, and the young generation of artists born around 1990 was more interested in social media as an artistic vehicle. Now that the possibilities offered by Instagram have been exhausted, painting seems to fulfill a want produced by social media: the yearning for boundless individuality, as German artist Fabian Treiber (@fabian_treiber) recently suggested. Art theorist Isabelle Graw also believes that the renewed interest in painting is a result of certain characteristics of platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. Referring to the attention economy, she writes in her essay "The Value of Liveliness: Painting as an Index of Agency in the New Economy" that "painting is particularly well positioned in such an economy since it gives the impression of being saturated with the life of its author."

Many recent canvases address the very issues mentioned by Treiber and Graw: the yearning for individuality, the indulgence in consumerism, and the craving for attention. Canadian painter Chloe Wise (@chloewise_) is perhaps *the* portraitist of her generation. She paints friends and people she encounters in her social milieu. "They are people who cannot be characterized," Wise says. For this reason, her subjects are either shown naked or wearing the kinds of things everyone wears today, for example, clothes by Adidas or Lacoste. In group portraits, they lie and sit together, leaning against each other or supporting themselves on each other. In individual portraits, they gaze confidently at the viewer while the world behind them gets destroyed. "The people in my paintings look cute," Wise says, "while the world goes up in flames. That is our normal state."

"Cute" would be the wrong word to describe the figures that have made British painter Oli Epp (@oli.epp) well-known. "Weird" would perhaps be a more apt qualifier, for Epp paints beings with his airbrush gun that occupy a position somewhere between worm, human being, and a lump of flesh. They often appear a little bit too cool, with a baseball cap perched on their heads, a cigarette stuck behind their ears, and headphones in their ears. In the digital age, one is always connected with and isolated from their immediate surroundings.

Chris Drange (@chris_drange), who studied with Anselm Reyle in Hamburg, does not paint any of his work himself. He often has to tolerate comparisons with Richard Prince, since he has also been working with Instagram influencer pictures for years. But that is the only thing that connects Prince and Drange. Unlike Prince, Drange is not primarily interested in the act of appropriation. "Appropriation is the basis of my work, but not its subject," Drange says. He is interested in playing on authorship and authenticity, which he continues in the medium of painting. Where there is no longer an original, painting also turns into a fake and a copy. Drange selects photos of influencers such as Kylie and Kendall Jenner on Instagram. He creates a simplified yet precise composition on his computer, which is then enlarged to its final size by another computer at a machine learning company in Lithuania. The file produced in Lithuania serves as a blueprint for a Chinese manufactory for oil painting that finally paints, in consultation with Drange, the portrait on a canvas and sends it to Germany. In this manner, at times monumental photorealist paintings are produced for the exhibition space. Yet the paintings are also littered with kitschy emojis such as hearts, butterflies, and unicorns. They thereby point to their origin in the digital world.

Approaching painting in the digital age in terms of content is one possibility, approaching it formally in terms of its use of technology is another. Rachel Rossin (@rachelrossin) transfers the digital directly onto the canvas in the form of holograms. She describes the combination of painting and technology in her work as "digestions of the uncanny." Like Drange, she works with imagery found on the Internet, but she also integrates material from her own archive. She sees her holograms as commentary. A cat runs across the canvas, and a heart beats.

Chris Drange, *Kendall with Wilted Flower*, 2019;
oil on canvas, 130 x 106 cm

German artist collective Banz & Bowinkel (@banzbowinkel) takes things even further. "Originally, our idea was to digitize painting," says Friedemann Banz. Fluids that look like paint are created with a simulation tool on a computer. The results look "as though" they were painting. "For centuries, painting has found its subject matter in its own mediality," Banz explains. Accordingly, the duo's starting point is painting that reflects not itself, but the computer. "The concept of painting is misleading," Banz believes. Computers create, process, assess, and apply data sets in analogy to events in the real world. Google, for instance, interprets data sets, while Banz & Bowinkel visualize them in Augmented Reality. With this tool in hand, the two artists pursue the following question: "How can we create images that incorporate both these transformation processes of data and their relation to reality?"

The German artist Pascal Sender (@pascalsender) also works with Augmented Reality. Traversing London on the tube, he works on his iPhone with photos that capture his surroundings and the people in it. He cuts and pastes elements of the images, rearranging them on the screen with his fingers. Then he prints the pictures and paints over them with acryl color. An additional layer of the images only becomes visible when the viewer scans a QR code with his or her phone and applies an AR filter via Facebook or Instagram. For instance, one filter plays a video that provides the viewer with an insight into Sender's working process.

All of the aforementioned artists will participate in the exhibition series *The Artist Is Online*, curated by Johann König and myself. The series will consist of real shows in the virtual space. The future of art will certainly not be just digital, since the experience in front of the original is irreplaceable. New technologies grant viewers a different kind of access to art and artists. The pressure is increasing, but so are the opportunities to share and think about art. In a few years' time, we may no longer be able to differentiate between real and virtual space. As of now, it is impossible to foresee what this could mean for art.

All artworks, if not otherwise stated, courtesy the artist.

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Jeremy Shaw *and* Julia Stoschek *in states of trance*
Sarah Morris *on* Alexander Kluge
Anselm Reyle *and* Martin Eder *celebrate friendship in Tokyo*
Tue Greenfort, Emanuele Coccia, *and the life of plants*