

Of the beauty of reality

*"Beauty is truth, truth beauty, - that is all
ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."*

John Keats (1795-1821), Ode on a Grecian Urn

Gerd Kanz is a painter of the Romantic. Even though he would perhaps beg to differ, I still see him as an artist right at the centre of the art of the Romantic. Gerd Kanz is a quiet man, who reacts sensitively to his surroundings. Not one to force his company on people, he always takes a back seat. He is somebody who looks and tries to see behind things and their outward appearances. By 1994 he had already been called a "loner". That's definitely still true to a certain extent today, although he has been in a steady relationship for years.

His home and studio, a former brewery in Untermerzbach, seems to visitors like an island set slightly apart from the 'mainland' of Untermerzbach. Close enough to village life yet remote and slightly removed. Gerd Kanz watches the world around him from his island, then he translates what he sees into his own language. His language is that of pictures which, at the same time, are also sculptures. His personal search for the meaning of things and his penetration of meaning have found an artistic parallel in his way of working. He really gets into the basis of his pictures, whether he's using wood or cardboard and brings their hidden structures to the surface. The work he has produced using this technique have already been called "Landscape(s) of Memory" (Susanne Rose, Copenhagen, 1997) or "Landscapes – Weltinnenbilder" (Reinhild Schneider, Sonneberg 2002).

The basis for these conversions is the "intuitive imagination" internal images that he makes real. At this juncture you would be correct in thinking of the philosophy of Plato, which has been influencing the philosophical thinking of the Occident for centuries. Plato's central idea was that we only perceive a shadowy reality with our physical eyes. We can only see the true reality with our spiritual eyes. According to Plato, we carry images of this reality in our souls, from birth. We can then recall these internal images again when they are triggered by certain impulses. Gerd Kanz attempts to call up landscape of the soul in his work. This is something else that links him to the poets and painters of the Romantic period, who greatly desired to find the beautiful and

paradisiacal. All of the Romanticists were and are painfully aware that this is a search for 'paradise lost', a paradise that will never be fully discovered. This pain can also be felt in the work of Gerd Kanz. The pain is that of the perfection that we look for, but never quite find. It is the search for a suitable way to express meaning that can never be fully discovered.

Gerd Kanz' work represents, in the most beautiful way, the ambivalence of every human feeling. When you look at his paintings, you are entranced by the "aesthetics of decay and transience". Although his work also concerns a "memento mori" or a reminder of death, they are possessed of an exceptional beauty and completeness that words can scarcely express. It is like beholding a flower in full bloom that is just about to wither. At times when beauty is at its greatest, death is just around the corner, so if you want to live well, you must also know to die. "Ars moriendi", the art of dying, was known in the Middle Ages. Gerd Kanz is not far away from it. As a 28-year-old, he once mentioned that you spend your whole life preparing for death.

However, in recent years, his work has regained a colourfulness that is almost boisterous. He also creates "blossom" from the picture base, but this doesn't necessarily have to involve flowers, as he says himself. There is a whole range of work that recalls tulips. The forms that are developed in the works mentioned become rounder and more playful and the colours used are suddenly brighter. It is mainly in the past two years that the colour combinations of pink/ orange and green/red, for example, have been making a constant appearance.

Cross or lattices are central themes of his work. They may appear under round floral shapes or alone. Gerd Kanz has taken these crosses and lattices from nature and his environment. Of course, they also signify a lot more, because crosses are loaded with significance and meaning,

primarily in our Christian / Western culture, either as signs of salvation or as a bone of contention. It is precisely the ambivalence of the Christian version that is close to the understanding of Gerd Kanz: the sign of torture and death is also a sign of hope of eternal life.

Gerd Kanz seldom gives his work a title. He deliberately places them outside a meaning, spatial and temporal structure. He sees his work as being beyond time and removed from any current relevance. He also relieves them of all superficial meaning. They are quiet and unpretentious, just like their creator.

In the Middle Ages, beauty was awarded its own theology. Regarding all things beautiful and listening to harmonious music were seen as being a reflection and a foretaste of divine glory to come. Beauty was not only said to have healing properties, it was also considered to be something deeply truthful. The English romanticist John Keats expressed this programmatically in the last lines of his "Ode on a Grecian Urn": "Beauty is truth, truth beauty". He provocatively places beauty with truth and vice versa. He isn't talking about a superficial, beguiling beauty. It is beauty that comes from the innermost core of a being.

Gerd Kanz is searching for the "core of the being" in his artistic works and he has evidently discovered much in quiet and restrained beauty. The colours and shapes of his work absorb the viewer. If you honestly confront Gerd Kanz' work, you will also realise that John Keats was right when he wrote that "beauty is truth, truth beauty - that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

Jürgen Emmert, Würzburg, May 2006