

Thoughts on an Optical Illusion

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The way in which the artist places her works in space conjures a phantom that has gone down in art history as the Gesamtkunstwerk, also known since the 1960s as total art. However, Hanna Roeckle does not construct self-contained systems nor does she stage multi-media extravaganzas. Instead, aesthetic and secular spaces overlap and flow into each other almost in passing. Perception of the entire work of art can take a split second, instantly becoming a memory, a moment after which the layers of reality separate again, after which reason rescinds the fusion of self and other, though without refuting and perhaps even actually generating the impression that something special, something unique has happened. Roeckle's sculptural staging of color and volume on the first floor of the Kunsthalle Ziegelhütte in Appenzell makes a physical, bodily impact. The towers built of modules and the stretches of color mounted as grids on the wall are tangible: not only do the classical categories of sculpture and painting still apply, the works can actually be nailed down as precisely defined units of form with an existence independent of context, time, and individual perception.

Or so it appears at first sight: the modules or boxes show what they are. Only gradually do the towers of light (the artist calls them Faro) and the Xoana, wall-mounted pieces named after archaic Greek cultic images, reveal their multiplicity, their formal and chromatic riches—which are, no doubt, substantially indebted to the atmospherically energized and energizing way in which the artist wields her paintbrush.

Depending on our vantage point in both space and mental, emotional terms, we may see a painting, one hundred paintings, or a painted fragment as a pointer that embodies the entire potential of painting: the picture, or rather the overall impression, is constantly changing. This is due, among other things, to the fact that in the empty injustices of the wall pieces, the structure of the support, that is: the white wall and all the attendant effects of color and light, play a role as well—in the tower for instance, which is slightly taller than human height, there are views within and through that change both perception and the perceived.

Inside and outside are incorporated into the sculptural, painted work: while our gaze ceaselessly reorganizes the visual object and its surroundings, it is the object that dictates our path and the steps we take. Our interaction undermines the seemingly static immobility of the work, transforming it into a malleable process that can only be experienced through time as a multidimensional, visual configuration: the “ur-image” of all art, color-painting, here proves to be of an irrepressible openness that can only be contained in a state of stasis, when—so to speak—the history of images has come to an end.