

Rémy Trevisan

Exhibition from 18.06. to 18.07.2004 at the Kunstkreis Tuttlingen e.V.

Opening speech by Stefan Tolksdorf (M.A.)

What is the best way to approach Rémy Trevisan's work?

From the view of the art historian maybe?

In that case we would place him in the tradition of tachism, roughly in the 1950s, and then discover that Trevisan's method of working has very little in common with that of the abstract expressionists like Jackson Pollock, for instance. It is not spontaneous self-expression, but a calculated, finely balanced interplay of colours and forms in motion.

We could actually find other examples such as the American Marc Tobey, who died in Basel and, like Trevisan, was concerned with a process of spiritualization; they both use the all-over technique. If one wanted to be malicious, one might even describe Trevisan as out of date, compared with contemporary artists and their attempts to save panel painting - which is allegedly doomed - with their blend of photography, film and computer images so full of allusions, and especially the all-dominant conceptual art.

But none of this interests Trevisan.

The aspect of art history doesn't really bring us any closer to his pictures, not to start with anyway. Let's try a different perspective, quite an adventure story that takes us to the Indian Ocean.

There, on a dubious cargo vessel heading from Mombasa to Singapore, we encounter a young man travelling to faraway places in the search for himself. The journey is torture. He's almost starving, only gets a piece of bread every day, and if there's meat at all it's dog.

Finally pirates come on board, and the corrupt captain lets them take over the ship. In the midst of all this tumult, somewhere between heaven and sea, Asia and Africa, the 21-year-old Trevisan has a kind of vision: "I must be a painter". The red of the sunset couldn't be located at any spot on the horizon, Rémy Trevisan recalls: "It was all around me".

Then the experience of India. He is overwhelmed by the power of hitherto unknown rituals and intuitively understands Hindu wisdoms, such as this: that Brahman and Atman are one and the same, which in translation to Western ears sounds like: "God and soul are one".

Rémy Trevisan immerses himself in the secrets of Far Eastern beliefs, and when he returns home a year later, he feels he has become a different person. No longer the musical son of French-Italian parents from Chaumont in the department of Champagne-Ardenne who fled his country of birth and, following a serious bicycle accident and many days spent in a coma, was for a long time without orientation. He now sees his path before him - clearly as never before.

The former post-office official begins his studies at the Academy of Art in Stuttgart, practises drawing nudes and portraits. An important occurrence for him is meeting the artist Rudolf Schoofs, who encourages his talent. But he has to liberate himself again and return to his creative roots.

As once for Paul Klee, for Rémy Trevisan too nature is the *sine qua non* - the essential condition - for his creative work.

In the room on the floor below you can see quite clearly how the passionate graphic artist departs from real nature as his model and gradually begins to try out colour. For instance, a moth is incorporated in one of the small early pictures, but the compact natural form is already in a process of dissolution; the hint of animation becomes movement and rhythmic energy which is expressed in the tangled lines. For Trevisan a thicket is not a barrier, not an image for the sinful world we must resolutely struggle through, as it often is in the Western tradition. The labyrinth is not a deadly maze with a terrible Minotaur, it is the golden way to the Self.

At this point permit me to digress a little, to a poem by Günter Eich that also leads us into the thicket.

Himbeerranken (Raspberry brambles)

*Der Wald hinter den Gedanken,
die Regentropfen an ihnen
und der Herbst, der sie vergilben lässt.*

*Ach, Himbeerranken aussprechen,
dir Beeren ins Ohr flüstern,
die roten, die ins Moos fielen.*

*Ein Ohr versteht sie nicht,
mein Mund spricht sie nicht aus,
Worte halten ihren Verfall nicht auf.*

*Hand in Hand zwischen undenkbaeren Gedanken.
Im Dickicht verliert sich die Spur.
Der Mond schlägt sein Auge auf,
gelb und für immer.*

A love poem full of hope and futility. In the ambivalence between temporality and presentiment of eternity, motion and apparent standstill of time, there is a connection with Trevisan's thickets, which - as I say - by no means represent a static obstacle but are the expression of a universal vital energy.

In his non-representational painting, too, nature is still his model. The abstract patterns resemble the veining of bark, leaves and stones. For a while he paints - impasto und haptic - vertical structures which look like the stalks of plants: symbols of growth. An elm leaf perforated by caterpillars then provides a new impulse. The alternation of positive and negative form, background and foreground, substance und vacuum, remains a constant feature of Trevisan's work.

Two superb drawings on the lower floor show a leaf in its original - one is tempted to say "academic" - form. But does such a thing exist? Isn't everything metamorphosis? After all, it is primarily linguistic convention that makes a leaf a leaf. Language fixes things by naming them, it interrupts the permanent flow of phenomena, sometimes even causes them to be forgotten, and forms images.

It is no coincidence that seeing the beginnings of human art was a decisive experience for Trevisan. The wall paintings in the cave at Lascaux - are they not the expression of a non-verbal, even pre-linguistic form of communication? Do they symbolize the unity of man and nature or rather signify a fundamental and final break?

It is this mental breach that Trevisan seeks to heal with his pictures - and in this he can be seen as a romanticist. Some of the early drawings, in part scratched in formatted sand, remind us of archaic art.

Like the precursors of modern art, Rémy Trevisan is always in search of the roots of artistic creativity: nature, childhood and archaism. A row of wooden discs - apparently from untreated logs - have been covered with primal symbols and signs from a region in between nature and culture. The

double helix for example, concentric circles on water, is also the elemental symbol of life spanning all culture, the regenerative cycle of life and death: forever changing, as Goethe says.

This flow of life in its changing manifestations is what concerns Trevisan; that is the theme of his art, not the ego or society. We can see two basic structures in his works, which are executed in increasingly larger format: the so-called webwork pictures show a mesh of filaments, others a more splotchy, bubbly pattern. And some are a mixture of both. But his intention is always the same - to open up new vistas.

He frequently superimposes as many as six layers of paint, so that we wonder, "Which is the foreground and which the background?"

Rémy Trevisan's paintings cannot be taken in at first sight, they need a second and third look. If you contemplate them from different distances away, you will see that much is not as it first appears: what seems to be painted turns out to be an empty space and an opening, bright areas that stand out are only a window onto the first layer of paint.

Maybe you'll even find the two Buddhas which Trevisan has hidden in a red picture on the upper floor. One really has to get involved with the images before they come alive. So do please take time for them.

There is a picture on the upper floor, perhaps not his best but nevertheless quite ingenious, that exemplifies Trevisan's artistic inspiration. It is called "Eins" ("One"). We see the shape of a figure perhaps sitting in the lotus position. But what appear to be its contours open onto a wide colour space beyond; indeed the figure itself is the aperture through which we see further, a kind of keyhole leading into a sphere beyond the superficial appearances: Brahman is Atman. What Trevisan wants to convey is a sense of unity - of movement and non-movement, immanence und transcendence. His art aims to be timeless and - in the best sense of the word - style-less. The artist as an individual is not of central interest, he sees himself at best as a medium.

Returning to the view of the art historian, we can now see that Remy Trevisan indeed belongs to a long tradition which could be called "The Art of Spiritual Harmony" - the original English title of a treatise by Wassily Kandinsky published in 1912. Almost all the avant-gardists at the turn of that century were concerned with creating the idea of a spiritual dimension concealed behind the outer world, the phenomena of which were being questioned by the natural sciences. It was one of the mainsprings of abstract art. We can trace this tradition from Kandinsky, Malevich and Mondrian through to Mark Rothko and Julius Bissier, though today it can hardly be recognized.

When asked what has influenced him, Rémy Trevisan reaches even further back and refers to a compatriot, the Paris symbolist Odilon Redon, whose dreamlike, poetic paintings are smothered in radiant colours in the later phase.

Trevisan himself works differently: the structures in his pictures display a transparency which suggests he is steadily approaching the monochrome - like in the painting with the characteristic title "Durchblick" ("Perception").

Whereas the earlier earthy filaments frequently remind us of the lead comes of Gothic church windows, the composition is now fully opened to an amorphous, endless beyond.

It takes him a week on average to complete a picture, and it is no surprise that he meditates before he starts painting. But for Trevisan the image itself is - and he doesn't hesitate to use the word - a meditation in a region between the creation and disintegration of forms, growth and decay.

Every one of these pictures is also about death, in a subtle way, but above all about submersion in the flowing river of life, as Hermann Hesse describes it incomparably in the final chapter of his *Siddhartha*.