

τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν ὁ χρόνος,  
ἀριθμὸς κινήσεως κατὰ τὸ πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον.

For more than twenty years and more systematically than most of his fellow artists, Herbert Maier has thought about the problem of time in painting; and he has not only thought about it, but has also acted upon his thoughts accordingly, both in artistic and in technical terms. His interest was, of course, never in a historical conception of time (for example: "Goya and his time"), but in a systematic or physical conception, as is also expressed in the definition by Aristotle above.<sup>1)</sup>

Largely simultaneously, Gottfried Boehm conducted his studies on aesthetics which are documented in the Herbert Maier catalogue of 2004 (published by the Morat Institute, Volume IV, p. 8).

An awareness of this problem – or at least the beginnings of such an awareness – already existed much longer ago: in his «Salon de 1763» Diderot writes about some of Chardin's still lifes: «Approchez-vous, tout se brouille, s'aplatit et disparaît: éloignez-vous tout se crée et se reproduit.»

In 1862, on seeing Chardin's Basket of Strawberries, the Goncourt brothers wrote of the «merveilleuse opération d'optique entre la toile et le spectateur, dans l'espace». This «merveilleuse opération» can only take place and be experienced in the course of time; where or when else?!

Let us turn to the largest work of the exhibition, the monumental painting ( 240x990 cm, 3 panels, see page 107) " Speicher - Grosses Mexiko". Considered in terms of content, it depicts part of the base of the wall of an Aztec temple, viewed close up. Herbert Maier most certainly did not intend to paint an architectural picture. The crucial aim of his work on this painting is to enable the openminded and observant viewer to have tangible experiences which are only possible in the process of looking when it is experienced over a period of time. This experiencing of time does not happen by means of some trick – to that extent it is no « trompe-l'œil » painting – but as a result of the eye's natural ability literally to jump back and forth between the convex and the concave. The time that the eye requires to switch from the surface to the space makes it possible to experience time. (Almost as a by-product, one is convincingly made to understand once again how obsolete the antagonism between abstraction and representationalism has always been.)

The painting technique that makes such experiments and experience possible is that of oil glaze painting of Jan van Eyck. In his incredibly persistent approach to his work, Herbert Maier has further developed and perfected this technique, which cost him not least a tremendous amount of time. The work of applying seventy to eighty glazes to this painting extended over more than an entire year. What is revealed under natural light conditions is that the light captured in this way has a constitutive character. The change in the mode of appearance of a painting with changing illumination is of fundamental significance. This, too, is an important aspect of Herbert Maier's work. There is no one mode of appearance of a painting, even though reproductions may suggest this. Our perception is subject to constant change.

<sup>1)</sup> Martin Heidegger: " Time is this; namely something counted in connection with motion, as encountered in the horizon of earlier and later." (Being and Time, p. 421)

Rainer Marten: " For that is time: that which is counted or the countable number of motions with regard to earlier and later." (memo to the author, July 24th 2009)