

The Poise of the Head und die anderen folgen

by Katharina Grosse

In 2005 I was invited to do an in-situ piece for Solvent Space of Richmond University, Virginia. While waiting for all the prep work to be done, I decided to spend half the day in the vast collections of the Museum of Fine Arts. ¶ Amongst the people that happened to arrive with me, a little eight year old boy stood out wearing yellow rubber boots, jeans, a big yellow t-shirt and a black cowboy hat. ¶ After having purchased the ticket I went to the loo and all of a sudden there was a yellow rubber boot poking through from under the other booth, showing a ball pen drawing on its lower part. ¶ It was after viewing the Chinese and Indian collections that I realized I could not get this drawing from the ladies' toilet out of my head. So I went back looking for the boy to take a shot of the boot. ¶ It then dawned upon me that this little boy ensemble contained a lot of features crucial to the painting that most interests me: The piece moved through public space but connected to the framework of the museum. The support for the drawing expanded from boot to the whole boy, dramatically shifting the scale relationship from drawing and boot via drawing and boy to drawing and the whole environment of the boy and so forth. ¶ Questions, such as who was the author of the drawing, opened up. Did the boy wear the boot when the drawing was made? Was it made by himself or somebody much smaller than himself? ¶ From his carefully chosen clothes I deduced he was showing the drawing deliberately. It was shown, during this afternoon, not only in the museum's toilet but also in most of the museum's collections, causing a continuous contextual shift from private to public or to other artists' work. ¶ A ball pen is normally used for writing on a piece of paper. Its unorthodox usage, in this case, changed the meaning of the boot from waterproof footwear to a yellow three-dimensional pictorial surface. The blue lines established a relation to the yellow dissolving the connection between the yellow and the rubber and setting the surface free to being a coloured unfathomable space.



I probably painted this Easter egg at the age of ten. My mother must have kept it all those years. She gave it to me around 2003 with a big laugh telling me how much she thought it was connected to what I was doing now. | The egg shape provided an endless surface (no beginning/no end), giving the egg and its drawing an expanding and difficult to determine scale. Similar to the boot drawing it is only by adopting a drifting point of view that the whole image unfolds to the spectator. ¶ As it cannot be seen as a whole, at once, the egg has to be turned in your fingers to reveal the complete drawing. The fingers always covering some of it relate to another order of scale and let the egg swing back to small. In this way the egg is always viewed through various shifting temporal and spatial perspectives. ¶ It is the image that disconnects the egg furthermore from its daily use and expected function. ¶ Both boot- and egg-matrix reflect crucial issues of my work: the drifting point of view, the transformation of the support's meaning through painting, the arbitrariness of the context, size and scale shifts within the work's structure and the temporal and performative quality of it.





This was the first time I used a spray gun to make a painting in relationship to space and its volume. Until then I had used paintbrushes, covering the full wall space going in regular movements from left to right or up and down thus creating different over layering colour segments. ¶ When showing canvases I also used to make them correspond to the given wall dimensions until I thought that was a too sculptural interpretation of the situation. ¶ Painting evokes illusionistic space that follows different rules than built space; that's why it should make different use of the space it is shown in and display its independence from the surrounding set up by underscoring an incongruent relationship to it. ¶ The painting optically destabilized the corner of the room letting it appear soft or even dissolved. I intended to show painting's independence of the support's coherence, i.e. the architectural structure. ¶ In Bern I decided to show a painting sitting up in the right corner; that was where my gaze ended up when entering the room for the first time. ¶ The light came through windows in the opposite wall, filtered by the green of pine trees. The phthalo green of my painting reflected in a very artificial way the outside context and despite its monochrome nature developed a polychrome character. ¶ Spraying paint on a wall has a very different effect on the working method than using a paintbrush. There is no physical contact with the wall anymore. The brush not only feeds back the disposition of the surface linking the painter more strongly to the surface's construction but it also covers what is being painted that very moment. The painter only sees a little later what they did a moment before. The spray gun's movement is less related to body or support but it allows the activity of painting and looking to happen at the same time and to coincide. The movement of the spray gun is more related to the movement of the eyes than to the movement of the body in space. In a way it dematerializes the painter. The body-size painting-size relationship is given up. The eye movement places painted areas in out-of-body-size relationships. This is why the artificial enlargement of the painter's body (ladders, scissor lifts) goes along with the continuous development and expansion of the work.

Whereas Bern was just slightly different in size from my studio work, the Sao Paulo piece refocused the relationship of scale and distance. From far away the painting in Niemeyer's large biennale building looked nothing but a crayon scribble made by a giant. From close up it reduced the spectator to a little figure barely able to take in a small section. ¶ The viewing angles significantly altered the appearance of the piece. Coming down the ramp one would first see the wall, whereas from the lower ramp or the side wings the ceiling became the prominent view. ¶ Corrugated iron roller doors and two toilet entries were part of the painting. You could get to the men's and ladies' bathroom by walking through my work.





This was the office building of an old glass factory before it was turned into Berlin's city museum. I selected the site as an exhibition venue having decided to make an outdoor work. It was included in the city structure and life, exposed to all weather, to the dark and to day light mode. ¶ The viewing distance of the painting in the open city could be endlessly expanded. ¶ The building was used as a complete object offering a complex structure comprising a number of components such as windows, doors, blind racks or drainpipes. The paint covered and transformed these components in various ways dislocating and inverting the presence of drainpipes etc as if the building was turned inside out. Also inverting the function of aspects of the building, most noticeably blinding the windows with an opaque paint-skin. ¶ We were working from a 5 storey high scaffolding fully wrapped in tarpaulins. While working the piece could never be looked at as a whole from far. ¶ I had no sketched out plan or preconceived idea according to which I would then evolve the work. First we coated large parts with white to get brilliant colours and to delineate the maximum size of the painting. Then I worked in large overlapping movements reaching often over 2-3 storeys. I painted the following sequences from remembering the previous movements, not aiming at an envisioned optical result but making decisions in relation to the detailed close-up experience. I stopped when the structure started to lose the transparency of its own making. ¶ What I had in mind was to give part of the building's static-functional appearance an absurd metamorphic meaning similar to a gigantic bruise.

I had made quite a few in-situ paintings just prior to this work, all of them connected to set time frames and opening dates. I wanted to see whether scale shifts could also be achieved in normal sized rooms with an everyday use. In order to understand the function of different sized objects and to analyze their figurative or narrative quality I made this painting in my bedroom. ¶ Deliberately choosing a very private space of small scale filled with personal possessions and with no public access, I took it the way I had left it the day before. Nothing got specially arranged. ¶ The bed added a strongly metaphoric layer to the piece. In a more formal sense it introduced a discussion between horizontal and vertical planes. Whereas with our feet on the ground we are in a measurable relation with our environment, when in bed our understanding of space and volume is shifted and unlimited. ¶ The books, the clothes, the money, the little paintings and photographs on my writing desk embedded references of fiction and the anecdotal into the painted field. ¶ Spraying over door, walls, cardboard boxes, books, clothes, the bed and on the floor in one unbroken spray gun movement, the objects gave up their individual contours to share the painted structure of the image. ¶ At times the paint was absorbed and swallowed by soft velvety clothes or the cotton of the sheets. In places the painted over objects gave a lot of volume to the thin layer of acrylic paint evoking the effect of body in oil paintings. In this way the movements of the paint took up different densities and intensities as if different time units were linked to one another. ¶ The dis-congruency of the painting towards the environmental set-up was now visible on a more detailed level.



In Odense the bedroom experience was expanded to fit a large-scale room including a 4x15m Montana bookshelf, three very large paintings, the doors of the museum and an imported fake oak floor that covered the original one. The Double Floor Painting. ¶ The bookshelf was completely filled with second hand books leaving no gaps. It sat on the same wall as two large canvases coming from my studio, mimicking the qualities of a pictorial support on the one hand and just looking like a very large bookshelf on the other. It linked the museum space to the atmosphere of a private living room that came out a little too big. Only the books would allow the visitor to re-scale the experience and to recognize an object of a familiar size from close by. ¶ For larger works like this one I made a model beforehand to think about the size of the canvases or the bookshelf. The 4x8m net structured painting existed already but I had to paint it again for the show, as I did not own it anymore. The one next to it I specially made for the installation, 6x3m; it shows a large centered oval shaped form; on the white canvas it looked like a large pancake leaning against the wall. I wanted to exaggerate the object/ground icon and to accentuate the height of the space. ¶ The shelf, the canvases and the floor were camouflaged by the painted film and became unified. ¶ The combination of wall and floor painting turned out to be very surprising. Painting on the two different planes united them into a seamless continuity setting up one coherent movement running along the wall and then sliding down onto the floor stretching into the last corner of the room. This made the whole painting take on an enormous dimension, rescaling the already large canvasses and bookshelf to a fraction of their original size. ¶ Looking at the wall and standing on the painted floor at the same time you would discover yourself in the work and on top of it triggering off a sensation of being above it or even distanced from it. The contrast of being wrapped and separated seemed to dissolve into each other and generate another state of being. ¶ The all over painting constituted an image value, i.e. the activity of painting does not merely produce traces of its own action but it clearly is the result of the mental capacity to understand and generate structures according to painting's pictorial logic.



In this work I introduced a new element replacing the numerable objects by an uncountable mass, the soil. The painted soil referred to pigment as the basic ingredients of paint; it could also be read as colored earth, contaminated nature or thickened paint. The color on the soil could be looked at as the mere light reflections coming from the colored walls or as being artificially lit from above as the space had skylights. ¶ The soil connected the wall and floor planes establishing a new space on which the canvas sits. ¶ In this group I started a feedback loop structure to integrate studio work into a flexible in-situ process, where different time modes and scale definitions were intertwined. ¶ I painted the soil, floor, the empty canvas and the walls at the same time, and then shifted the canvas from the right wall to the left, turning it from a horizontal to vertical position. This movement both exposed the unpainted space behind it and covered some of the painted parts of the other wall. ¶ The inserted canvas was smaller than the shifted one. Surrounding the inserted canvas the white field appeared like a flat well lit showcase. I painted the two-spiraled turquoise dots on gessoed canvas to make them look like two objects on a white sheet sitting in a specific white field. The dots were an image of the smallest unit in a spray finish. ¶ The piece could be seen from above; the soil seemed to look like a landscape seen from a bird's-eye-view. In this context the size of the canvases was hard to understand. A white spray movement on the floor took up the soil's outline so that the earthen mass seemed to sit on a white field floating on the grey floor. ¶ The activity of the work took up a relatively small area of the whole gallery. In most cases I aimed at making the smallest version of the biggest possible piece for the given space. That often meant the painting's size would not be much bigger than half of the unpainted parts. In Duesseldorf instead I compressed all the information. The corner seemed to contain the plot from where the pictorial energy expanded into the whole room giving the whole space what I called image value earlier on.





Here two of the large paintings were partly painted over without being fully integrated into a wall painting. ¶ The left one was leaning against the wall. Its structure was painted wet in wet, the unstretched canvas lying on the floor. I walked into the wet, newly painted areas undoing with the dot like footprints what was being built up. When hung in the space I painted the lower third white with a roller to connect it optically to the wall and dematerialize its physicality. ¶ The painting in the middle, that was three by nine meters, took up an image type I had used earlier in the year for the Palais de Tokyo show. It consisted of two spatial systems: a broken surface constituted by large turquoise dots that became smaller towards the right end of the canvas. I had painted a line structure on top of it walking from the right upper corner back to the right lower corner covering the largest possible distance. All these movements added up to a centrist twisted space figure. When hanging, I sprayed into it to add a third movement to the two systems of the painting. This spraying added a soft ex-centric movement running from top to the bottom down the floor along the whole room. ¶ A new kind of feedback loop was set up through the painting, installing and over-painting of these works. The paintings can be taken into another context and possibly be painted over again, collecting different definitions resulting from their presence in various show constellations.

This was the most complex loop of integrated studio work, soil structure, canvas shifting and painted objects I had generated so far. It spread over four larger and three smaller spaces on two levels, some artificially lit others in daylight. The appearance of various light sources existing alongside the painted illusionistic light was one of my main interests in the show. ¶ Another intention was to develop one room out of the other. A thought would unfold during the painting process and take on another appearance in each room. ¶ Theatre spotlights directed strong light out of the semi-opaque window glass. A big heap of soil was mixed with thick Styrofoam boards and a light wire grid balanced colourful circles cut from antique stained glass under a skylight. In the third room you could walk on painted Dutch clay that pushed two large dot canvases towards the walls. In the fourth room I painted the floor as white as the walls, put seven circular canvases on top all of them different in size, spray painted the floor and then I took the tondi upstairs to the next room to put them on the walls in an irregular rhythm. This space looked like the inversion of the previous one. ¶ The tondi could be understood as single works or as small sections of a larger coherent invisible surface. The large white circles left on the floor when the tondi were removed were disturbing to walk on, evoking holes in the floor or the sensation of a spotlight on the painting itself. ¶ From the upper level you could look down into the second room catching some of the soil's foothills through the stained glass circles partly colouring your vision and appearing as enlarged floating spray dots. ¶ The reminding small rooms displayed a heap of white wooden boxes that I thought of as a schematic three-dimensional enlarged model of canvas' microstructure. The boxes were sitting in loose stacks on a very low pedestal in front of a canvas that was propped up with another two boxes. ¶ I painted very lightly over the whole set up, approaching it from all sides and creating spray shadows from every direction. Then the canvas was moved to close the next space off creating a one meter wide corridor between the windows and the painting. Some light traces were left behind the box stacks as if a magician had caused the evaporation of the objects. ¶ The most important features genuinely inherent to painting are to me synopsis and non-causal structure: the first annihilating linear time flow and the latter letting cause and effect coincide to the extent that the vision of the world constantly turns out to be ambiguous and relative. Both break down hierarchic order and challenge western societies' dualistic and causal foundations. This is why painting is so interesting today. Its medium is non-affirmative and anarchic. Its political potential is rooted here. ¶ This potential unfolds when outside information is imported into the medium's specific loop. This import needs to be transformed and its mental content to be made the blueprint of the working method bringing forth the medium's new conventions. ¶ This is where the differences are between site-specific work and autonomous work. The first introducing "life" into the art loop thus shifting via the context "life's" meaning, the latter expanding the work's condition even into theatricality to provide the transformational liquid to fuel the act of transcendence opening up the experience of the spiritual core of the work.





I had been working on different sculptural units for a little while alongside my usage of found materials. Some consisted of more or less mathematical elements such as spheres or ovoids, some of them were rooted in organic forms coming from stones or boulders. I was curious to find out how to substitute the soil, clothes, furniture etc. I had used so far to dramatize the various aspects of paint's volume. ¶ Faux Rocks was made for Helga de Alvear's gallery space in Madrid. ¶ I had a mobile sculptural structure built and I painted it in situ. ¶ My main interest was to create an artificial sculptural surface that would carry the image into the volume of the architecture. ¶ I do not consider painting as extending its structure into the surrounding field, understood as the given architectural context, nor as deliberately opening up to associative subject matters „created“ by the recipient. ¶ I rather understand it as a small visible part of an agglomeration of independently interrelating organisms that exist in invisible information pools. The connection between the painting and its invisible reservoir is comparable to the way the ball pen drawing refers to the little boy wearing the yellow boot or, put another way, to the relation of a footprint and the body that caused it. ¶ Nevertheless I believe we cannot deduce the appearance of the invisible mass the painting is made of since I read a painting as a side product of the existing whole rather than an abstract of the whole that continuously refers to its infinite structure. ¶ This reasoning made me investigate possible support features existing independently from architecture. I blew them up to construct a simultaneous view of the image's evocation in volume on the one hand and its reliance on a projection plane for visibility on the other.



Town and Country, Copenhagen

2006

This is the largest earthwork I was able to realize so far. Nearly two thirds of the Art & Design Factory in Copenhagen was covered with soil, damaged furniture, steel containers and paint. ¶ This old factory built at the beginning of the 20th century provided an ambiguous setting for the work. It is used for workshop and preparation activities as well as to stage shows. ¶ The provisional condition of the space permitted me to explore, more extremely than previously, transitional qualities inherent in the work. The piece looked very much like a building site, loosely organized and yet on its way to a meaningful cohesive structure. ¶ Rather than achieving a finished self-sufficient work, the situation allowed the surrounding set-up to subversively infiltrate the different semantic layers of one's thought process. ¶ The provisional structure of the space's usage accentuated the temporal, unfixated qualities in the work. ¶ There is a continual coming-into-being in the work. The potentiality for change and emergence and the potential for the elements used to assume various semantic identities. ¶ For example the containers becoming perhaps little huts or jewel boxes or frames revealing slanted doors leading into hidden underground hide aways. ¶ This leaves us with the question: Is what you see what you see?

1. Katharina Grosse, untitled (boot), 2005, Richmond  
Photo: Katharina Grosse,  
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2. Katharina Grosse, untitled, (painted egg), 1973,  
felt pen on empty chicken's egg, appr. 6,2 x 4,8 cm,  
Düsseldorf  
Photo: Olaf Bergmann  
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3. Katharina Grosse, untitled, 1998, acrylic on wall,  
450 x 1250 x 400 cm, Kunsthalle Bern,  
Photo: Michael Fontana, Basel  
© Katharina Grosse and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2007

4. Katharina Grosse, untitled, 2002, acrylic on wall,  
500 x 5000 cm, "Cidades/Cities",  
25. Bienal de Sao Paulo, Iconografias Metropolitanas,  
Sao Paulo 2002,  
Photo: Nelson Kon  
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5. Katharina Grosse, untitled, 2003,  
acrylic on aluminium, concrete, glass and plastic,  
1300 x 1000 x 1000 cm, Berlinische Galerie,  
Fred-Thieler-Preis für Malerei 2003,  
Photo: Olaf Bergmann  
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6. Katharina Grosse, untitled (the bedroom), 2004,  
acrylic on wall, floor and various objects,  
280 x 450 x 400 cm, Düsseldorf,  
Photo: Nic Tenwiggenhorn  
© Katharina Grosse and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2007

7. Katharina Grosse, untitled, 2004,  
acrylic on canvas, bookshelves, wall and floor,  
680 x 3800 x 1100 cm, Double Floor Painting,  
Kunsthallen Brandts Klædefabrik, Odense,  
Photo: Torben Eskerod  
© Katharina Grosse and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2007

8. Katharina Grosse, "The Poise of the Head  
und die anderen folgen", 2004,  
acrylic on wall, floor, soil and 2 canvases,  
900 x 900 x 1100 cm, raumfürraum,  
Kunsthalle Düsseldorf/Kunstverein für die Rheinlande  
und Westfalen, Düsseldorf 2004,  
Photo: Nic Tenwiggenhorn  
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9. Katharina Grosse, "Something leadlight", 2005,  
acrylic on wall, PVC-floor and canvas,  
480 x 2020 x 939,5 cm, Kunsthall Bergen,  
Photo: Torben Eskerod  
© Katharina Grosse and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2007

10. Katharina Grosse, "Holey Residue",  
De Appel, Amsterdam, 2006,  
acrylic on wall, floor and soil,  
371,5 x 1430 x 646 cm, (partial view),  
Photo: Johannes Schwartz  
© Katharina Grosse and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2007

11. Katharina Grosse, "Faux Rocks", 2006,  
acrylic on wood on styrofoam on polyurethane,  
320 x 700 x 440 cm, "Faux Rocks",  
Galería Helga de Alvear, Madrid,  
Photo: Galería Helga de Alvear  
© Katharina Grosse and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2007

12. „Town And Country“, 2006,  
acrylic on soil, floor, steel container and tin shelves,  
250 x 3800 x 3000 cm,  
The Factory for Art and Design, Copenhagen,  
Photo: Torben Eskerod  
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