Deep Space

by Joan Waltemath

Neither in concepts nor in language does anything ever stand isolated. But concepts actually become related only when the personality acts in inner unity, when full subjectivity radiates toward complete objectivity. When the soul actually awakens to the feeling that language is not merely a means of exchange for mutual understanding, but a real world, which the spirit must set between itself and objects by an inner exertion of its powers, the soul is on its way to finding more and more in language and to putting more and more into it.

—Wilhelm von Humboldt

Thomas Schneitzner announces his seriousness with a dangerous looking sky wall piece that juts out into the entryway of the Bonnerkamp Gallery, where his fourth solo show in New York opened last month. The painted triangular end of “Follow” forces us aside and signals the risks involved in being unaware; at the height of cool, its casual painterly surfaces reveal the pleasure in doing so, yet the painting itself points to the weakest in the show. It’s at a larger scale that Schneitzner finds his stride.

Scheitntzr had over a year to work on his tour de force and described the conditions as ideal. Everything found its place. In the central gallery, though not immediately recognizable as such, a dignified map of the world in warm and cool greens, blues, and browns, covered with gold leaf and imposingly a mosaic of known and unknown territories. It’s a painting with a grand vision, from a painter born in the East who seems not to have registered that painting was ever deemed capable of anything else.

Divided into three horizontal sections, “Map I (Old Map)” correlates information at radically different scales. What looks like the floor plan of a simple apartment in the top band sits alone, while multiple similar shapes represent Holland, Senegal, or Tibet. On the bottom a subtly lettered N breaks the boundaries of the tripartite divisions in which a charted land mass is divided with a beautifully tinted drip that lands where the solid divides from the outlined, the white from the black. The map is out of proportion—Canada seems to be absent, and the apartment is bigger than Japan —yet as we navigate this world a myriad of thoughts arise.

The complexity of this painting and its ability to sustain attention stands in marked contrast to “Sundial,” a kaleidoscope of colorful pieces just to the left that references time rather than being in it. This shift reveals the limits inherent to the method of abstraction that grounds Scheitntzner’s endeavor in the process of translating from the collective image bank. Is the truth located in the source material or is Scheitntzner’s process capable of generating his own? While “Sundial” recalls Bosch’s “Seven Deadly Sins and Four Heavenly Virtues” with its outlying circles, the methodology of translation doesn’t serve here as a tool for plumbing the depths and we quickly move on.

“Map II,” with its baroque-like superstructure heading out for the great beyond, suggests the possibility of charting indeterminacy as it shifts from a plan to the classically oriented view and looks through an owl window. Scheitntzner has developed vocabulary elements that point to its own roots, like the series of stacked rectangles that he deploys to locate the urban in the


...playful...Tiny bits of neon yellow offer a whole expanse of blue violet and stripes of rocket red stream through the white ground. Associations are plentiful here, but nonetheless we remain on the surface. Contextualized within this exhibition, it adds pop to what otherwise might be read as a classical bent.

Scheitntzner’s drawings expose us to a wide range of his interests and give clues about the development of specific forms. These idiosyncratic and quirky studies provide a sense of the personality of the artist. Bringing to mind Martin Kippenberger and Rosemarie Trockel, they help to locate him within a tradition.

A few blocks away, David Row opens the season for Von Lintel. His new paintings seem lighter and more expansive, deeper has replaced flatness without compromising the solid foundation Row has built for himself, mirroring has given way to an exploration of paired relationships. The colors are jarring as you enter and yet extremely specific; they mark a shift from a major to minor key in Row’s palette.

The screaming yellow ground in “Inside Out” is tinted by the interplay of peachy orange and crimson meander; on the left darkly drawn geometric forms float while floating dots claim their side of the composition in a nod to abstraction’s long held autonomy of organic and the geometric forms just off center, a small red circle lies tangential to the overbearing crimson meander and then erupts up to a cosmic dimension that evokes the interconnectedness yet separability of time and space. Working with simple elements, a circle, a triangled geometric form, the meandering brushstroke, and his ground, Row posits a number of different spatial relationships between them, and in doing so is able to bring forth conditions of intimacy.

"Radiating World" calmly holds down the front room, its luminous geometries run parallel to the canvas edge; there’s a playfulness here that comes in as a pretty girl pink swept over a spring green and renders a depth that is photographic. The grey-green forms create chance configurations that confirm the desire of these two colors to separate. The eye searches out pathways and focuses in them, using memory to aid in the process. Color and form have achieved an equilibrium that causes the classic hierarchy to teeter.

"Body and Soul" stayed with me after the opening and I found myself coming back to the complex web of relationships between its two forms. On the left, a solid embryonic form located within the boundaries of a circumscribed geometry has just the twist and turns needed to give it a sense of life. Its similarity to and difference from the white meandering brushstroke that forms the painting’s other half initiates a back and forth dance for the eye that leads the mind back to the painting’s title. Scared over a dot screen, the painted substance of the meander gives detachment, and like the construction around the embryo creates a perspective from which we can contemplate the subject.

When the logic developed out of Row’s fixed vocabulary limits rather than expand our spatial experience it falls flat. The aptly titled “No Promises” disappoints. An autistic green meander ties the blue circles to its path and the symmetrical geometry of the ground is incapable of the levity or breadth that would render it a counterpoint.

A lime yellow-green scraped over a full-bodied yellow (the color most commonly associated with accident) forms the ground for a wide carmine lacquer stroke. Orange circles float in the field as a shinier than line meanders beside and below the deep-set red one. In “Tiefer Paar,” Row’s structure hints at the complexity visible from the longer perspective that life gives us. Symmetry has given way to a notion of the pair as qualitatively matched, the brush is held to keep time with the broad fluid red, their pairing speaks of the inherent as opposed to the obvious.

In “Waves of Desire,” multiple layers of Row’s new meandering lines set up similar shifts in color from underneath an ebullient orange ground. Barely visible this undertone provides a distant echo to the racing blue on the surface. In and among these interwoven meanders, five yellow circles locate spatial coordinates to render depth palpable. There is solemnity here in a field of lyricism that makes laughter seem like the most profound emotion on earth, a joy in the resonant possibility of color and its ability to lift the spirit.

Row worked on these paintings all summer, while kids, often just looking for a way to finance their education, were being shot down half way around the globe in a Grandiose miscalculation. They do not betray the gravity of their time so much as they move us as if to alleviate the weight of the soul without excess or decadence.