



Wall Painting Technical Colleges Munich, Germany

‘Color speaks directly to the feelings; it is open in the same way as music, and it is devoid of specific content. Freely assembled color tones is conducive to a refined perception of color and space in the viewer.’ It was with these words that Karlsruhe artist Sabine Funke described her concept for the extension of the Technical Colleges and the comprehensive refurbishment of its existing buildings.’

‘Color fields in different formats are applied directly to the walls so that – and this differs from the classical easel picture – a fusion of painting and architecture takes place and the painting becomes an integral component of the space. The monochrome color fields are either placed alongside one another with equivalent values or they are superimposed on formats of different sizes, giving rise to formal dialogues and spatial depths that are optically varied. Surface is developed further in depth; it is a matter of the relationship between two-dimensionality and three-dimensionality, of creating color spaces. The artist has indicated how close in conception her wall paintings are to music, in that she assumes that different shades of color can constitute a tonal color harmony. Beyond that her interest lies in the harmonious effect of such color tones on contemplation and meditation. Her treatment of color in the hall, along with the staircase wall, as it were, slow down the excessive pace of our daily lives: in this way the monochrome space pictures will become picture spaces for the human imagination.’

Prof. Dr. Florian Matzner, Academy of Arts Munich



Extract from catalogue book:
Sabine Funke `diafan`

...”Sabine Funke’s paintings are characterized by immediate sensuality and a fascinating suggestive power that derives from the light filled reflection of colours. Built up on the grounding with many applications of glaze, the resultant layers produce a diaphanous transparency which intensifies the colour and makes it glow. The immaterial energy that is inherent in colour communicates itself to the viewers and intimates to them that there is a transcendental aspect to the works.”

Dr. Brigitte Baumstark, Director Städtische Galerie Karlsruhe



"three walls"

Clearness and formality characterise the works from Sabine Funke, at the same time as they reject objectivity and narrative. By painting directly on the wall, she merges art and architecture, thus creating an art form that at once entrusts itself to the space and educes it so that the picture surface reaches its apex as a chromatic surface.

Her wall paintings reveal the aesthetic in its original meaning as a sense experience. The colour fields, which are geometrically demarcated and allowed to pile up and intersect so that the eye senses depth in them, releases energy that delights viewers by allowing them to sense colour as a wave. The stimulating effect of the colour, which is applied in many I impid layers, thus makes a surprising connection with the subjective nature of the abstract. Precisely by rejecting all objectivity and using only pure colour and form, the artist succeeds in releasing energy underlying all objectivity and directs it toward the viewer.

Edda Jonsdottir

Blue Green

“If however colour has no other meaning than that it is colour, it gains unsuspected appeal. It reveals itself in the value of its own substance. There is nothing that might serve colour to divert us from the sense of colour. Looked at in this way it cannot be related back to any meaning other than that it is what it seems. Even the designation of colour is superfluous for such a view. It suffices to perceive it as it is experienced, even if it is given no name. Attention is directed solely on the shade, brightness, clarity and intensity of the colour. No word, no judgement, no claim to knowledge of its meaning and function detracts from the sensation with whose help we materially and immaterially comprehend colour as substance and light. This route of sensuous comprehension brings out both colour’s value in itself and its creative value ...” (Wolfgang Iser, *Psychologie und Kunst. Vom Sehen zur sinnlichen Erkenntnis*, Vienna/New York, 1999, p.120 ff.

The work *Blue Green* which is the subject of what follows has a special place in Sabine Funke’s oeuvre. Since she began her work as an artist, colour has been her creative medium. Whereas in wall works, easel pictures and works on paper she creates a sequence of shades of colour and colour spaces by scaling colour fields which she matches against one another and in a lengthy process brings into dialogue with each other, *Blue Green* has been created by projecting computer generated “light images” which are sequenced in time and use effects of increasing or decreasing colour intensity in which artificial light intensifies or dilutes the colours.

In the case of works in which she analyses colours on physical supports, the viewers determine the colour sensations which they experience under given lighting conditions. The artist however does not only express herself in single works, she likes to orchestrate her works in space as colour-ensembles. So she includes the physical presence of the viewers and the movement of their visual axes in her thinking, and engages with their sensitized physical experience as an elementary condition of their perception. The role of the viewer in space is choreographed as a physical visual experience.

In composing *Blue Green* Sabine Funke engages with the exhibition space and its passages and vistas by developing a vertically mirrored basic grid consisting of a large vertical oblong that is framed at the bottom by an angled U-form. This leaves narrow rectangles at the sides. The form is closed at the top by a crossbar whose fine articulation takes up the overall structure. The work consists of 47 single computer generated images of which each is shown for four seconds and they are then cross-faded into one another in a rhythm of eight seconds. The images are shown in a loop, so that for the viewers there is neither a beginning nor an end. The slow cross-fading enables them to experience the colour intensity of the individual images and at the same time to get a sense of the imperceptible changes in the progression of the colour effects. An identical geometric grid underlies each of the single images although not all parts of it are always visible. The colours shift in this work within an exquisite blue and green spectrum which the artist defines with variety and complexity. This is different from the easel paintings in that here she controls the viewers’ perception time with the periodic light projection. By cross-fading the images into one another at constant intervals of eight seconds, the remembered image is fused with the following image before the latter establishes itself in the foreground of perception. The viewers are therefore tied into the progression of different drafts which they can compare and relate to one another in sequence, in order to experience colour as a dynamic element. Here too the alternation of colour surface and colour space in dialogue is a dominant concept.

At the same time the principle of cross-fading makes the artist’s working procedure visible, for the easel pictures too are created in an experimental process in which the work is overpainted with thin glazes until the intuitively correct colour combination which relates the colours accurately to one another is arrived at and their energy is liberated. As the title of the

work tells us, the interaction of green and blue is explored exhaustively with the use of light. Both colours belong to the cool range in the spectrum which recedes from the eye and tends to have a restful and static effect. In the individual pictures the artist unfolds the vibrant life of colours by exploring the possibilities of the three parameters which characterize colour, namely shade, intensity and brightness. What happens when the yellow component in the green is increased, how is the blue or red component affected? How do different green and blue shades impact on one another? In some pictures the upper colour field, where its tonal value is lighter and cooler, appears to be a fictitious horizon. In other cases where it is a question of a pale green with a red component, this field stands out dynamically. Sequencing the images at the same interval indicates the subjective experience of time. A pale, radiant green is quicker to take effect than the dark moss-green colour-value, though both colour fields occur in the same rhythm. Individual pictures with dark fields that verge on black interrupt the sequence of images like ricochets and raise our level of attention. By specifying the time and sequencing of the images in the light work, the artist succeeds in facilitating a contemplative, exact gaze in the viewer, and this reveals the relativity and complexity of colour, light, space and time. Slow seeing allows us to experience the dynamics, balances, flows of energy, and emotional vibrations in the differentiated dialogue between the colour surfaces, precisely in the case of subtle variations.

Andrea Buddensieg

Play.Space.Drawing

Over a long period of time Sabine Funke as dedicated herself to colour painting – whether layered in pictorial space or on the built environment – with an intensity which relegated other mediums into the background. This is now changing. Recently she has been experimenting with the digital layering of transparent coloured surfaces. And since last year she has turned afresh to drawing on paper. In comparison to her closed, linear, coloured shapes and her previous outline drawings in several colours, her present approach is different: the white sheet is viewed as the surface of an imaginary invisible space to be opened up playfully by means of pencil drawings and colour fields.

Horizontal and vertical lines are set sparingly and occasionally collide with one another at right angles, or else they run parallel as repeatedly broken lines to form an open structure. There are no diagonals, which means there is no indication of linear perspective or potentially practicable space. Instead our gaze falls on a surface that is fragmentarily articulated and suggests a ground plan or an abstract map. The lines, which are drawn with a ruler, vary according to the weight of the drawing from thick to light to barely perceptible. With their varying presence they are comparable to ideas and thoughts which come and go and sometimes take shape, leaving traces of different depths on the mental map.

To this exploration of possibilities that is in the main rational in character, colour fields add an element that is a primarily emotional in effect. Placed high up, or as horizontally orientated oblongs, its size and direction correspond in proportion to the line drawing and the paper format. Here again the application of the colour is semi-transparent so that the underlying lines remain visible, and a further level is at times opened up by new lines laid over the colour field.

Basically and in every medium, Sabine Funke employs a geometric vocabulary, and she applies it with the intention of providing a definite framework for colour in its intangibility, in this way establishing both poles in a relationship characterised equally by tension and equilibrium. Her route to that point is not a mathematically calculated one, it is rather determined by intuitive decisions. Secure in the possession of an eye that is sensitized and experienced in equal measure, the hand that converts her decisions with sovereign ease and self-confidence manifests her indefatigable curiosity and profound fascination with colour. Only in this way can the balancing act between harmony and dissonance be successfully achieved in the long run. How this is perceived and experienced is, however, differs with each medium.

So in the room-filling wall paintings, the polarity between rational order and sensual dispersion can be physically experienced as a colour-surface space set in a built environment but connected only by its surface. It changes each time the viewer moves. In the case of the pictures on the other hand, the restricted format that – like a window – diverts the gaze from the edges to the interior, and on to the colour surfaces layered in front of, behind, superimposed on top of one another. Contrary to their predominantly horizontal extension they are not fixed but seem rather to float weightlessly on the picture surfaces, as if they were emerging very slowly from unplumbed depths. Their semi-transparency allows ephemeral interstices to open up, in which colour reveals itself in all its intangibility. For this the viewers must position themselves emotionally, consciously choosing where to stand.

In the drawings too, the visible and the nameable similarly add up to a result that combines the invisible and the unnameable. They are, not least, compressed abbreviations of what Sabine Funke in her colour painting for the picture space as well as for the built environment explores and puts down step by step and layer by layer. Above all they are autonomous works which, true to the medium, permit a direct and playfully casual procedure in order to catch the moment when the idea is taking shape and retain the fleeting flight of the eye. If we read them as ground plans or cartographic frameworks devoid of all tectonic apparatus, they offer a sight of a bird's eye view of an imagined spatial order. The colour field as a surface that can be experienced emotionally and therefore obeys different laws, thus shows that it is of equivalent value to the horizonless gaze. Together they create a unique and entirely

appealing tension between distance and intimacy. Or to use Sabine Funke's words, "Colour field and line enter into a dialogue with one another and in this way create something like play areas or ground plans for thought spaces or emotion spaces."

Drawing maintained its position as the king of artistic disciplines, unchallenged over many centuries, and there had to be a lengthy process before colour, as the element in painting that is primarily sensuous and therefore subjective in effect and consequently unpredictable in its operation, could attain a status equivalent to the rationally ordering line. The philosophical controversy over this is now history, the academic discussion of the topic has happily gone quiet with the abandonment of any hierarchy in the disciplines of art. The opposition of reason and emotion that was its basis, in other words the cultural and physical contingencies determining it, have, however, lost none of their elementary validity as statements about our perception. In Sabine Funke's work both poles are always present, but only in the drawings do they meet as equals in such equivalent coexistence, two complementary opponents in a dynamic state of equilibrium.

Susannah Cremer-Bermbach

Performances in Colour

It could be quieter in this exhibition. Not that there is a sound to be heard, but Sabine Funke's paintings make the rooms vibrate. Perfectly square zones in the most intense and nuanced colours, superimposed like gelatines, filters or surface coverings hold their own in their strictly circumscribed fields without being optically fixed in their place, but rather kept in constant movement by our perception, emerging simultaneously out of several green surfaces, to recede, cover or overlay one another.

In the end, this complex layering and nuancing of different colours defies description. In his "Remarks on colours" Ludwig Wittgenstein has explored this particular inadequacy of language:

III-78. The indefiniteness in the concept of colour lies, above all, in the indefiniteness of the concept of the sameness of colours, i.e. of the method of comparing colours.

III-213. And in this way I think that it is worthless and of no use whatsoever for the understanding of painting to speak of the characteristics of the individual colours. When we do it, we are really only thinking of special uses. That green as the colour of a tablecloth has this, red that effect, does not allow us to draw any conclusions as to their effect in a picture.

III-233. We might say, the colour of the ghost is that which I must mix on the palette in order to paint it accurately.

But how do we determine what the accurate picture is?

III-255. Our colour concepts sometimes relate to substances (snow is white), sometimes to surfaces (this table is brown), sometimes to the illumination (in the reddish evening light), sometimes to transparent bodies. And isn't there also an application to a place in the visual field, logically independent of a spatial context?

III-315. The question is clearly: How do we compare physical objects – how do we compare experiences?

(Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Bemerkungen über die Farben. Remarks on Colour*. Edited by G.E.M. Ancombe, translated by Linda L. McAlister and Margaret Schättle. Oxford: Blackwell, 1977, p. 27e ff.)

And what is the position with constellations made purely of colour? Are they not related to "those places in the field of vision that are logically independent of any spatial connection?"

Because we are confronted by painting we know, or at least we start from the assumption, that the application of the pigment has run its course and the material events have come to closure. This being so, a static element too clings to Sabine Funke's pictures. What we experience, however, when we view these paintings, is far removed from a static event. The perception of these pictures, made up as they are of pure layers of colour, involves constant oscillation between impressions of changing focus, after-images or memories of impressions. The individual colours in a precise constellation, as free actors on the stage of the pictures, begin their seemingly unending interaction in a performance of colours. It comes therefore as no surprise that at the centre of this exhibition too, there is a projection in which the silent dynamics of the colours appear as an almost filmic sequence: open windows or something like instant stills during scrolling, the horizontal, mirrored but symmetrical colour fields appear in infinite variations in the verticals. Only one oblong refuses to take shape. But not only movement, the fleeting duration too of the light-pictures intensifies the emergence of the colours as shrill or mute events.

And finally, in the works on paper the structural lines on the preliminary drawing are retained, both structuring it and at the same time breaking it up and embellishing the flat, radiant fields and evidencing the lengthy process which all of Sabine Funke's pictures initiate.

Sparingly hung, they develop the dynamics of pictorial artefacts in space. In this way the architecture too can become a stage for colour performances in which, at right angles, the given fields forget their places, make the viewers forget their fixed places.

Hans Rudolf Reust

Sabine Funke `diaphan`

The Diaphanous Transparency of Red, Yellow and Blue Colour with its inherent ability to create effects of light, its power to suggest space and its emotional resonance is central to Sabine Funke's artistic achievement. The adjective diaphanous, whose first meaning is „translucent, light-transmitting“, embraces all these qualities, though it can also apply to ephemeral phenomena. It is a term commonly used to describe the luminosity of High Gothic cathedrals, where it refers more particularly to the immaterial phenomenon of coloured light as a sensory experience.ⁱ

If one surveys the painter's works –her first solo exhibition took place in 1983 in the St Johann Gallery in Saarbrücken –the consistency with which she has pursued and constantly developed her initial approach becomes clear. In the beginning there are fragile objects such as wire sculptures suspended like a delicate filigree of colour in front of wall surfaces so that they enter into a dialogue with the surrounding space. Parallel to these she makes stave-like objects on which she experiments with the primary colours red, yellow and blue. In the 1990s she transfers this tonal range to easel paintings and begins to experiment with colour in terms of Hard Edge.ⁱⁱ

The painting *Flügel* (Wing) from 1994 can serve as an example of this. It is one of the artist's most important works and was acquired two years after it was painted for the collection of the Karlsruhe City Gallery. The almost square pictorial field is divided into nine rectangles, of which three are further subdivided and painted with the primary colours red, yellow and blue. Several fields are worked over with white glazes in such a way that the gleaming form of a cross emerges. The interplay of the various colour values shows the power that colour has to create space by pushing surfaces back or pulling them forward. For this dialogue between shades of colour and colour values, Sabine Funke has found a formal idiom that, though entirely her own, still leaves her art-historical references clear.

In his *Homage to the Square* Josef Albers from 1950 systematically explored the way colours interact optically with one another. In Sabine Funke's paintings light colours and dark, warm colours and cold, in conjunction with the complementary shades she uses, cause the superimposed squares to oscillate, bringing the colour fields forward or pushing them back. Her intensive engagement with the primary colours red, yellow and blue provides a connection with the American Colour Field painter Barnett Newman.

She varies the classical sequence of colours in her paintings and explores their relationships to each other afresh and in depth, and by applying white glazes, she creates ever new nuances. The gleaming veil of white glaze functions in two ways. It increases the luminosity of the non-whitened primary colours and it allows the colours of the grounding to show through. Her use of this method of working produces a „pulsating veil which lies over the surfaces like a web of light“.ⁱⁱⁱ Since the 1990s the light-intensity of colour has been an essential formative element in Sabine Funke's painting.

An essential constitutive element of all her paintings is the processual application of glazes in thin layers onto the pale grounding of the supporting surface. Light penetrates the layers as if through stained glass and is reflected back by the grounding as deep light giving the colour an immaterial radiance.^{iv} The pictures seem to radiate an inner light. In doing this the artist is carrying on a venerable painterly technique that is centuries-old, and using specific effects that once embellished mediaeval painting for work of her own which is entirely of the contemporary world.

This produces compositions which sensitize her viewers and expand their capacity for experience. The differentiated, multi-layered interplay of her basic constants and the tense equilibrium in which her dynamic elements are suspended only reveal themselves after long, attentive, contemplative scrutiny. The gradual decoding of her clear, but allusive pictorial language corresponds directly to the concentrated, time-consuming work that produces it.

Alongside the interaction of colour on more closely circumscribed pictorial surfaces, she has since the mid-1990s been engaged with the effect of colour in architectural spaces, and the question of how large-scale areas of colour transform their immediate surroundings. Commissions under the Kunst am Bau^v legislation offer her the opportunity to do this. The logical next step for Sabine Funke now seems to be to combine painting, sculpture and architecture in one complex work, in order to make it possible for the active components of colour to be experienced physically in real space and under the influence of changing lighting conditions.

The present paintings are still based on a strictly constructive pictorial structure. Most of them are symmetrical about a central vertical. The colour surfaces may be enclosed by a single „frame“ or several together or in a split frame. Occasionally they are docked at the edge of the picture as if it had been trimmed.

The artist is thus giving up her previous juxtaposed pictorial surfaces, removing the white glazes and giving layering a new function as a means of defining form. The pictures no longer feature dialogue between adjacent colour fields; the focus now seems to be on below and above, outer and inner. The pictures she is now making have colour fields that are aligned with one another, or overlap, or slide under one another, or gently take shape from the depths, or have a stripe running through them. These collide at the edges and seem as a whole to float into one another. The compositions that at first glance appear strictly rational are not obviously subordinated to any conceptual order, but seem to have been developed intuitively. Yet the shades of colour and the colour fields stand harmoniously side-by-side.

Primary colours have long disappeared from the centre of her colour palette. Instead of red, yellow and blue or the white veil, there is now a wide array of commercially manufactured colour mixes that produce unconventional colour combinations, which at first glance frequently appear odd and dissonant. Yet red, yellow and blue still shine through these colours.

The surfaces of the individual pictures are built up using the finest glazes in almost imperceptible gradual variations. Shade by shade they coalesce with the colour immediately underneath them and a new field arises. The differentiated gradations often prove even richer and become visible only at a second viewing or under slightly different lighting conditions. Frequently one senses or has the feeling that there are areas of colour present other than those one can actually see. The attention of the viewer is gripped by the rich nuances in the pictures' multiple layers, and they take on a proactive role in the act of looking as they follow the dialogue between colour and form. But as features to focus on, these prove elusive. Where the colour fields come into contact with one another, the picture surfaces become spacious, they open up and reveal depths.

With her painterly technique, Sabine Funke exploits colour to the full. If something like nano-technology existed in painting, the term would appropriately apply here –so subtle are the colour blends and tonal shifts.^{vi} The element which sustains her work is colour. One senses that the artist has a quite direct relationship with it. „In her treatment of colour she gives form to the different phases in her spiritual and emotional life. The painter then „lives“ for long spells in these colours, exploring their individual shades and testing potential combinations of them. One could say that

colour takes over her personality, and that this is only resolved when a further spectrum of formal possibilities has been formulated.^{vii}

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The immaterial energy that is inherent in colour communicates itself to the viewers and intimates to them that there is a transcendental aspect to the works.

Dr. Brigitte Baumstark, Director Städtische Galerie Karlsruhe

ⁱ Hans Jantzen, who introduced the term to describe gothic cathedrals, uses it more comprehensively to refer to the double-shell wall structure of these churches. Cf. Hans Jantzen, *Über den gotischen Innenraum und andere Aufsätze*, Berlin 1951, pp. 7-20.

ⁱⁱ Hard Edge is a style in painting in which the colours abut hard against one another.

ⁱⁱⁱ Friedhelm Häring, 'Vom Kuß des Prinzen', in: *Exhib. Cat.*, Hamburg 1992, p. 6.

^{iv} 'Tiefenlicht' in: *Lexikon der Kunst*, Vol. 5, Berlin 1984, p. 134.

^v German law stipulates that a proportion of the budget for new building projects must be earmarked for artwork in/on the building.

^{vi} Michael Hübl, 'Raumgreifendes Leuchten'. *Karlsruher Atelierbesuche*(33): 'Sabine Funke und die monochrome Malerei', in: *Badische Neueste Nachrichten* 31 March 2005

^{vii} Heinz Liesbrock in: *Exhib. Cat. Sabine Funke, 'Tafelbilder und Papierarbeiten'*, Frankfurt 1992, p. 41.