

Franz Immoos and the Paradox of an Orderly Energie

How can the fleeting, fragmentary motions of an individual life be connected to a ground of being or a universal order? What do physical shapes and mathematical configurations have to do with the subjective order of our lives? How can matter influence consciousness, or consciousness find response in matter? Through the act of viewing, rather than the learning of yet another theory, the art of Franz Immoos offers an opportunity to explore these interactions and correspondences. Although a theoretical infrastructure is not lacking in his work, Immoos seeks an art containing its own ordering and transmitting power, arising, as he says, "from the collective unconsciousness and his transpersonal content". This Jungianism fairly describes an art realized within the traditional Chinese, in particular Taoist, cosmologie, a structure serving as the artist's means of navigation in a stream of perceptions and intuitions. It doesn't explain the flow of an energetic order through the act of viewing his work, anymore than Jung's theories explain the opening of some symbols to epiphany, and not others. To be able to come alive within the viewer's imagination, Immoos's work asks for a focused attention. It isn't necessary to have shared the artist's close study of Chinese medicine and astrology, or to have read his writings and seen his diagrams about the patterns of bodily energy, the somatic and spiritual influences of colours, and their corresponding symbolism. These traditional and theoretical structures are so fused into the physical and aesthetic substance of the artwork, that they are met like natural phenomenon, perhaps better first seen with a naïve eye.

An unapologetic craftsmanship has worked material into concept, carrying the viewer from sensorial saturation to meditation. Sifted generously onto sand, or a fixative underground, or rubbed directly into the fibres of rice paper, the pure pigment chosen by Immoos have a radiance at once sensual and spiritual. The organizing forms, squares and circles, and their sequences, have the pregnancy of the first human signs drawn within Nature, rather than the dryness of the geometric conventions they have become.

One of Immoos's favourite quotations comes from Gustave Flaubert, "Pour qu'une chose soit interessante, il suffit de la regarder longtemps". For a superficial look, Immoos's work offers little of iconographic interest, just blocks of radiant colour, arranged as matter of factly as boxes of supplies on

the shelves of a neat housekeeper. There is obviously a system, perhaps no more than ringing the changes on the combinations of fundamental colours, facilitating their irradiation of the viewer's body and mind. The material intensity and the formal ordering seem indifferent to thought and feeling, until the conscious dimension of the work is touched, tuning in both the daily history and the private consciousness of the viewer. This deepening awareness remains in tension with the original sense of impersonal order, until finally moving into and joining the viewer's sense of self, in my experience resulting in a shower of associative memories. At some depth in these works is a kind of threshold, in crossing which the act of viewing begins to harvest a myriad of correspondences with the story, emotions, and structure of the viewer's one life. The passage from the impersonal to the personal probably will remain surprising, no matter how familiar Immoos's work may become.

Over the years, Immoos has carried out a complementary photographic work, including serial images of himself recreating states of trance, and diptychs and triptychs of images symbolizing the archaic categories and virtues of Nature: air, earth, fire, water, eros, death, and ect. Taken sometimes embarrassingly directly, from the matrix of the artist's personal experience, these compositions nevertheless steer the viewer ineluctably to transcendental order. Entering the art work through an emotional, individual connection, the viewer is brought into a world ignoring the self. Is there a fundamental difference between such expressionistic symbol sets, opening on the impersonal, and geometrically severe, materially factual abstractions which are the main work by Immoos? It seems that the latter have a reverse order of viewing, bringing the viewer from an initially cool sensorial and formal constatation, to an actively personal integration of mind into the work, albeit partly by means of provocation. The homogenous colours, rich in physical texture, held in a systematic but unstable composition, slowly and steadily attract an emotional response, as freezing surfaces ineluctably substantiate water vapour out of the air. The compositional relations, as fixed at first as the cobblestones in a street, or the layers of an onion, with the passage of the time begin to float, turn, and seem about to change position, provoking a cooperative response from the viewer.

The fusion of kinesis and stasis, sensual gravity and conscious lightness, recalling the even-handed paradoxes of the Tao, reflects itself in the contradictions of an individual life, its impulses, hesitations, and turning points. This integration is at its strongest in the works of Immoos which are based on the

Chinese astrological calendar, an implicit magical square, moving its component nine symbolic colours through their changes in a cycle of nine years. Any one of these configurations is a moment in a cosmic dance of numbers and meanings, presented as a means of participation for the individual life.

The illusory impersonality of Immoos's style provides a privacy within which the viewer can quietly pass over to engagement, allowing his secret life to unfold and move with the signaling and moving elements of the artwork. It would be reasonable to explain the ability of an impersonal art to call out a personal response as being the effect of the hidden traditional rules of configurational changes and symbolic variations followed by Immoos. But these works also embody the artist's intuitive responses to the seeming impersonality of Nature, and the qualities and changes it brings about within our bodies and lives regardless of what we will. Immoos has constructed opportunities for us to experiment with the mysterious two-way traffic of perception across the gap from matter to consciousness, and from unique event to universal law.

Colour as used by Immoos comes to us clear and unimpeded, perceived as concretely as the pressure of sunlight on the skin. In the extension of this effect to the mind, the viewer experiences something of the earthy spirituality of Taoism. The materiality of this art can not be separated from its ideas, without a considerable loss of power. Photographed and digitally processed, these work would become ghosts, instructional diagrams. They exemplify the problem of bringing to pass a transmission of energy between personally embodied fact and universal abstractions. Modern reproduction technology censors away the sifting and rubbing hand, the dustiness of pigments, the fragility of rice paper, and the weight of carpentered forms. The very primitiveness of being a unique object represents that density of being which through an unimaginable process becomes a myriad – detailed human life. We cannot control this process, but we can learn navigational skills within it, such as the macro- and microworld order and colour symbology of the Emperor Fu-Hsi as used by Immoos and handed on to us through the viewing of his art work. Inextricable from these works in their making, but not in their usage, is the artist's study and charting in his search for combinations of Western and eastern insights into the nature of life. The artworks stand before us, neither rejecting nor requiring text and explanation, the multivalence of their status encouraging us to continue

speaking about the unspeakable, being persons in a world which makes personality seem absurd.

Jonathan Bragdon Amsterdam 1991

(Edition: Centrum Beeldende Kunst Utrecht 1991)



Die neun Bilder Zentrum 44 x 44 cm
 Pigmentfrottage auf Reispapier 1991



Die neun Bilder 9 x 44 x 44 cm Pigmentfrottage auf Reispapier 1991