



"STROMATA" at Hoeps, Münster 2010

Stromata was the name given by the theologian Clement of Alexandria in the second century AD to the last of his three main works: Carpets.

The title refers to a method of reasoning that does not progress from a single question along a single path to the answer. Rather, thinking, according to the Stromata model, emanates from an array of different questions coming from various directions and from a body of knowledge, as yet unsorted and from scattered points of origin, all of which cannot be systematically forced into a consistent line. Everything needs to be related to everything else, which places much higher demands on the thinking process than the steady step by step of cognition along a straight path. Success is demonstrated not by reaching a peak but in the density and also the transparency of the fabric of divergent lines of thought.

Stromata constitute thinking in the format of an image field, as Günther Malchow presents in his painting. In the ideal rectangle, various styles of coloured lines (broad and narrow, with open borders from the flow of the brush, with masked edges, ending on or just before the edge of the picture) connect the two respective opposing sides. In the grid of horizontal and vertical lines, at the points where two lines cross, spatial distances are created by the overlapping which either pick up on or contrast the spatial effects of the colours. Over the lines that were painted last, a layer of transparent piano lacquer has been applied, which finishes and confirms the process of the overlapping of line systems. Moreover, it confines the image narrative, which one could, in general, readily imagine going beyond the image field, to the borders of the image square by means of a strict outline.

Malchow's pictures appear like islands that point to something beyond themselves but are simultaneously totally self-focused. The structure of the paintings is clear and transparent; nevertheless, the development in this most recent group of works in Günther Malchow's oeuvre (since 2009) is aiming for increased complexity. From the first works with compa-

ratively few lines that can be clearly distinguished from one another, the path leads to overlaps of line systems that are denser and made up of multiple components, through to a state in which the continuum of a line dissolves into a rhythmic staccato of small-pieced, rectangular line segments.

This development of the image structure moves from the idea of tectonics to that of a texture. The first works, incorporating methods from earlier works, are characterized by a stable composition that focuses on the congruency between the image's appearance and comprehensible image logic: everything you see can be traced by the eye back to the transparent structure of the picture's arrangement. The lacquer surface gives the strict order of the image an additional sense of coherence. It is merely the points where the lines cross that cause some confusion, to the extent that they prove layers of line systems that are apparently separate from one another to be, in reality, interlaced with one another.

It is this kind of confusion in perception that increases in complexity as the group of works continues to develop. Reconstructing the system of painted layers increasingly requires considerable investigative persistence. The eye prefers to gather the diversity of vertically and horizontally presented colour values into an overall impression that is not entirely transparent and all the more lively. It is true that it remains a construct of verticals and horizontals, and individual, accentuated lines are predestined to guide one's gaze through the image field which is additionally stabilized within itself through symmetries which emerge to a greater or lesser extent.

Looking at the image as a whole, however, the strict tectonics have diverged into a many-layered, interwoven texture. Its basic principles remain intelligible, yet they are not easy to retrace in their implementation.

This gives all the more weight to the final lacquer which comprehensively summarizes the extremely lively image narrative as an entirety. The lines and line segments interlace in an alternating relationship to form individual internal configurations that furnish the mesh of grid structures with zones of tonal depth and modulations of colourful luminosity. Transparency here constitutes a quality of the image's appearance far more than it means the comprehensibility of an actual image structure. The transparency of the image's appearance is, indeed, due to a dissolving of the clear image tectonics into the increased density of interwoven vertical and horizontal lines. The transparency that results from this texture is rather one of an image tone which originates from the interplay of different colour and area elements and which is more than their mere sum.

This overall tone, on the other hand, allows the individual note that contributes to it to be heard within it. And to take the musical imagery to extremes: the picture is both a polyphonic sound and, simultaneously, the musical score for this sound. Translated back into the language of pictures, the interweaving of individual tones (of colour) to an overall effect is called an ornament: like spatial sound, it is a structure of density, depth, luminosity and inner movement that is moulded out of the expanse and rises above calculated image tectonics.

Wrongfully, the ornament is generally marginalized in art. The reason for this is that, while a representational image conveys meaning by portraying reality, an ornament, like music without any specific significance, seeks meaning for itself by becoming part of reality, enriching it with its shapes and figures. In the ornament, the reality of life is not the subject but rather the place of artistic reflection.

Günter Malchow's ornamental interweavings do not reflect reality but rather—and in this they are not unlike carpets (stromata)—they are intended to be understood as a possible part of reality: How would we move, talk or think if one of these ornaments were to daily frame our own living space and our own lifetime, accompanying the events of life as a background?

As prominently as Günter Malchow's pictures dissociate themselves from a visually corrupted environment, also through their intensity, shut in under the clear surface of lacquer, they just as emphatically bring themselves into play as a possible place of resonance for the observer's own everyday reality. It is precisely in this immediacy that they commend themselves as a place of reflectiveness.

Reinhard Hoeps

