In the Studio

Nick Oberthaler, Vienna

»I am not concerned with the application of paint.«

Nick Oberthaler's paintings imply a conceptual superstructure: color and surfaces assume a codifying role, opening up references to fields such as image theory, art theory and philosophy. Oberthaler's work is thus not a question inherent conventions rather than to describe a vocabulary of form. We visited Nick in his studio to learn about the conceptual depth he applies to his work and why he values discourse over the essential process of painting.

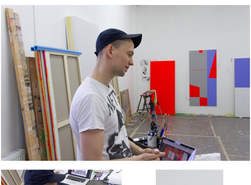
Nick, you began studying art at the age of eighteen. Why art, and how can one already be so sure at such an age?
I was always interested in art and graphic design. Coming from a rural area – I come from the Salzkammergut – one does not have a concrete idea of what makes up the context of contemporary art. You just want to move to the big city and study something creative. I had no idea what contemporary art or graphic design would seem to suggest itself. At the time, I spoke with a friend who studied at the "Kepler" University of Applied Arts Vienna. However, the entrance exams were already over and I had missed them. So I ended up in free art and then studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna.

In the meantime, you have left your beginnings as an artist far behind you. What has remained from your art study?
Of course you take things with you, you get an overview of art history and learn how to deal with it. Nowadays, I am not concerned with the application of paint. I do it work theoretically or scientifically. Art education was not valued in the way it is today. Recently however, and for the first time, I have written a short exhibition text for a friend. It was very difficult, I had to concentrate very hard. I was actually quite surrounding that that? How does one address another artist's work textually?

You say you don't work scientifically per se, you are not an art theoretician. But you do deal with art theoretical themes in your work. Don't you?
Yes, I do, my entire work has to a certain extent to do with theoretical appropriation and I think it is necessary to include it in my own practice.

You don't deal exclusively with art theory. Often, your references originate from philosophical theories, from social sciences or in politics. Rad is, in fact, has nothing to do with art.
The contents with which I work originate from various fields: Image theory, philosophy, sociology, politics, psychology. I like to move in the spaces of contexts between different areas of subject matter. I, as a pale earn for me to read something in one go, rather I pursue a kind of Hannah reading method.

The French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari used the term rhizome as a metaphor for a postmodern or post-structuralist model of knowledge and understanding. Knowledge is not hierarchical, it is not linear, knowledge is not fragmented in a linear sheet or on one level, but three-dimensionally and anti-hierarchically. My approach to research and my work process are similar.



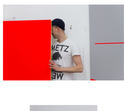
For example, how did you come to "Distinct Features of Fast Oscillations in Phase and Toric Rapid Eye Movement", as the title of your exhibition at Galerie Emanuel Layr in Vienna in 2016?
I read a book by the neuroscientist Wolf Singer, which dealt with the description of light. In connection with this book, the question of the so-called distinct of coating. I am interested in such image theoretical questions. "Of a distinct of coating" is a phrase that I have mostly formed by coating? And what is the relationship of the classes to it?

One paragraph in the book is entitled "Distinct oscillator", I did not only like this phrase, I also thought it was very beautiful. I was also interested in the idea of painting was converting. While researching on the web I accidentally came across the article "Distinct Features of Fast Oscillations in Phase and Toric Rapid Eye Movement". I thought the combination of the two titles, the phase profile of the phase rapid eye movement, a form of REM sleep. I felt the sentence was appropriate as a title in regard to the concept of the exhibition. I like the idea that the title could be read as a possibility, as a new theme of meaning in the overall artistic practice.

Do you are not concerned with painting only colorful surfaces in your pictures, even though it may look that way in the viewer at first glance.
Yes, that would definitely be too boring for me. It is important to me to pursue a conceptual approach in my work and to deal with the theme of the image, the interpretation. From this stagnant forms something like a story, a conceptual superstructure. At the same time, my artistic practice is extremely contemplative, I am very concerned with the physical and the materiality of images to each other, the constructing of exhibitions as situations.

Would you call yourself a genuine painter?
I am not really sure myself (laughs). The mere fact that I apply paint to a surface does not mean that the work can be exclusively derived via the discourse of painting. I am not at all in the classical sense of a painter who is concerned with contemplation and the processes of the application of paint on material.

More important to me than the painting process itself is the creation of a combed into which the process has to be integrated so that it becomes authentic. I am also interested in the fact that I can also do this work on the computer or with the coding of stencils and templates than with the actual painting process.



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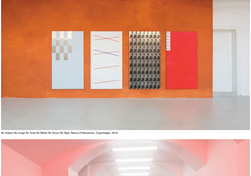
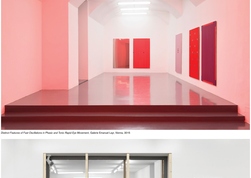
Les Cinq (Cliff Jules d'Ivoire), Villa Medici, Académie de France à Rome, 2016

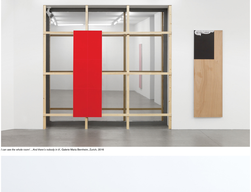
Calculated Reality, Mexico, Hélène E. J. Anderson / Galerie Nationale d'Art Moderne, Rome, 2015



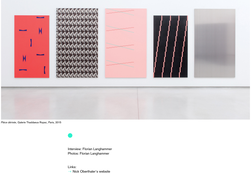
Ny Bidgen Ny Image Ny Tale Ny Matte Ny Gloss Ny Mat, Bente E Nissastiftelse, Copenhagen, 2015



Distinct Features of Fast Oscillations in Phase and Toric Rapid Eye Movement, Galerie Emanuel Layr, Vienna, 2016



I can only flat which now?, Aargauer Kunsthaus, Aarau, 2014



Pliny abroad, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris, 2015

Interview: Florian Langhammer
Photos: Florian Langhammer

Links:
- Nick Oberthaler's website
- Galerie Emanuel Layr, Vienna

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