

Some Ideas about the painting „Hommage à Anton Bruckner“,

Doris Reiser, acryl and oil on canvas, 250 x 200 cm, 2014

My initial idea for that painting was a virtual space built of various colors. Without having detailed concept of the painting yet, I tossed pure blue, green and violet paint on the white canvas with a big brush in broad strokes. The colors fade into each other and the brushstrokes form a kind of structured surface. The placement of the different colors already shows a curved movement, starting with violet in the lower lefthand corner, changing into green in the righthand corner, green rises and returns to the left side of the painting, at the same time changing into blue, only to fade back into violet again, thus closing the circle of colors. In the blue part there is already a hint of gothic vaults. For that priming I used acrylic paint, it becomes insoluble and can be covered with layers of oil paint in different ways without being destroyed.

The Portraits

Doing homage to a wellknown personality by way of a painting demands a portrait as main focus. Of Anton Bruckner we find many photographic portraits from different decades of his life, most of them date back to the last 20 years of his life, when he was both a renowned virtuoso on the organ as well as a distinguished composer. It is interesting to note that his appearance changed from one photosession to the next in a most astonishing way, one might suspect completely different persons!

Responsible for that phenomenon is either loss of weight or changing hairstyles.

About his complexion we don't know much, the only source being an oil-painting by Ferry Beraton from 1888, which shows blue eyes and ashblonde hair. The black and white photographs indicate rather dark eyes and very fair, extremely short cut hair.

We have uncountable posthumous portraits, reliefs and busts of Anton Bruckner, all these have manifested a certain image of him, showing a practically bald, elderly man with deep lying eyes, heavy eyelids, tear sacs and drooping corners of the mouth. The wrinkled neck is framed by a far to wide white collar with a carelessly tied black fly. A wide and oldfashioned black coat with sagging shoulders completes this image.

For the portrait I chose the lower lefthand corner of the painting. The violet basic color (a mixture of red and blue) in that region symbolizes the musician and composer Anton Bruckner as mediator, who, thanks to his talents and musical visions, was able to open up new spiritual dimensions for others.

Since I wanted to focus on the late symphonic oeuvre of Bruckner with my painting, especially the unfinished coda of his last symphony, I chose a photographic portrait from his last decade as a reference. It shows Bruckner in halfprofile, he is wearing the Franz-Joseph-medal, which was given to him in the year 1886. I sketched the head in light pastel and made the final brushstrokes in oil.

As the violet part seemed a bit empty, I had the idea to add two more portraits of Bruckner, imagining film stills of a turning head, put closely together. The gaze of the portrayed sways from a direct gaze to the far right corner of the painting, thus guiding the movement of the beholder's eye.

The photographic models were photographs of the older Anton Bruckner, that cannot be dated with certainty. The 3/4 profile was also taken as template for a stamp in honour of Bruckner's 125th anniversary (1949). The profile served as template for a silver coin (1962) and a stamp to commemorate the inauguration of the Bruckner Festival Hall in Linz (1974). All of the photographs had to be mirrored, since the head is looking in the „wrong“ direction in the original photograph.

Those further portraits were painted in a much fainter way, moving to a more monochrome color scheme, showing the last profile more or less like a plaster bust or a plaster relief. This indicates the physical decline of Bruckner in his last years, which stands in contrast to his rising fame and his unchanged musical impetus. The main topic is still the unfinished coda of his last symphony, where Bruckner wanted to describe both a summary of his whole symphonic work in a way never done before, as well as a grand finale for his life on earth.

Composer and conductor

Having completed the portraits I started to design the aligned green section. Bright green stands for (prospering) life, freshness and vitality. I show the right hand of the artist with a conspicuous ring on the pointer finger (as portrayed on Viktor Tilgner's Bruckner bust and on the photograph from 1886, which was already mentioned). The hand writes on a white sheet of music paper with a quill. The staff is only adumbrated by scratching into the wet paint. Underneath, some more sheets become visible. The uppermost sheet is stretched upwards, it dissolves and aligns with the green base color. Further up there is another hand holding a conductor's baton.

Music arises out of Bruckner's spiritual world (violet colors), we behold and share it in its performance, its revival. The colors are now green.

Organist and musician

Through the apperception of music new spiritual spaces come into existence, in which Bruckner (according to his own words) wanted to build "cathedrals made of sound". This I wanted to express with the glance into a neo-Gothic church interior (blue colored section). As role model I chose the new cathedral of Linz (Mariendom). Its erection was initiated by bishop Rudigier, still in Bruckner's lifetime. For the foundation stone ceremony and the consecration of the votive chapel Bruckner composed a ceremonial cantata and the mass in e minor. Bruckner is also shown on one of the stained glass windows of the cathedral. Bruckner did not live to see the consecration of the cathedral but the view on the large organ represents his international reputation as the most outstanding organist of his time. The blue color of this section symbolizes the spiritual world which becomes perceptible – in this case - by our auditive sensation, therefore expressed in the green colour of life.

Synopsis

The gaze of the contemplator is guided as follows: from the portrait studies in a large curvature to the music sheets on the right side, then further upwards over the conducting hand to the upper left into the blue cathedral area eventually coming back in a full circle to the portraits. They are painted in full detail and are therefore the center of interest.

The eyes pass through three different color sectors, which spread their aura on the shown motives subconsciously and lead us to the following interpretation:

The symbolism of dark deep violet has different assignments. Maybe the bestknown meaning comes from the liturgical colors of awaiting and penitence (advent and lent). As a symbol of inversion and preparation it helps us open spiritual forces. On the other hand this combination color, a mix of earthly red and transcendental blue, is a kind of an intermediary color. In the Middle Ages, Christ was pictured in a violet cloak, thus showing his role as a mediator between God and human beings. This appeared to me quite suitable for a prodigious musician like Anton Bruckner, who enables us to enter into higher dimensions by means of his music.

Pale, bright green on the other hand stands for growth and life, a blend of yellow and blue, of warmth, light and water. It's symbolic meaning is hope and future. In the color disc it is exactly between yellow and blue, it is more than only a mixture of those colors. It is a new color of its own, neither warm nor cold and indicates the coming to life of something awaiting the warming sun of spring. Each musical theme already exists somewhere, that's for sure, only waiting for the one who can perceive it, bringing it into our material world for us to experience with our senses. We call these outstanding people musicians.

Blue is the coldest and deepest color in the color disc. No warmth is in it, no yellow, no red. Nevertheless it is bright and beaming, like the glow of the blue sky. Not material, not concrete. We are not able to possess it, we can only long for it. Different to the complementary orange, which is powerful, earthly and hands-on, blue draws our mind into infinity. Blue lends us wings to leave our earthly limitations behind us and helps us enter the dimension of faith. Blue leads us into higher conscience levels and lets us see a glimpse of God. Isn't that exactly, what Anton Bruckner wanted to achieve with his music?
