

## From Figure on the Margins to Furniture without Model (2007 to 2020)

Painting the same model over a ten-year period had not been my initial intention. Perhaps we developed something of a creative interdependence. Hansjörg Zauner volunteered to pose for me on a frequent basis, and was in a position to be generous with his time. As a visual artist and writer of experimental literature, he was an inspiring model – you might even say, a muse. And yet, the series *Figur am Rand (Figure on the Margins)* also documents my struggle to liberate my paintings from his presence. I ended our collaboration half a year before his passing in 2017.

In the *Stuhlkörper* series I created for my diploma thesis, as well as my early paintings of male subjects, the body is positioned, like an island, at the centre of the image – its unicoloured form dominating both the foreground and background. Over time, objects began to emerge from the painted surface – initially only in the form of lines – and developed independently. I aimed to engage with items in the room in the manner of Zauner's linguistic approach – translating his playfully absurd cascades of words into a visual medium, by reducing objects to the one aspect that appealed to me at that moment, and spontaneously combining them with other parts of my surroundings. The inanimate objects in my studio were brought to life as I transposed their surfaces – fabric, wood, plastic – into painted form. Eventually, I imbued them with the same intensity as the subject's skin.

Throughout the years of being repeatedly painted, objects such as the chair, the table and the airbed grew to be of equal significance to the depicted model, and developed a character that can be actively positioned either alongside, or in opposition to the human figure. Particularly the airbed with its many vibrant colours was an item I employed as a dominant, indefinable juxtaposition to the model.

In the series *Figure on the Margins* I also applied the method of spontaneous fragmentation to the model himself – breaking up the body into sections, and interweaving them with their surroundings to create new islands of colour (i.e. *rudern / Rowing, 2015*).

I am fascinated by human skin in all its hues, both in terms of a membrane between the internal and the external, and as a reflector of the subject's respective surroundings. Larger areas of skin, such as a person's back, allow for a different visual approach than the delicate structures of a face or hand. Skin is unique in both colour and fragrance, it is fragile and transient, constantly changing under the influence of temperature and light. In addition,

skin is confronted with clothing or items of furniture within a room. These encounters between skin and the external environment – between the human body and inanimate objects – and their translation into painting, have interested me ever since my university days. One of the reasons I first embarked on painting a male subject, was to explore my own attitudes towards masculinity, and make my perceptions visible to myself.

Zauner's favourite colour was pink, and he often wore a pink overall on special occasions, such as public readings of his work. Given the slightly cooler temperatures in my studio during the winter months, I had the idea of integrating this full-body suit with its pink drapery into the painting. When children create pictures of people and faces, they use pink as a skin colour. I found it interesting to juxtapose the medley of green, purple, orange, pink, brown and red tones I had used to paint the model's skin, with this simplified, homogenous area of skin-like colour. The pink overall has a flesh-like quality, and almost seems like a feminine disguise.

While working on a painting, I usually feel inspired to approach the same scene from another angle or with a different colour scheme that might be even more conducive to getting to the heart of the image. This concept of repetition makes the working process both easier and more condensed. It keeps me from being distracted by questions of technique – ideally enabling a transcendent experience whereby I step outside of myself to intuit new visual solutions.

All of my work is based on scenes I have orchestrated in my studio after much deliberation, as well as trial and error. My studio serves as a stage for the model and, equally, the table and chairs. The scenes are enhanced by my own sculptures, or by materials left over from the painting process, such as rags, tubes and razorblades. These debris are presented in the manner of relics, and imbued with poetic associations through titles such as *Cloud*, *Skin*, or *Amber Expansion*. For example, the figure in the painting *Hey (2015)* sits within a space that is outlined by stretched string, and in which a painting rag is displayed as a wall-hanging.

While I generally adhere to the rules of spatial perspective, my omission-based method of working sometimes tilts the background into the foreground – which places the figure in an ambiguous, fragile in-between space. This space describes the balance between the potential dual meaning of private spaces: a longed-for retreat shaped by one's own preference and taste as well as a place of loneliness and personal confinement. It is a space, in which disorientation becomes visible.

I am not drawn to creating shrill or shocking imagery. I don't feel the need to position my model in painful poses as a means of introducing tension to the image. I also avoid explicit depictions of the model's face or genitalia, as either would focus the viewer's gaze, and thereby counteract my endeavour to create a balanced composition of colour and form. I tend to incorporate content-based tension into the dialogue between the figure and its surroundings – in other words: into the question as to whether the body dominates the setting, or to what extent it can be relegated to its margins; whether the figure is a part of its surroundings, or a foreign entity that is lost within the image.

Painting a life model is an interactive process. Although most of the image is created in the model's absence, the atmosphere and exchanges that take place during the sittings inevitably flow into the painting.

Painting allows the artist to translate experiences that happen over extended periods of time into the materiality of colours and lines, as well as a very personal brushstroke. During our sessions, Hansjörg Zauner was always very talkative, only briefly pausing his animated gesticulations at my request to hold a pose. For me, the continuously changing nature of a living reality presents the most exciting challenge.

Transposing a live scene onto canvas without technical aids can give rise to inaccuracies – but it can also facilitate precision. For example, a snapshot photo will never render a model's skin tone in the same way I see it when the person stands before me. For this reason, I chose to work with a life model, rather than on the basis of photographs.

I worked with Hansjörg Zauner as my sole life model from 2007 to 2017. The subsequent, furniture-centred paintings celebrate what has now turned into a model-free studio space – although the table and chairs still continue to serve as models in their own right. In these past years, furniture items have played an important role as carriers of amber hues. The texture of a wooden surface, or the light reflecting off a tabletop, perfectly echo sensuous depictions of human skin.

As in my previous, model-based paintings, I continue to limit myself to those details whose implementation is of particular interest to me. For example, I might paint only the back of a chair – capturing the interplay of light created by incoming rays of sun. I then try to build connections between the resulting fragments, using new and sometimes challenging perspectives. Once they have been brought into correlation with each other, the fragmented objects form intriguing hybrids that can no longer be directly traced back to the studio's interior.

I essentially work on the premise that the subject is not decisive for the quality of the final painting. The real question is: which scenario allows for the highest degree of emotional intensity during the painting process – because this intensity is the energy, that can ultimately touch the viewer.

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