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Geological analogies and references to the transformation of landscapes, often applied to the interpretation of Patrick Rohner's paintings, undoubtedly pinpoint biographical aspects, as when Annette Schindler speaks of the "visible, sensual, scientific methods of acquiring insight" that "Rohner exploits in his painting".¹ The essential factor in contemporary painting is, however, the autonomous process of defining an image, which allows the artist to arrive at a more or less final conclusion by the time the painting leaves the studio. The emergence of a work can always be interpreted in terms of analogy, whether we speak of Bernard Frize's surface skins of colour transferred from paint pot to canvas, or of Patrick Rohner's translocation of paint from picture to picture. Whatever the case, the significance of Rohner's paintings does not lie primarily in their analogy to landscape structures or scientific processes of cognition but rather to the constitutive method of superimposing or transferring layers of paint.

Although it is tempting to draw on geological vocabulary in analysing the genesis of Patrick Rohner's works, the viewer, on taking a closer look, focuses entirely on animated nature. The process is understandable since there is no mimetic representation that imposes restrictions beyond which the informative precision of the painting could be recognised as being determined by the medium. The painting describes only itself. The thickness of the pigment acquires its own tactile appeal and the wall of colour fills our entire field of vision – at least vertically – while we are increasingly drawn into the process of development: the act of painting, which constitutes itself when the pieces of pigment become autonomous and leave traces behind on the new picture support, so that the painted layer paints the painting. Obviously, it is the artist who applies the paint to his work and nothing happens without his sanction. Close proximity to what is happening and infinite distance from actual comprehension lend a final justification to the above-mentioned association with natural processes, but only if the assumption has not yet been refuted that natural laws ultimately posit the picture in the work.

Not only the paintings but also the actual paints used in Patrick Rohner's studio are made with powdered pigment and linseed oil. This is not surprising because this substance, applied so thickly to the plywood panels, is more than a means to an end. It spreads both physically and contextually over the picture plane, and is deposited layer upon layer. The artist's will defines and gives shape to the emerging work, whose second component derives directly from the physical properties of the pigment. Dripping, sliding, shifting layers of paint rip apart or cover up portions of underlying layers, while elsewhere

the topmost membrane appears quite smooth and unimpaired. No matter where we begin reading the painting, it offers no support to the eye except the edges of the picture itself. Having stood at a distance and registered the picture as a whole, we curiously step closer and begin studying the canvas from left to right, from top to bottom – following the convention of Western writing – in order to explore the substance that has yielded the earthy landscape image. From a distance, we notice geometric structures throughout and the damage imposed on their order – geometric inasmuch as we immediately assume that an original order underlies the off-kilter grid and contradictory traces of transformation. We intuitively attempt to read the process that has led to Patrick Rohner's paintings: no one could possibly assign a beginning or an end to the almost animated substance of his pictures. Change is the subject matter of these paintings in the most conceivably linear way, namely linked with the substance out of which they are constituted – and that is what makes them unique.²

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The essence of painting comes to the fore in extreme *modi operandi*. Given the steady flow of medial images, the results of this archaic medium inevitably make an impact where the question of its specific potential is most provocatively posed. Patrick Rohner's painting is this uncompromising inquiry. Ponderous, even leaden, the medium renounces all that is light and colourful or effortlessly nimble and ironic. Diametrically opposed, perhaps, to the analytic exposure of psychoanalysis, Patrick Rohner piles up layer after layer and creates a physical reality in his pictures that is of Serra-like weight. The physis of the picture is a phenomenon that marked the history of painting immediately after the Second World War, when pictures could not and would not serve. All humanist ideals having been shattered by the atrocities of the War, the signs and traces of pictures without colour and with a focus on material represented the chance to reinvent an authentic pictorial vocabulary. The signs and ciphers of contemporary art go back to the earthy origins of Brassai and Dubuffet, Tàpies and Schumacher. Visual recall of the atrocities was left entirely to photography and film, for they alone were able to lay claim to significant forms of authenticity. Bacon, Freud and, of course, Warhol reinstated figurative representation in the collective memory of art. But it was Luc Tuymans, racing up and down the keyboard of memory with the empty spaces and overexposure of his pictures painted after photographs, who finally shook our visual memory to the core. Polke's incisive, ironic alchemy and Richter's (over-) painting of the picture in neutral grey tones were – metaphorically speaking – in pole position when Patrick Rohner began studying at the Düsseldorf Academy in 1986. Anyone from Switzerland is naturally associated with

mountains: the burden of tradition. Albrecht Schnyder addressed the issue in a postcard-sized series of conceptual pictures, and Helmut Federle's drawings of mountains, as early as the 1970s, aspired to the sense of attunement that was to characterise his entire painted oeuvre.

We have not even begun to explore Rohner's time at the Academy, a period marked by illuminating insights into the function of the picture. If, as Tuymans claims, there are only constructed pictures of memory, it is only logical to take the next step to conceptual and physically identical – and therefore potentially analogous – representation. The fact that the physical reality of the picture as a construction is autonomous and inimitable is a sufficiently precise foil for the steady stream of false images in the media. An evening of zapping with the remote control yields a climate, albeit an uncontrollable one, that is defined by the exchangeability of the electronically communicated image. The subject matter of specific pictorial messages is no longer relevant. The ambience of the programmes changes, archaically governed by the rhythm of weekdays and seasons, piling up layer upon layer. Within this framework, Patrick Rohner's superimposed compositions are a visual delight; they make our pictorial memory more autonomous and the possibility of insight more probable.

1 Annette Schindler in: Sammlungskatalog, Kunsthaus Glarus 1992.

2 This first section is a condensed extract from the article: "Nr.121/1998, Zur Wahrnehmung eines Bildes von Patrick Rohner", in: Patrick Rohner, Kunstmuseum St.Gallen, Kunsthaus Glarus, 1998, pp. 10/11.