

## **Painting with the Fingers**

by Herbert Jochmann

As Martin Hentschel notices it is not seldom that today's works of painting materialize by way of artificial processes whose end is not yet foreseeable. By that is to be understood, according to Hentschel, "that the artists, when they start to work, do not operate with a preconceived pictorial idea, but also comprehend what appears before their eyes as a substantial factor of the pictorial genesis."<sup>1</sup> If one takes this observation of the author as a starting point for continuing reflections, then the question arises, how this action settles in artistic works. The process of painting with open starting point will be illuminated as follows with examples of selected works by Stephanie Jünemann, who developed her artistic position in the nineties.

A number of paintings have been produced by Stephanie Jünemann since 1994, not only with the aid in general of conventional tools, but also with the fingers which the artist employs as a substantial element for the production of pictures. Stephanie Jünemann uses her hand, especially the index, middle and ring fingers to structure the pigment on the pictorial surface. If one is made aware of the previous course of the artist's work, then it becomes clear that the pictures which came about by way of this process are not conceived as an ordered sequence or as a closed series, but are produced singularly in a chronological interval; they do make up any exorbitant, but, in the meantime, a remarkable component of the artistic production.

A tile which is coated with a smooth surface serves as a carrier. A squeegee is used as a technical implement to remove excess pigment from the pictorial surface. The artist prefers acrylic paint, because it is very thin and due to its particular consistency it allows a smooth and nearly mirroring surface come into being which does not lose its character with the repeated application of pigment. All these pictorial constituting elements are generally characteristic for Stephanie Jünemann's painting work, which also means that for the pictures, which are the object of contemplation. What clearly sets them apart from the other works of the artist is the fact that here lines are drawn in the freshly applied pigment with the fingers.<sup>2</sup>

With the use of the hand, it appears that artist is not concerned with the simplifying the process of painting, and not to be her concern either, executing impulsive actions. The pictures are mostly produced not only with the use of the fingers, but also with the aid of additional resources. Neither can the works be completed in one operational step. It requires some measures until the desired result is achieved. Frequently the pictures consist of several layers of pigment. Almost always it is necessary that the pigment, which is on the surface, dries first until another layer can be put on. Through this process it already becomes understandable that the works do not materialize by means of a simple process and from a spontaneous impulse.

At first appearances, there are indications which suggest that the aforementioned pictures are painted with the fingers; finger prints, for example, cannot be found. If one looks for a piece of evidence, then the sequence of lines can be more closely viewed. Thereby it can be ascertained that the lines do not run precisely and straight, but coil in feeble waves and nevertheless maintain a certain distance from one another at the same time. They recall movements with the hands which are made on steamed up windowpanes; even the breadth of the lines reminds one of them. In addition, that the lines do not allow any inner structure to be discerned points in favor for the use of the fingers - quite different from the use of bristly brushes,

and show typical thickening of the pigment at the edges. All together, it suggests that certain pigment tendencies arise on the pictures with the fingertips.

If one considers the artistic works of Stephanie Jünemann, which are structured according to this principle, in all, then one not only notices that they are extremely different, but also, as a consequence, increasingly varied and complex. One gets the impression that the artist has set up experimental arrangements and is conducting experiments.

To judge the artistic works by appearances, it becomes clear that lines in the picture show to their advantage differently and contribute to structuring the surface of the picture. Three different strategies may be specified. Firstly, finger movements are used to ascertain the inner connection between line and surface. The lines that here only partly fill out the colored field stretch in the same direction, the beginning and end point of the course is clearly discernible. Secondly, the structuring of a picture can be achieved with a network which stretches across the entire surface. A tension arises here in such a way that horizontal and vertical lines do not run exactly by the movement of the hand and allow thickenings of the pigment occur in the picture. Thirdly, the complexity of the structure of the picture can be intensified in such a way that different kinds of lines are placed in contrast to each other. Such pictures frequently consist of a number of pigment layers and lines which are drawn with the hand as well as with a squeegee. Both approaches are used to structure the surface of the picture. Analysis is carried out through this comparison of different methods in which the specific of the lines painted with the fingers as an element of the constitution of the picture has its roots. The lines are executed with same measure. The artist emphasizes that she may not proceed to intensely, otherwise the hand would loose its hold on the smooth layer of pigment. The desired effect comes about only when the fingers glide across the picture.

If one imagines the pictures of Stephanie Jünemann, which are painted with the aid of the fingers, then it becomes obvious that the production contains planned as well as unplanned steps of action. For example, right from the beginning it can be established that the surface of the picture will be structured by horizontal and vertical lines. With that, in fact, important conditions of the structure of the picture may be laid down, but the definitive appearance of a work is not yet foreseeable. Substantial factors of the genesis of the picture occur from the process of painting and are hardly predetermined. That is especially true for mixtures of pigment and pigment tendencies in the picture and also for the middle, which are used for the structuring of the surface of the picture. It, too, develops a dynamic of its own, because the courses of the movement of the hand can be controlled only to a certain degree. The process of painting cannot be repeated; the deviation is preprogrammed. These factors of pictorial production result in the works that materialize as single specimens - they are originals.

*Translation: William Mickens*

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<sup>1</sup> S. Martin Hentschel, *Die Lust zu sehen - das Abenteuer der Malerei*, *ibid.*, and Raimund Stecker (ed.), *Das Abenteuer der Malerei. Eine Reise in die Bildkunst der neunziger Jahre*, catalogue on the occasion of the exhibition at the Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf from 14 May until 25 June 1995, and at the Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart from 18 May until 2 July 1995, Ostfildern 1995, p. 45.

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<sup>2</sup> I thank Stephanie Jünemann for the insight into her work and for the extensive conversation at her studio in Berlin on 30 May 1997.