

In >pintura< veritas

In a work of art, the point is never any kind lesson; paintings that can be interpreted and contain meaning are bad paintings. A painting presents itself as the unclear, illogical, meaningless. It demonstrates the innumera- bility of the aspects, it takes away our sense of security because it takes from us the opinion and the name of a thing. It shows us the thing in its multitude of meanings and its infinitude which leave no room for an opinion and view.

Gerhard Richter, 1964/65

Favorite color: colorfulness. The encounter with Yago Hortal's paintings has something of an unprotected impact—for a moment, our thoughts are frozen, as if in shock, leaving our head speechless, until eventually word fragments piece themselves together. The various bloggers who here and there vent their feelings on the over-active Internet are stuck in this phase: they can hardly get beyond cascades of gushing “wows.” Once our thoughts sort themselves out a little further, the brain reproduces an image of flashily chaotic, screaming colorfulness that defies all description. And then: a system articulates itself, but it is as of yet still vague, be it because our synapses, trained by constant sound assaults and a visual sensory overload, switch to normal or everyday mode, or because the work of the artist humbles itself onomatopoeically into comprehensible color structures and manageable formats. Bungee jumping of the senses, but the impact remains a confusion in the cerebellum, though in the end undivided enthusiasm wins the day. That, too, is a phenomenon when we behold Hortal's paintings: without understanding what is not visible on his paintings, there is a fascination that works very immediately and exhilarates us, at first staggeringly and then rhythmically, or even allows us to submerge ourselves into a space of color which opens up in front of our eyes so quaffably, as if they were rocking in lovely intoxication. However much we may submit to the gestural impulse in the work that seems to drive the flow of color, we cannot elude the clarity that gives the seeming clamor of the colorfulness its indescribable preci- sion and throws the intellect back on itself and its reflexes. Torn between sensual movement and a retardingly laconic thoughtfulness, the painter shows us the disparate field of tension that characterizes his perception of the present, and we begin to realize that there is a great deal of an awareness of life in these paintings, which we cannot let go of for good reason, because we also recognize ourselves and our present in them. And here it doesn't matter in the end whether the beholder reads things into the paintings that the artist never intended. It takes your breath away how Yago Hortal invents the space into the pictorial plane with such dynamic and yet controlled force. When he draws with a broad trace of shades of reddish-purple, blue, and green a reversed “Z” across an entire large painting, this is initially only an orphically rhythmitized accord with a signaling effect. The stretch of paint is spatially differentiated at the turns, where the direction changes and forms waves that lead into drops reminiscent of spray, which in turn define the background as quasi-spatial structures, a back- ground which is sometimes monochromatic, sometimes multicolored. Our habits of perception seduce us into recognizing things, even if we don't want to—on this painting, we really want to circle the drops with our eyes,

on other paintings, we associate rural formations, spherical phenomena, or similar things, other works seem to be painted from the perspective of an astronaut, for example when below a shapeless swirl of color something like a deep, dark lake seems to open up in the middle of landmasses in streaks that seem as far away as satellites. Of course none of that is on Hortal's mind, but for him ideas are free, and he is happy to admit them all. His smaller works, even more so than the large and medium-sized ones, inspire us to behold them in a reified way: a blazing yellow with reddish heated edges and darkly separated fragments seems to be a part of a liquid stream of lava or metal; in another, starkly contrasting painting, we seem to see a freezing cold waterfall motif that rushes downwards in roaring veils of color, only to collect in weightless mountains of waves, culminating in the above-mentioned crystalline, floating drops. While the very heavy masses of paint condescend to slight elevations, in the small formats from his most recent phase, Hortal experiments with relief-like elevations which give a haptic, spatial quality to his frequently used interlacing of colors. Yago Hortal makes his abstractions comprehensible, but he rejects from his view and perception a felt world of things. Recently, he has consistently countered the potentially meaningful horror vacui with lyrically delicate shades of color on a blank background that only want to be color, blue today, red tomorrow: an adventure of completely free beholding, a game of the senses, a feast for the eyes.

Sometimes I talk to my pictures. “At six, I wanted to become a cook, at seven Napoleon – and then I became Dalí”, is how the famous painter summed up his eccentric life. His compatriot Yago Hortal, who was born in 1983 in Barcelona, was six years old when this surrealist par excellence died. It is possible that at that point he wanted to become someone like Dalí; after all, Picasso and Miró, two of the most important artists of the 20th century, were then still very much alive in the spirit of Spaniards who after the end of the Franco regime were eager to rediscover their own creative roots. However that may be, since the young star Hortal, whose demeanor is anything but wild, has nothing Napoleonic about him, it is interesting to note that the profession of a cook is quite close to what he does: a sense of preparation, a sensitivity for timing, the ability to concoct colorful creations, and an appetizing presentation are only the most obvious parallels – all the way to the question of taste, which lies in the judgment of the chef/painter on the one hand and the gourmet/beholder on the other hand.

In the eyes of the mad Dalí this would be a step back, but from the perspective of today, Yago Hortal very obviously strikes a cord that is slowly being heard in the art world (the cult around celebrity chefs is already well established). While some still look to Asia and Africa, many see new trends coming above all from Spain. Hortal, who studied in Barcelona and Seville, came to Berlin in 2010, and despite his youth, he already plays in an international league and has already exhibited in New York. That Germany, and Berlin in particular, plays an important role is hardly an accident: Hortal's only slightly older colleagues Miki Leal and José Otero are quite present here, as well as Joan Cabrer and the even younger Hugo Fontela, all of whom make the most of the international stage that Berlin offers. This generation of artists, encouraged by of all things the new figurative painting, has made space for abstract art at the hearth, which in Berlin was fired up by people like Christian Awe and others. The recipes for geometric abstraction as well as those for gestural-expressive or informal abstraction are all used, but what these artists create by mixing these is absolutely new, fresh, true to life. The climate for non-figurative art has been traditionally favorable in Germany since the 1950s, which is why the latest trends have a particular strong standing here. And all the Spaniards who have settled in Berlin for a shorter or indeed longer time ensure an influx of fresh blood into the city, where the climate can sometimes be

a bit cloudy. Yago Hortal, who in his small studio in Berlin-Schöneberg lets nobody take the colorful whirlwind out of his sails, fuels the art scene with his tireless creative urge, and in his works professes his commitment to his neighborhood as well. The works painted in his Berlin studio have in their title an abbreviation of the street where he works. This makes it theoretically possible to trace his life paths through Spain and Germany. Young artists know where the creative kitchens are, where the latest trends are simmering. But there is one thing he doesn't do: if you observe him at work you realize that he doesn't jump on any trendy bandwagon. He ponders even his perfectly accomplished works meticulously and self-critically. Those who aren't satisfied own the world. This is all the more true because he is not guided by motifs, but rather by emotion, which at times calls for flamenco, at other times for jazz as a stimulant. Sometimes he speaks with his paintings, and who would doubt that they are brightly eloquent. This is important as part of the process, because in spite of all the passion, Hortal is concerned with the sober philosophical sequence of action, reaction, consequence. The aim of this dialogic structure is on the one hand the path to art as art itself, and on the other hand the attempt to control the ubiquitous chaos. This also distinguishes him from kindred spirits like Gerhard Richter whose intention it is to veil reality; Yago Hortal is much too affirmative in his work to hide anything, on the contrary: even the veils smeared across the paintings are crystal clear, both in his small formats as well as on the very large canvases. Incidentally, he gets the fluorescent paints from his home country; the German paints are not strong enough for his taste, or to put it in culinary terms: the purity of the spices he finds only in Spain, but the kitchen can be anywhere in the world.

Günter Baumann, September 2011