

The Allure of Images

The squid streaks through the picture swift as an arrow. A dark blue cloud of ink surrounds the moist and glistening red body, its tentacles clad with suction cups. The light is refracted as it falls upon the large eye. Artist Stephanie Pech has brought the shy animal from the darkness of the sea onto the canvas and isolated it on a technically cool, monochromatic background. Now motionless, the animal can be viewed at leisure: What is the skin of the cephalopod like? How are the mantel-like body segments joined and interact? Where are stability and firmness to be suspected, where might tissues be soft and pliable? How are the pigments distributed on the skin? The painted studies of Stephanie Pech demand exact inspection, just as they force viewers to reflect skeptically on them. What do we really "see" in her work? Only what we already know? Or can we discover something new?

A visit to Stephanie Pech's studio opens the doors to astonishing worlds: furry magnolia buds, the erotic unfolding of an Amaryllis, moribund cuttlefish, squirming earthworms, flying slices of bologna. The nearly invisible cosmos of insects, marine animals hidden under the water's surface, individual blossoms, and simple things of everyday life become protagonists of her oftentimes large-format paintings. On the canvas they develop enormous vitality, their size is playfully enlarged, they take on luminous, energy-charged colors, and they seem to bond effortlessly with unrelated objects. Dead things seem alive, living things appear to be strangely lifeless. Textures and layers of color draw viewers' eyes into a deep, diffuse image space still recognizable as artistically fashioned surfaces. The surreal lays claim to reality and reality is unveiled as a theoretical construct.

Stephanie Pech describes her art as figurative. Ever since the first non-representational pictures were painted at the beginning of the 20th century, artists have felt compelled to designate their work either as figurative or abstract. And yet, an encounter with the creations of Stephanie Pech reveals that such categorization is neither precise nor helpful: Her stage-like still-lives, her ambiguous dream worlds, her strident color combinations, her multi-faceted image levels, and, above all, her subtle collage-like textures are woven into image events where object and color, subject and material, appear to interact, to breathe, to contend. In this complex visual world where optical impulses can no longer be trusted, the intellect is called on to help. Although things seem near enough to grasp, they remain apparitions, symbols, metaphor

Just as the figurative and the abstract are interestingly balanced in the works of Stephanie Pech, the actual painting process is an ongoing seesaw between coincidence and planning. When the subject matter has been selected, which is an always new and productive search-and-find activity, the artist approaches the motif more closely through photography and drawing. After the subject has been removed from its natural surroundings and exposed to the revealing light of clear portrayal, much time and exacting craft must still be invested by the artist. To introduce a conceptual counterpoint of unpredictability into her art, Stephanie Pech has for several years now made use of so-called anthropometry. After being covered in paint, a female dancer rolls her body on a canvas spread upon the floor, thus creating clouds and blurs of color that productively open up the image space for the artist. Informal, colored, non-compositions emerge and leave individual traces of the body; recognizable handprints and footprints remain. With characteristic precision Stephanie Pech then works into these "wild forms." From the "pure color" she develops the concretion, and the fleeting moment becomes an artistic statement.

The fascination of the artistic work of Stephanie Pech lies in the poetry of her settings, the luxuriant colors, the presence of objects, and, finally, the alluring surfaces whose artistic brilliance attracts the eye as a moth is drawn to the light. It is a delight to view her paintings and sense the vibrant energy with which she brings her images into the world and which accompanies her every brushstroke.

Martina Padberg, Bonn 2020

Translation: Albert Brancato