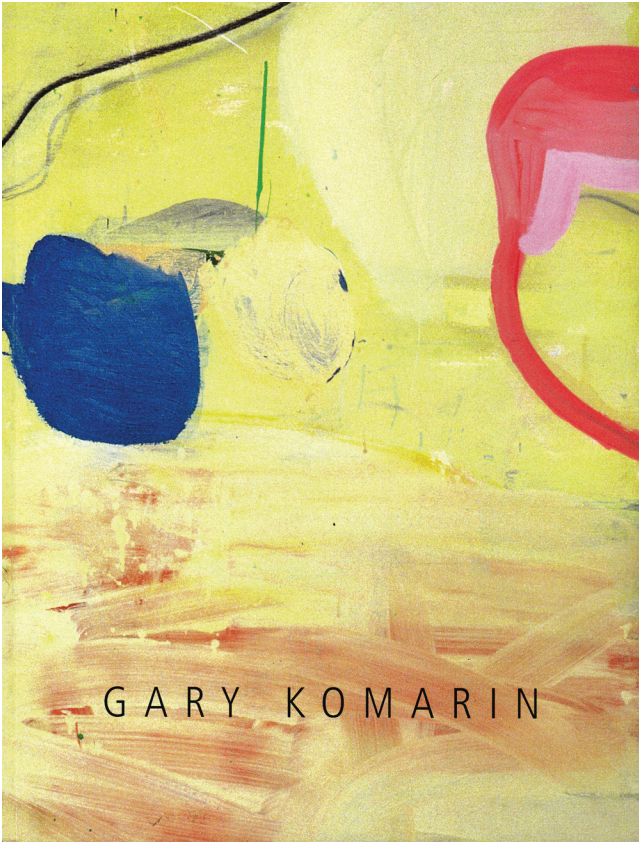


Abstraction and Figuration



The history of art in the last century was characterized by the tension between representational realism and abstraction. With Gary Komarin, certainly, it has long ceased to be an either/or situation, nor do we find him sustaining a balancing act or searching for a decision between two polar opposites. His pictures are rather defined by the mutual implication and interlocking of these two poles, with a nonchalance that appears to be self-explanatory but which actually, when you look closer, turns out to have been quite precisely calculated. Just as far removed from his painting are the intuitive and instinctive gestures of abstract expressionism, even if we can catch the occasional echo of it here. But this is not pure painting either – not that kind of painting which in an untroubled way can dedicate itself to the object, or the absence of an object, and find in that theme enough. This is because the mutual implicativeness that constitutes the composition is above all that of painting and drawing – however hard it may be to draw a sharp line between these two, when the brush functions as a draughtsman's pencil, while at the same time the outline it creates effects a gradual transition into a spot of colour. And this very point, where they appear to clash without any kind of mediation, is the point where they unite to create a tension-loaded harmony.

If it happens, from time to time, that a large monochrome surface dominates the picture, we are forced yet again to posit the question: 'Pure abstraction – is there really such a thing?' Does not the colour itself – when it dominates a picture in the form of <swimming pink> or <wilder blue> -- actually constitute its own theme, become the thing that the

picture is telling us about? In their very intensity, which can also be that of a highly differentiated grey or beige, these colours may liberate strong emotions that demand to be transcribed. And a more restrained monochromatic approach occasionally gives the picture the appearance of a wall – this is a topos of informal painting – on the surface of which time has left a deposit, both in the traces of weathering over many years and in the graffiti that someone has just recently inscribed there. But when we engage with the picture on a deeper level, it can suddenly open up again into mysterious depths – which are also those of the past.

Above all, associations with natural objects may also suggest themselves, and at times the artist emphasizes, through the titles he has chosen, that this is entirely intentional – that a shining blue stands for the sea, and an equally shining green stands for the almost violent outburst and onset of spring. The mere titles, though, do not explain anything – least of all those objects we find everywhere in the artist's canvases which suggest vessels or articles of luggage but in the last resort remain undefined and undefinable, constituting a kind of leitmotif, though to understand them as such in a literal sense would be highly misleading. Everything seems tangibly present, and yet remains intangible, as in the clarity of a dream: now it is a spot of colour, now it is a body in space, so that the picture is thrown into oscillation in a field of tension between the second and the third dimensions.

The titles indicate us that Gary Komarin is a great story-teller – though his stories, it must be said, can hardly be represented by verbal equivalents. But he just has to use a few allusive and yet cryptic words to succeed in summoning up the most varied range of recollections, and to prompt the imagination of the viewers to supply their own stories: to enter the space of the picture, and open themselves there to receive the moods and emotions it conveys. The possibility implied of being taken up into a picture is what gives many of these canvases something liberating, something that blesses and fulfils. This is in part the result of a factor that cannot be proved, though it may be felt: the subtle humour that shows itself over and over again in these pictures. More obvious is another aspect, doubtless a related one – an appearance of formal clumsiness, which actually makes us think at times of a child's drawings. A certain childlikeness – maybe, but then we must see it as a quality born from maturity or rediscovered on a new level, like that which Picasso so long had to struggle to achieve. And that is how all that is humorous about these pictures, all that delights in telling a story, appears against the background of a process of searching and discovery that is serious through and through.

Dr. Martin Kraft | 2004

(Translated from German into English)