

THE FREIBURG QUESTION

Peter Zimmermann presents
Freiburg School at the
Museum für Neue Kunst

Christine Litz

Freiburg School embodies an opportunity for the Museum für Neue Kunst to present the work of an acclaimed protagonist of conceptual painting, Peter Zimmermann, for the very first time in a large solo exhibition in his home town. Zimmermann has been exploring the possibilities and potential of painting ever since the mid-1980s. He is particularly well known for his frequently large-format paintings that are produced by the manipulation of digital templates – be they photographs, film stills or diagrams – via computer programmes and digital filters and subsequently transferred onto canvas in several transparent layers of epoxy resin. This gives rise in turn to impressively colourful, abstract compositions endowed with an extremely robust visual energy.

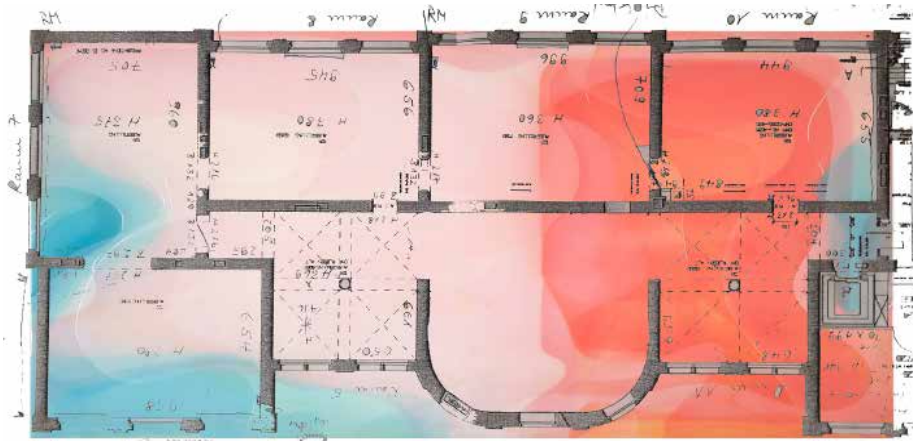
Peter Zimmermann was born in 1956 in Freiburg and grew up in the Black Forest. After graduating from high school, he left the region in order to study at the Stuttgart State Academy of Art and Design, being taught there by K.R.H. Sonderborg, among others. Towards the end of the 1980s, Zimmermann moved to Cologne (his adoptive home to this day), which was a pulsating nexus of art production and theoretical discourse on contemporary art at the time, ultimately taking up a teaching post at the Academy of Media Arts there. Consequently, Zimmermann's development as an artist didn't actually take place in Freiburg and environs. And now, as a famous artist, he is returning for the first time to the place he left as a youth. This has led to a challenging encounter and exchange with this renowned artist and, in view of his sixtieth birthday, a suitable occasion for reflection about his artistic practice – also as the title of the exhibition suggests, with regard to questions of identity, biographical detail and impressions, sense of place and belonging, as well as the region's overall influence upon him during his childhood and adolescence.

The exhibition of Peter Zimmermann's work links up on a number of levels with the vision the Museum für Neue Kunst has of itself, as well as with its perspective for the

future in general and with regard to its collection. Ever since the museum began to collect art, the primary focus has been upon a rooting in the region yet with a trans-regional horizon.① From a purely geographical point of view, the Museum für Neue Kunst in Freiburg enjoys a close proximity to the art institutions of the state capital Stuttgart, Karlsruhe, Baden-Baden, Offenburg and Mannheim, as well as to the museums and art galleries (Kunsthallen) of Strasbourg, Colmar and Mulhouse; moreover, the diverse high-quality public and private institutions that Basel – thanks to a well-established, traditionally strong civic commitment to art – calls its own, are also a stone's throw away, not to mention Basel's celebrated annual international art fair. In view of the tri-border area's unique concentration of qualitatively high-ranking art institutions, the Museum für Neue Kunst, with its thirty-year old pedigree as a municipal institution, is faced with the

Germany, Europe and ultimately – globally – across the world. The Museum für Neue Kunst perceives itself less as a regional museum and more as a museum based in the region. This goes hand in hand with its ambition to latch onto the debate surrounding art both nationally and internationally, thus enabling it to operate locally and globally and be distinctive and exemplary in equal measure. Freiburg is in the world and the world is in Freiburg – an arrangement of reciprocal conditionalities best summed up with the image of communicating vessels. This results in high demands placed on the Museum für Neue Kunst to offer a meaningful and accomplished platform for the production and reception of art and to place this in a relevant, diverse and stimulating field of reference.②

In this respect, inviting Peter Zimmermann to show his work in the Museum für Neue Kunst wasn't a throw-away, superficial reference to his origins. Nor did this invitation



Schule von Freiburg, Exoxid auf Boden, 2016, Entwurfszeichnung auf Grundriss des Museums für Neue Kunst / Freiburg School, epoxy on floor, 2016, sketch on floor plan of the Museum für Neue Kunst

task of honing the programmatic direction of its activities, both collecting and exhibiting, in three specific areas: first, which position would the City of Freiburg like to adopt in terms of funding, identification and appreciation of modern and contemporary art within the framework of its social role and responsibilities; second, how can the Museum für Neue Kunst enhance its standing within and reciprocally enrich Baden-Württemberg's overall cultural landscape; and finally, and most importantly, what will its activities signify in twenty or thirty years from now within a local, regional and international context.

Perhaps the recent coinage “glocal” best describes how the Museum für Neue Kunst engages with new and contemporary art: the global rooted in the local, both as a presentation and reflection of it. The Museum für Neue Kunst represents art matters in Freiburg not only as a city in the South Baden region, but also in Baden-Württemberg,

target to the story of the son returning home in the wake of anything-but prodigal international acclaim, nor indeed to the oftentimes attendant clichéd topoi of home and world and their concomitant romantic gloss. Instead, the exhibition is about the presentation, discussion and situation of an extremely individual, pioneering position in painting in the digital age.

Peter Zimmermann has somewhat self-consciously titled his exhibition *Freiburg School*. In the context of communicating about and the communication of art, the title plays on associations with stylistic schools or artistic communities; as such, it insinuates that rather than being about one individual, it might be about a whole movement instead.③ However, he is also referencing the museum's previous incarnation at the start of the 20th century as a girls' grammar school. Thus, the title does indeed contain a biographical reference of sorts because a school

© The primary focus of the collection is upon works by artists with a relationship to Freiburg and the Black Forest, likewise upon artworks by critically acclaimed international artists who have addressed the specific conditions and environs *in situ* in their works.

© The consideration of peculiarities views this less as a criterion of exclusion than one of differentiation when applying the “local-regional-global” yardstick. In the attempt to understand how the local, regional or international fields of reference differ respectively, identities and cultural peculiarities play a decisive role and can be seen and experienced precisely here; for it is only possible to experience and accept otherness if an awareness of one’s own special characteristics obtains. Seen through such a “micro-meso-macro” lens, individuals in the 21st century can appear alternately as migrants, countrymen, tourists or exiles, they don’t derive from one single root but proliferate in every possible direction and link up with any available surfaces in the most diverse ways imaginable. The French cultural theorist, Nicolas Bourriaud, has coined the term “radicant” to describe this phenomenon. Borrowed from biology, the term describes plants that root themselves in their surrounding area in often heterogeneous soils, as opposed to planting their roots vertically into the ground. As a botanic family, radicants are able to develop roots on the most diverse surfaces and spread out laterally – in contrast to radicals, distinguished by a firm, vertical anchoring in the earth. For Bourriaud, the word radicant connotes dynamism, which derives from the necessary relationship to the immediate environment, the energy of being uprooted and re-rooted, as well as standing for the potential that lies in this very proliferation and networking. Cf. Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Radicant* (New York, 2009).

© There are numerous examples of schools in art history that are often not connected with the names of centres as such, but rather with the names of medium-sized or even small places that otherwise would scarcely have been known (cf. Barbizon School, Pont-Aven School, the Olot School). Art historians often ascribe the status of a school retrospectively to such associations of artists (cf. among others, the Ulm School, the Sienese School, New York School). Schools no longer seem to play a role in the globalised world. Catchwords such as the New Leipzig School – in a similar way to the Young British Artists in the 1990s – are more like labels coined for and by the art market. The artists associated with them tend to reject such attributions, whereas academics avoid these terms because they are considered to be both vague and imprecise. Admittedly, the appellation “Freiburg School” is not without historic precedent, albeit within the unrelated field of economics. The name was given to a teaching and research community, founded at the Albert Ludwig University in Freiburg during the 1930s, whose “ordoliberal” theories laid the foundations of social market economy.

socialises its charges; it qualifies students in anticipation of the demands made upon them in later life. It is selective with regard to productivity as well as social status and communicates core social values, at least it has the ambition to do so. But at the same time, the title refers to everything unknown, still to be learned, the new.

The latter is also the prime motivation for the selection of works in the exhibition. Zimmermann has undertaken a most radical conversion of the rooms in the museum to create a single installation: the floor becomes a canvas, the venue becomes a gigantic spatial painting. Correspondingly, the epicentre of the exhibition resides in the very place where two distinct groups of works confront one another: the epoxy works on the floor made especially for the exhibition and the more recent, current oil paintings on the walls, which are being shown in this configuration for the first time.

The newness of the relatively young series of oil paintings largely painted especially for the exhibition, the *in situ* production of an overarching, contextual epoxy painting and the combination of both ought to be read in the sense of “not having been there before” or “different from before”. That is to say, it derives from and simultaneously motivates one to be open and unbiased. In terms of the relationship between the epoxy works with the oil paintings, the word “new” takes on the nuance of “anew”, that is to say, “once more”, inasmuch as the production process is the same insofar as it involves manipulating digital templates by means of digital filters or programmes, the respective results then being transferred into one or the other technique. As far as the oil paintings are concerned, there are also a number of unassailable parameters: colours aren’t mixed, each colour is applied to the canvas in individual brush strokes and at a specific angle. The development of this technique derives from artistic necessity, that is to say, from the continual self-engagement of painting with continually shifting perspectives in the digital era. Oil painting makes different demands and has other ambitions, augmenting the range of meaning in the word “new” with a layer of “learning” – it responds to and illustrates the kind of courage one needs to take the path less trodden. All in all, the “new” of the exhibition combines with the “new” in the name Museum für Neue Kunst and, as such, coincides directly with the heart of contemporary art discourse in the sense of “current” and “progressive”.

In this respect, the *Freiburg School* is not a nostalgic review of the artist’s roots, but instead an utopian place which, endowed with the will to explore the untried and untested, finds itself re-emergent in a new guise time and time again.

LESS RELIABLE

MORE DESIRABLE

Didem Yazıcı

The first internet website went online a quarter of a century ago and the first web browser capable of displaying online images was introduced two years later in 1993. In parallel with this life-changing digital revolution, from 24 hour news cycles to sophisticated surveillance software, the widespread use of computer programs and applications on tablets and smart phones has radically changed the production and circulation of knowledge today. Massive amounts of image and text-based information are disseminated, consumed and surveiled simultaneously all across the world. The ocean of online images on our screens has gradually become less reliable and more desirable. This seemingly limitless information from known and unknown sources, showing up in a diverse range of contexts – such as political, confessional, educational and personal – reflects the way people think, feel and live today. Reading your Sunday newspaper on your tablet, writing an e-mail, watching a film on a screen, seeing a performative poem on YouTube, scheduling a meeting on Doodle, joining a discussion on a web forum, reading an e-book on a Kindle, browsing online-exhibitions, learning on Wikipedia, sharing your academic paper as a facebook note, marrying your online date, having a job interview over Skype, writing history through revolutionary shares on twitter during a civil movement, contributing to a social change by signing an online petition ... new technology has become integrated in every stage and every moment of daily life through touch screens and digital displays. Every traceable action and byte of information is interconnected through a complex, non-linear network. This networked ecosystem carries with it complex power relations and digital feudalism that are at odds with the ideal of a democratic internet.

Experiencing Peter Zimmermann's work with this in mind allows one a deeper understanding of his practice and artistic methodology and the complex role of post-digital aesthetics in painting today. A technologically forward-thinking artist, who continuously approaches

painting from a theoretical standpoint and contemplates what defines painting today, Zimmermann picks up on the logic of twenty-first-century digital visual thinking: *If I would have lived 100 years before, I would paint landscape, but now in our times, everything you know about the world, you know either from television screens or on computer screens. That's how the world gets into your brain.*① This straightforward logic of what is to be painted provides insight to Zimmermann's free-wheeling and clear approach. The artist's own words here not only reflect the change in learning forms with new interfaces and media, but also how the *zeitgeist* can be translated into painting. He shares the same genuine artistic curiosity with early modernist painters and applies his own vision to today's visual grammar. More than a decade ago, when the recent term "postinternet art" was not yet coined, Zimmermann was working with emergent technologies that allowed him to edit images and to determine the composition and abstraction of his paintings. For this particular process, he has been utilizing the tools of new media art, but not

Throughout modern and contemporary art history, the traditional understanding of painting has shifted; becoming more process-related, more sculptural and site-aware. The artistic practice of Zimmermann is contributing not only to the field of conceptual painting but also to the transformation of the medium itself. In the exhibition *Freiburg School*, Zimmermann radically transforms the museum space into a single work in which the floor becomes a canvas and the exhibition ground turns into a massive spatial painting. The large-scale floor piece, created *in situ* for the exhibition is not only a painting, but a room installation one can walk through. In order to experience the exhibition in its entirety, the audience is not only asked to look at the painting, but to be an embodied part of it. Simple actions like walking, sitting and standing implicate viewers as integral components in the experience of the work. The epicenter of the exhibition is the confrontation of two distinct bodies of work. One monumental floor piece, created *in situ* for the museum's space, and a series of recent wall-based oil paintings will be exhibited



„sticker“, Work in Progress, Atelieransicht, 2015
Work in progress, studio shot, 2015



Rendering der Ausstellung, 2014
Rendering of exhibition, 2014

necessarily practicing new media art. Rather, he is reinventing the medium of painting in his own terms, finding a new way of looking at this traditional practice. In the case of the exhibition, *Freiburg School*, he proposes to not only look at a painting, but to actually be part of it. Although he has been making spatial installations, poster walls and series of box objects since the early 1990's, conceptual painting has been a labor of love for him since his first years at the art academy. If we were to think of an artist, working with a similar approach to Zimmermann, who adapts the change in the tools of painting, we would need to look at an upcoming generation of artists making paintings with postinternet aesthetics.

together for the first time in such a constellation. The wall paintings depend on a similar process in creation of their formal compositions, but require different techniques and material. Regardless the difference in material (oil paint resp. epoxy resin), the abstract shapes in the paintings are composed in a way that the technological background process can be subtly understood. In both cases, Zimmermann uses image software techniques to manipulate and play with personal or anonymous images from his visual archive. These initial digital images are either found online or scanned and printed material. At the end of the artistic procedure, they have new shapes as they blur and create new fluid forms. There is something curious and



Atelieransicht, 2015
Studio shot, 2015

magical about this process of creating the compositions. The method of abstraction is a pure function of the software, but the degree of abstraction and the image selection are the artist's own careful decision; a painstaking yet conversational collaboration between painter and computer. The artistic process is closely linked to the context of the work.

When you post an image on Instagram, a photosharing smartphone app, it offers various filter choices, each with different names and concepts: Lo-fi, Toaster, 1977, Crema, Ludwig, Perpetua, Valencia, X-pro II ... Each is capable of changing the aura of your images in seconds. One may lend a futuristic effect while another produces an image that feels right out of the 1950's. Similar to the tools and aesthetics of Instagram, Zimmermann works with various image editors and filters for the abstraction process. When he talks about people becoming increasingly suspicious and unable to trust what they see, it is certainly because this question of manipulation has entered our lives without reservation. Despite their deceitful nature, these manipulated, shiny forms carry a certain beauty. The bold and the accidental character of Zimmermann's luminous paintings give them an incredibly playful and attractive look. They are impulsive and unstable; exhibiting a strange sort of in-your-face attractiveness. This shiny allure is heightened by the sense that they are symbolic of another preexisting set of images. It is possible to see this approach in his early works such as book-cover paintings, text paintings and text sculptures. There is the same ambition for translating existing textual or imagery material into a new format and visual language. When Zimmermann talks about his early paintings which depict book covers of travel guides, he refers to learned, memorized and almost controlled experiences. *Do you only perceive what you read before in the guide book or do you perceive other things you haven't formulated in language before?* In his recent paintings, the original, un-manipulated or un-formulated image is still present in the painting, partially visible, it recalls its own history and context. For *Freiburg School* he worked with pictures of his paintings and installation shots for the first time. This marks a major self-reflective moment in his practice. Numbers of exhibitions, paintings and other works Zimmermann has created since the 1980's have been gathered into their own archive and embody their own reality; finally ready to be re-contextualized and re-realized.

© Peter Zimmermann, CURRENTS, part 1 of 2, produced by Columbus Museum of Art: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RX0V7HcpJ_w.

© Ibid.

PAINTINGS

cannot be but of today

Till Briegleb and Peter Zimmermann
in conversation

TB: You are about to present one coherent painting on the floor connecting all the exhibition rooms in the Museum für Neue Kunst in Freiburg. Historically speaking, floor art tends to be in the form of a mosaic or a carpet, but the idea of the floor also connotes submission. Will there be there any references to these traditions?

PZ: I have been painting in oils for three years now following a very long time working with epoxy. A few of these new paintings will be shown in Freiburg and I wanted to show that these works are based on my experience of previously used techniques. In this sense the floor, which has been covered in epoxy resin, could represent a pedestal. The floor acts as the past supporting the present, the topical.

Associations with carpets or floor mosaics are definitely useful as a point of access. But I wouldn't say the idea of submission has anything to do with it.

Even though the visitors are actually trampling on the art by walking across the floor?

I am more interested in walking on the surface from an aesthetic point of view. When I realised my first floor piece about eight years ago, it represented an attempt to break with the shiny surface of the synthetic resin works. The fact that visitors actually walk on it necessarily means that the surface will get scratched, destroyed. It develops a kind of patina as a result. Trainers leave scuff marks, high heels leave scratches. All of which are all interesting relicts. As far as Freiburg is concerned, I think that these traces correspond to the brush strokes of the oil paintings. This could engender an interesting aesthetic experience.

Your epoxy paintings derive from templates kept in a digital picture archive. You process and defamiliarise visually them using software programmes, projecting the results onto the screen in order to cast them in their ultimate shape in epoxy. Do you use a similar method with the new oil paintings?

The process is similar – except that as far as the epoxy pictures are concerned, I used a different set of graphic algorithms. I simply used a mobile app for the oil paintings. The programme translates photographs into impressionistic line graphics. This altered template then becomes the material for the painting process. However, I can't simply translate these line graphics straight into the finished painting, but need to find a gestural correspondence for it. The murmurations that occur here in this process are really exciting.

What happens to the content of the painting as a result of these multiple transformations from the original motif to the finished composition, from the concrete, comprehensible template to the abstract painting?

Well, nowadays you don't do as Monet did and take your easel out with you into the countryside. We no longer see the landscape which we reproduce in a particular section, instead we largely view the world framed through a screen. The viewer invariably supposes televisual perception is based on evaluation and manipulation. As a viewer of these images, I don't actually believe them, but I don't have any other choice than to trust in them. The various transformational steps are aimed at rendering visible the processes and function of perception. And these steps become concentrated until they ultimately result in the finished painting.

Do you understand this process as a form of media critique?

It would be media critique if, as a result of it, you had a chance to see things differently. But realistically that's not the case. This way of perceiving the world through various media has become universal in the meantime. You simply can't get away from it.

Does the concept of the exhibition contain any references to the city itself and your personal history with it ?

Biographical material forms the basis or starting point of the oil paintings, as do views of Freiburg and the Black Forest. Although I was born in Freiburg, I grew up in Titisee-Neustadt.

I use a few really unsophisticated Black Forest motifs in the exhibition but also photographs of the countryside; there's also a portrait as well which relates to my life. Then again there are also templates from my own repertoire, motifs from epoxy paintings that already exist.

What was the prime motif for the work on the floor?

I chose a motif I had already used for a painting. This motif was suited to this situation because it kind of takes a back seat and allows the paintings on the wall to come into their own. I was originally looking for a motif that linked up with my birthplace and that would have done justice to the special nature of the occasion. That would have had to have been a photograph I had been carrying around in my wallet for years, something hanging on the wall in my parents' house or the like. But there simply wasn't anything like that to hand.

Do your titles provide clues for the viewers with which to identify the original motifs that presumably they would otherwise struggle to decode on account of their abstraction?

It's very difficult trying to find titles. When I am painting I often listen to music and sometimes quite intuitively I come up with a title. I try to think up general terms that kind of trigger particular associations.

But fundamentally you reject the essential recognisability of the motif?

I did allow the motif to rear its head to a certain extent in the case of the first epoxy works. This led to constant questions regarding the "original". I want to avoid this reduction of people's interests to this work-and-its-source kind of equation. But at the same time I don't want to turn the source into some kind of mystery, nor do I want to be restricted by the viewers either. If an exciting, dynamic painting happens, comprising an interesting structure made up of brush strokes, then the motif it is based on is no longer that important.

In the case of the oil paintings, the clearly recognisable brush strokes are redolent of a bold gesturality on the part of the painter, which is in itself particularly remarkable when compared to the cast epoxy works that are devoid of any such structure. Does this painterly movement follow any set rules?

Recently a journalist asked me the same question because she had read in an interview that I had rejected the whole idea of a "signature", which you can understand with regard to the epoxy paintings, because it was one of the reasons for choosing the material epoxy resin in the first place. When starting out with the whole process of painting in oils, I was actually thinking of doing likewise and allowing any characteristic style to appear unimportant through systematised brush strokes. But as soon as you start using the classic means of paintings, such as paint, brushes and canvas then the gesture itself immediately takes on significance.

If the paint is applied too systematically then the painting will be boring. I think it is important to be able to see a signature in the painting. As in the case of calligraphy, you can spot every mistake and it can be very revealing. That's why I had to take a new approach.

This signature is extremely energetic, evinces a strong rhythm and tangible movement. Is it a kind of liberation from the extremely peaceful way of working with epoxy resin?

In the case of the epoxy works and also before that with my context projects there was an idea which I then translated into a composition. But this process doesn't work that easily in the context of painting. In this case, the simple extension of an idea into a painting doesn't produce sufficiently exciting results. Painting in oils is as far as I am concerned not merely an extension of my artistic imagination but it offers me a much richer process of translation. Painting is direct.

I am particularly interested in the processual element of painting. I've got more time to influence the outcome. But I am more directly at the mercy of the material's resistance. And therefore the sense of achievement by overcoming this resistance is all the more pronounced. I really enjoy the immediacy and the unpredictability and the handling of the material.

In previous phases of your work there have been diverse visible influences of other painters, which have served you as either an inspiration or a system of reference. Jackson Pollock or Abstract Expressionism or phases in which pointillism or Informel were important. Is the switch to oil painting also an attempt to situate these traditions?

Well, of course I realise that as soon as you start using canvas, paint and brushes you are necessarily connecting with a tradition. But I try to reveal that these paintings cannot be but of today. That's often very difficult because the material itself is understandably so overloaded with associations: from the "water lilies" all the way to Expressionist lines and dashes. Nevertheless, I am at pains to find a kind of painting appropriate for the times, which doesn't just refer to traditions. This question never arose in the epoxy works by virtue of the surface alone.

The colour palette of the new paintings is also less frontal and luminous than the epoxy paintings. Is that a deliberate turn to something slightly more reserved?

One shouldn't confuse the shiny surface with the luminosity of the colours. I still paint with very bold and luminous colours. In contrast to my shiny epoxy works, the painterly

structured texture of the oil paintings is important for me. I recognise all the many subtle painterly manoeuvres within them.

How would you describe the dialogue that arises between these different colour conceptions within the exhibition, between the luminous floor and the gesturality of the oil paintings?

The paintings will be reflected in the floor and, as a result, produce some interesting vistas. I hope that in this way an enlarged form of the visual image will arise when traversing the expanse of floor. When standing on the painting itself, it will be possible to view the other paintings and I hope that this will set something in motion in the viewer.

At any rate, after being deliberately overwhelmed by the sheer colour, size and shininess of the epoxy paintings our ways of seeing will undoubtedly undergo a modification. Which new processes of perception are you looking for here ideally?

Well, I would be really pleased if the same train of thought could be understood in the confrontation of these two different formats – when the visitors recognise that it is the same process at work, the same strategy of composition. That can give rise to a way of viewing the epoxy paintings, which doesn't just allow itself to be won over by the shiny surfaces, but moves the topic of perception and its function in the digital era centre stage.

And when the exhibition is over the floor will be removed. This builds in an element of ephemerality reminiscent of street art. Is there a connection for you here?

Not really. It always used to annoy me that previous works on the floor were on slabs so that they could be moved and transported afterwards. This meant that there was a visible edging which made them look a bit like a collection of tiles. So in order to avoid that I wanted to ensure that the floor in the room in Freiburg was laid out without any joints.

Should we understand the ultimate destruction of the Freiburg floor piece as a critique of the primary commodity value of art?

No. That would be a too naive a gesture. It is self-evident that my compositions circulate as commodities in the art market. But I don't think I want to criticise this system by destroying something. The art market is far too differentiated for that. There have been gestures aplenty like this in the past, none of which having made a blind bit of difference. And at least just as much has been uttered

on the matter. I'm not convinced by doing something like that would necessarily generate an interesting statement nowadays.

So why will the floor piece be discarded after the exhibition and not sawn up and exhibited as individual paintings?

Well, it was devised in this particular size and if one were to subdivide the surface into panels, all that would be left would be monochrome images. I don't think that is very interesting.

At the beginning of the previous century, to certain extent abstraction replaced figurative painting as the purveyor of the spiritual, if you think of Kandinsky, Malevich or Mondrian, but also the latter-day rediscovery of Hilma af Klint. Be it underpinned with theory or merely as a hidden intention – the spiritual has found its home in colour and (abstract) form. Is there a spiritual dimension in your painting?

Painting is per se a spiritual act. This crops up in questions, such as: when do I stop, when is a painting finished? You can only answer these questions when you feel yourself to be in "receiving" or stand-by mode – as if you had just tuned into something which you accept as something good in that momentary state of mind. It's like being a receiver which transforms the transmission into visual images onto the canvas.

In a more rational way of speaking, it is the balance between chance and the moment of decision-making.

This balancing act is the most difficult challenge in art. It only works through a kind of conceit or delusion. Hubris coupled with amateurishness. This is the only way I can imagine getting the concoction right. I often feel that this balance is missing and that the painting is too deliberate, too intended. Or that these qualities are unrepresented, not present. The real knack is to strike this balance as closely as possible.

Are you able to put your finger on the concept of beauty that your way of working generates?

Something special can emerge if you manage to get the balance right between decision-making and chance. Whenever these forces are attuned and also something unexpected happens during the process beyond any sort of planning, then that's when I can go home with a happy heart and say it was a good day.

Does that last until the next day?

This feeling tends to last for quite a while where a good painting is concerned. The decisive criterion for me is returning to a painting after many years and being able to say that the balance works.

The past decades have witnessed many a change in the style of your paintings. There are series for example dominated by a black dot, paintings composed of beams or others consisting of amorphous shapes. Should we view this as a quest to find ideal beauty?

I am less interested in an ideal and more in specific steps it takes to get there, specific formations. The series with the black dots in the middle titled *Portraits* is a direct result of my involvement with "Second Life".

... the user-animated online virtual world in which participants can create a second self in the shape of an avatar ...

I have actually communicated with people in this forum whom I only know as virtual representations. This form of interaction provoked a lot of questions, including why I was interested in it in the first place. The result of this intensive preoccupation with this phenomenon of virtual communication was the attempt to represent these characters in "Second Life" as portraits.

This is how the different series actually come about. These somewhat round and amorphous shapes developed from the playful question regarding the extent to which paintings can be defamiliarised visually. It was real fun to reduce the original template to a line or a few blotches yet being aware at all times where they came from. And if anything, the paintings are more pointillist and are the product of an algorithm that can overlay many paintings.

Text represents a significant part of our digital world. After a long phase at the beginning of your career when you focused closely on text, would you now say that it has vanished completely from your repertoire of visual defamiliarisation. If so, why?

I was interested at that time in textual matter as a kind of anachronism. I asked myself the question: to what extent are paintings texts that can be decoded? Conversely, this of course gives rise to the question regarding the extent to which texts are also images. Does typography have an influence on the meaning of a text? Having devoted a lot of time to this topic, it ceased to be an issue for me. However, if I reconnect with it in some new way then maybe I'll return to it.

You have titled your exhibition Freiburg School which, in an art context, immediately evokes associations with a group of artists or a shared attitude to art. What does the title mean to you?

As far as I am concerned, the title has a number of aspects to it. The museum where it is being staged used to be a school. Another reason is the fact that I was born in Freiburg – even if I didn't go to school there – and my youth, which I spent in the Black Forest region, had an obvious influence upon me. I view the traces this has left upon me as a kind of school. I think I've still got a bit of an alemanic twang. I carry these influences around with me even though I haven't lived there for forty years. That's why I think it is an apt title. But there is no way I am going to set up a new school of painting. On the contrary, anyone visiting the show will see that any "ambition" in this regard is meant ironically.

DR. CHRISTINE LITZ

Seit Juni 2012 Direktorin des Museum für Neue Kunst in Freiburg. Von 2001 bis 2005 war sie am Museum Ludwig Assistentin des Direktors Kasper König und hat gemeinsam mit Peter Allmann die „filmbar“ ins Leben gerufen und die Vermittlungsprogramme „kunst: dialoge“ und „Junge Nacht“ entwickelt. 2005–2007 war sie Projektleiterin der Skulptur.Projekte Münster 07, Ende 2007–September 2009 Referentin für Bildende Kunst am niedersächsischen Ministerium für Wissenschaft und Kultur. Von 2009 bis 2012 war sie die Projektleiterin der dOCUMENTA (13) in Kassel.

Since 2012, she has been Director of the Museum für Neue Kunst in Freiburg, Germany, a museum dedicated to modern and contemporary art. From 2001 until 2005, she was assistant to the director Kasper König at Museum Ludwig and developed “filmbar” with Peter Allmann as well as the educational programmes, “art: dialogues” and “young night”. From 2005 until 2007 she was the Project Manager of Sculpture Project Münster 07, from the end of 2007 to September 2009 she was the Visual Arts Consultant at the Ministry for Science and Culture in Lower Saxony. Immediately prior to her appointment in Freiburg, she worked as Project Manager at the dOCUMENTA (13) in Kassel from 2009 to 2012.

TILL BRIEGLER

Geboren 1962. Lebt und arbeitet in Hamburg. Der Journalist und Schriftsteller Till Briegleb war als Kulturredakteur u.a. für die Hamburger Tageszeitung (taz) und Die Woche tätig und schreibt als freier Autor für diverse Zeitschriften und Zeitungen, u. a. die Süddeutsche Zeitung. 2006 war er Textchef des Kunstmagazins art, für das er bis heute mit seiner Architekturkolumne „Sofort wieder abreißen!“ die Neubauten dieser Welt bespricht. 2009 veröffentlichte er seinen Essayband *Die diskrete Scham*.

Born 1962. Lives and works in Hamburg. The journalist and writer was the culture and features editor for the Hamburg newspaper Die Tageszeitung (taz) and Die Woche, among others, and is now a freelance writer for various magazines and newspapers, including the Süddeutsche Zeitung. He became the editor in chief of the magazine art in 2006 and still discusses modern architecture across the globe in his column “Sofort wieder abreißen!” (Demolish them now!). A volume of his essays titled *Die diskrete Scham* (The discreet pudency) was published in 2009.

DIDEM YAZICI

Geboren 1986. Arbeitet als Kuratorin und in Freiburg ansässige Autorin und ist seit 2015 am Museum für Neue Kunst kuratorisch tätig. 2013 war sie kuratorische Gastwissenschaftlerin im Künstlerhaus Stuttgart sowie Projektassistentin bei der dOCUMENTA (13). Sie erlangte einen MA in Curatorial Studies von der Städelschule und der Goethe Universität, Frankfurt, und hat in Istanbul Kunstgeschichte studiert. Sie nahm an einigen kuratorischen Ausbildungsprogrammen teil, darunter Curatorial Intensive, ausgerichtet von ICI New York 2012, und A-Desk, Barcelona, 2013. Ihre Texte sind in internationalen Zeitschriften wie Extra Extra, Res-Art, Nowiswere und Art Unlimited erschienen.

Didem Yazıcı (1986) is a curator and writer based in Freiburg where she has been working in the curatorial team of Museum für Neue Kunst since 2015. She was the curatorial researcher-in-residence in Künstlerhaus Stuttgart in 2013, prior to that, she worked at dOCUMENTA (13) as a project assistant from 2012 until 2013. She holds an MA in Curatorial Studies from the Städelschule and Goethe University, Frankfurt and studied Art History in Mimar Sinan University, Istanbul. Yazıcı participated in a number of curatorial education programmes, such as the Curatorial Intensive, organized by ICI New York in 2012 and A-Desk, Barcelona in 2013. Her texts have appeared in international periodicals, such as Extra Extra, Res-Art, Nowiswere and Art Unlimited.