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Between Sense and Sensuality

Painting as Dis-Illusion

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Nikolaus Utermöhlen liked best of all to work with photocopiers and with existing visual material: photos from newspapers and magazines, calendar leaves, illustrations of artworks, but particularly with reproductions of objects by artist-craftsmen. In 1989 he created his 100-part, wall-sized work *ERREICHEN GLEICHES TOR DURCH DAS ZUERST GEGANGEN WURDE* (illus. p. 9; *Reaching the same gate that was first gone through*). It shows the filigree work of the Baroque rood-screen in the Conventual Church in Ebrach cut up into small-format panels, following the axial symmetry of his construction. Utermöhlen treated the colour copies plus their disconcertingly displaced "painterly aesthetic" with pigments, but also with gold-leaf, using a technique that brings to mind thoughts of medieval gold-grounds as well as of special finishes for objects both sacred and profane. This screen is undoubtedly (art)historically and aesthetically valuable, and with all its decorations - at least in the current view of the Baroque - an expression of sensual pleasure which may also exist within a metaphysical system of references, within Christianity and its modes of representation. Yet at the same time this is a gateway that, despite its transparency, marks a border: behind it lies the bright space of the chancel in all its glory, in front of it stands the viewer in the art-space, in the gallery.

This same title, *ERREICHEN GLEICHES TOR DURCH DAS ZUERST GEGANGEN WURDE* - a song-title by the *Tödliche Doris* - is shared by another work from 1989, two leaves from a calendar (illus. p.8) which sexualise the sacred pathos of the gateway and thus break with good taste. Arranged around the axis of the end of the old year and the start of the new are a young woman - January - and a young man - December - photographed liked private porn shots, she pure, blond, slightly turned away like a coy mermaid; he ornamented with tattoos and pseudo-exhibitionistically crouching face-on. The lacking professionalism of these shots creates a dilettante haze which Utermöhlen intensifies by using colour pigments to over-paint certain body parts, thereby increasing the alienating effect of the photographic sculpting of the body.

With these two works which he artfully gave the identical title, Utermöhlen laid bare a spectrum ranging from sense to sensuality, at the same time sending tremors through the chasm dividing the poles of the body and the spirit, for the so-to-speak formalised passage from the one to the other cannot be traversed without contortions and distortions. This transformation may testify to Utermöhlen's doubts at the rejection of so-called "lack of taste" in favour of the beautiful and the sublime, by means of his allusion to the traditionally hierarchical value-systems in the arts: high art at one end of the spectrum, and trivial, decorative or low art - namely popular or applied art - at the other end, while photography barely registers (with pornography as its literally unspeakable counterpart). A spectrum of a different, physical, kind - where light is broken up into bands of colour - defines another early series which depicts splendid, antique swords, or more precisely, swordhandles (*Untitled*, 1990, illus. p.16), presented against the refracted colour range of their

monochrome backgrounds. The alienating aspect of these works lies in the fact that these treasures of the gold and silversmith's art are each spread across four canvases. This cuts through their richly

detailed and decorated cross-shapes, and thus makes visible something of the function of the weapon: for all the beauty of the object it is there for fighting, even destroying, possibly even to quarter its victim. Thus Utermöhlen gives pictorial form to a verbal image, to a metaphor - quartering meaning to kill - just as he connects the idea of a spectrum (in the sense of multiplicity or breadth of variation) to its physical, concrete manifestation as a sequence of colours. In pursuit of these metaphors one could go yet further and see the fight symbolised in the beautiful swords as another sign of his stated ambivalence towards beauty (of the subject and its function) in the sense of a classically absolute norm and as something desirable. Thus Utermöhlen divides his objects up, dismembers them, often distorts their coloration and overlays them with a subjectively distributed covering of coloured dots which mocks the colour-effects of the Pointillists plus the function of highlights and reflections in 'real' painting.

For his largest work, *An Infinite Painting on "A Vision of the Last Judgment" by William Blake* (1992) Utermöhlen divided Blake's 1808 glazed pen and pencil composition (illus. p.42) lengthways into three parts and gave each a basic colour of its own (see illus. p.44). He then took the different sections of Blake's 'eroticised seething bodies', arranged according to the judgement supposedly passed on them, and superimposed them and layered them, varying the order of the colours. Given that Utermöhlen turned to the English mystic, visionary and artist, William Blake (1757-1827), then the relevance of the latter not only lies in his having been an artistic loner with mystic-religious tendencies, but also in his activities as a graphic artist and painter who took an active interest in the scientific investigations into seeing around 1800, and who gave artistic form to his own theories on the subject. Blake took the recent discovery that in physiological terms the image was generated in the viewer's eye, and translated this back into his motifs. He extended the bodies and had them embrace each other in a kind of analogy to the new notion of the subjectivity of optical experience, in which seeing no longer acted as a catalyst offering a blanket guarantee of recognition, but where seeing is dependant on the human body and its possibilities and particularities. Touching and feeling are much in evidence in this erotically dramatised figure composition - despite or perhaps because of its Christian theme - where the ascent into Heaven or the descent into Hell become a kind of sexual phantasmagoria. With this work Blake was reacting to the demands of the perception-theorists that, in seeing, the senses had to be kept strictly separate from one another, and that seeing should no longer be equated to imaginary touching from a distance. Blake's succinct formulation was "As the eye, so too the thing."¹ In this light, with his reference to William Blake, Utermöhlen was adding the central role of the senses - as established in those days when the paradigms of seeing were completely re-set - to the spectrum that he had already opened up between sense and sensuality. Blake had declined the possibilities of allegorical representation, for in his terms it was only in a vision, in a visionary manifestation that the eye and the image were one. And he took the biblical Last Judgement as a moral authority together with the last justice that would recognise the quality of art, of his art - which he hoped for, even expected when good, that is to say, true art would be highly esteemed and bad art would be condemned.²

We know that Utermöhlen studied Goethe's Theory of Colour³ published in 1810, which took the physical/physiological findings of the time and moved them on a stage further. A visible influence on Utermöhlen was Goethe's famous colour-circle constructed using the colours of the spectrum, in which colours are assigned to qualities and to the realms of fantasy, reason, the intellect and sensuality. However, possibly of greater significance is Goethe's thesis that the so-called

¹ Cited as in: Jonathan Crary, *Techniken des Betrachters. Sehen und Moderne im 19. Jahrhundert*, trans! from the American by Anne Vonderstein, Dresden, Basel 1996, p.77

² Cf. the quotations from Blake's notebooks that Utermöhlen includes in his brochure to *An Infinite Painting on 'A Vision of the Last Judgment' by William Blake*, op. cit. 1992, unpaginated

³ See the list of literature that mattered to Utermöhlen compiled by Oliver Koerner von Gustorf

physiological colours are generated from within the body of the viewer. For this means that on the one hand a product of seeing, the picture, is bound up in the finitude of the viewer and, on the other hand, if seeing becomes an autonomous, subjective act, the place and the status of the picture become questionable. Given that before Goethe the picture was always independent of and external to the viewer - as in the model of the camera obscura - now positions outside and inside the viewer are no longer clearly distinguishable from one another. If indeed the picture is dependent on the temporal processes in the body of the viewer, and consequently also changes, has an echo (here an after-image) and in the end disappears altogether - then picture and viewer both seem to have been disempowered.

Thus Utermöhlen made use of the photocopier - the death of the myth of the exclusive aura of the hand-crafted original - less as a technologically refined reproduction-tool to enlarge and change the proportions of segmented visual material from his archive, than as a painting-tool, with which he could experimentally analyse colour both as one of the prerequisites for the myth of painting and as a synthetic product: on the one hand copies were put back together again and used as the basis for further treatment with paint, on the other hand some works make it clear that the impression of colour in our perception is an additional end-product: every normal colour copy is produced in four steps after the original has been separated digitally into its constituent parts; in technical terms the colour is made up of layers of the standard DIN-colours cyan (blue), magenta (red), yellow and the (non) colour black. Often Utermöhlen not only extracted the basic colours from this mixture which creates the impression of 'natural' colour, but he would also manipulate them and overlay them in a sequence of processes with the result that at the intersections of the colour spectrum complementary colours are generated: orange, violet, green. Seen in detail the copying process (with its allusions to familiar glazing techniques) applied to the largely, symmetrically arranged panels of *An Infinite Painting ...* creates exactly those effects which would be emphatically described in art-jargon as painterly.

In 1991, the year before Utermöhlen brought to life his endless colour-orgy from a black-and-white reproduction of Blake's *Vision*, he had already made a 12-part work (*Untitled*): a combination of images from a newspaper showing male demonstrators lying on their stomachs stretches across two rows of panels, with six panels to a row. One can sense that the protesters have been forced down and held there by the police, although this is not made clear from the reproduced sections of the originals. Here again Utermöhlen has over-painted the coarse-grained black-and-white copies in his usual way, heightening the bright areas with white and both deepening and flattening the shadows with black patches with blurred edges. Here too there are the colours of the spectrum although in a different version: applied to the edges of the copies fixed to canvas and stretched on frames, these communicate glowingly with the wall. Phoenix Spektrum of 1992, conceived purely as a catalogue insert⁴ varies the motif of men forced to the ground. The first page shows the corner of a young person's room. Above the bed there are posters of River Phoenix, a star who died too young. On the bed lies one of the knobby balls that, enlarged, are seen again in the frieze *Das ohnmächtige Modell* (*Unconscious Model*, 1994). While a narrow line at the foot of the bed, made up of the colours of the spectrum, throws a shadow on the wall and disappears into the checked bedspread, on the right hand side of the picture colour is not thematised as a rainbow spectrum but as a narrow section of black-and-white, which presents the organisation of colour for spatial effects as the problem of reproduction, by extracting the colour from this section, by making it appear colourless. On the following pages stripes of different widths in the order of the colours of the rainbow cut into coarse-grained black-and-white reproductions of newspaper photos, showing a destroyed, abandoned dormitory (probably in some war-zone), fireworks against the night-sky, and men lying on the ground. Red has the title *Besitz* (*Ownership*), orange is entitled *tätige Liebe* (*active*

⁴ Nikolaus Utermöhlen, Phoenix Spektrum, in: *Explicit Material*, Contributions by Berlin artists to an exhibition in Phoenix, Arizona, Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlin 1992, unpaginated.

love), Intuition is assigned to a cold yellow and an apple green stripe, emerald green is linked to *Ernährung* (Nourishment) and blue is characterised as *Raum* (Space), cutting narrowly through a picture space with *Ordnung* (Order) written below it and which shows the demonstrators who, in the eyes of the state, must be 'called to order'. The words - of which there are more - form two associative chains whereby *Staat* (The State) becomes *Stoff* (Material, Fabric, Stuff) and *Besitz* (Ownership) becomes *Raum* (Space). *Seele, Magie, and Konstruktion* (The Soul, Magic, and Construction) were all involved on the way, notions which distinguish the metaphysician from the (de)constructivist and which the artist used so equably. Here too, as I see it, Utermöhlen is trying to open up a spectrum that has on the one hand historical and philosophical connections, but on the other hand repeatedly focuses on the matter of the construction of these paradigms that are so important in our perceptions, presenting them as invisible, often subconscious, rhetorical ideas and thoughts. His mode of visualisation of this symbolic function is typified by his use of rainbow spars, three-dimensional elements without 'art-status', as he himself stressed and which he employed on a larger scale in 1995 in *Zwei Freunde* (Two Friends), his last exhibition.

Utermöhlen was trying to create a cosmos from the ambivalence in his own attitude to enlightening, visually strategic processes on the one hand and the very weight of mythic-mystic-religious themes, on the other, as in certain artists, theories and styles:

Goethe, Blake, Gustave Theodor Fechner. In this cosmos certain elements would undergo a transformation of their metaphorical, symbolic or aesthetic meaning. This is particularly evident in his multi-part cycle, *Das ohnmächtige Modell* (1994), consisting of picture panels, all of the same height, which can run round an exhibition space like a frieze. This in itself is a form of presentation with time-honoured traditions and which achieved a modern highpoint in Gustav Klimt's *Beethovenfries* of 1901, where decorative features did not have to be viewed separately from the possibilities involved in the representation of a narrative, a myth, or historical events. In *Das ohnmächtige Modell* Utermöhlen takes a new angle on certain motifs that have already occupied him on earlier occasions: light emerges here in the form of a firework, balls are seen as threedimensional basic shapes, reminiscent of eye-balls, clouds become immaterial, illusionistic depths, shaped by light and shade, a passage-way leading to a door in the distance serves as an example or a model of central-perspectival illusions of space. The highpoint of this juxtaposition of copy-tableaux is the artist's studio as the place where all kinds of pictures and visual images may in fact be constructed. And it is precisely here that the male model has fallen from his dais, as stiff as a bronze sculpture. It is impossible to say whether he has fainted because of the constantly changing perspectives and their relationship to things, to so-called reality, because of the demise of the representational forms of classical notions of art, or whether it is the fact that a certain model of art - reproduced to the point of oblivion particularly in art schools - has itself become unconscious, powerless.⁵ Certainly the changed concept of the subject which now prevails - although to this day by no means consistently reflected in the art system and its rhetoric - was not induced by representational forms as such but by notions of seeing influenced by new scientific discoveries. As far as painting and colour are concerned, this new concept was founded and is still founded in "impure" seeing, where bright light blinds the viewer and disturbs our powers of recognition. Thus the perception of colours and the identification of colours with materials, things, bodies take place, like scientific experiments around 1800 in the semi-light, in a darkened room, inside ourselves behind closed eyes - colour itself is a thing of the shadows, as Goethe put it.

William Turner (1775-1851) - that painterly analyst of atmosphere, of light and of weather conditions, electric storms and the forces of Nature - produced a series of small, unusually sober, representational watercolours in 1810 called *Reflections and Refractions in Two Transparent*

⁵ Translator's note: the German word 'ohnmächtig' literally means 'without power' and implies a possibly sudden loss of strength.

Globes, One Half-filled with Water, which is purely and simply an investigation of the relationship between light, shadows and translucent materials - glass and water - in respect of the image on the human retina, particularly in that the globes themselves are not unlike eyeballs. Could it be that Utermöhlen's monochrome spheres, sometimes with small rays emanating from them, have a similar function? Decades later, in 1846, Turner painted his *Angel Standing in the Sun*. This motif symbolises the delirium of autonomous, abstract seeing and the angel becomes an allegory of the unportrayable merging of the sun and the eye.⁶ Utermöhlen's *Ohnmächtiges Modell* is not unlike this angel, who - it must be said - a century and a half later can only be a fallen angel, in the sense that Turner's "pure" image of the impossibility of seeing "as clearly as the sun" must prove to be that same fiction which is only ever constructed to the exclusion of language, historical awareness and sexuality.⁷ This then might explain why the model, although he has fallen - or rather, because he has fallen - is portrayed as such a strikingly sexual figure.

It is hardly surprising in Utermöhlen's work, in the context of the sun as a symbol of seeing, to find the photographic process known as solarisation, where extreme overexposure causes the black on the negative to turn pale. This not only means, for instance, that the disc of the sun becomes a black disc, but also that the grey tones separate increasingly into black and white (as in the previously discussed 12-part work *without title* from 1991), while the colours turn into their complementaries. In this process the light in the normal process of photographic exposure is strengthened, with the result that the gradations which create the different solids turn into irregularly-shaped planes in which pictorial space and the shapes of objects and figures are no longer clearly distinguishable from each other. The works in Utermöhlen's last exhibition, *Zwei Freunde*, 1995, linked pairs of small-format male nudes were made drawing on the techniques of solarisation, always alternating the possibilities of positive and negative, the technically possible reversal of the copying process, and oriented towards complementary colours. The originals, images of naked young men sitting somewhere outside in the grass, could easily be taken from soft-porn magazines, although equally well from photos by Wilhelm von Gloeden. In this series it is particularly clear that the picture surfaces have been repeatedly sealed with clear varnish (with the heights and depths bedded into it). This kind of addition is more than a purely technical process: light and shadows in the photocopied original are brought to the surface through multiple layers of doubling and highlighting, while the darker zones are also brought to the surface, elevated from out of the depths. Layer for layer this separation into the colours representing light and shade is repeated, not so much creating malleable three-dimensionality as emphasising it aggressively, for these are after all commercial fluorescent paints that Utermöhlen is using here. This results in slight blurrings and in contours being displaced by the brushstrokes, which all leads to a kind of three-dimensional flickering. It seems as though the over-heightening, the abandoned idealisation of these men and boys is balanced by the complementary act of shutting them away inaccessibly under layers of varnish, and at the same time lending them the glow of the imago with this mockery of varnish as the classical last layer of 'real' painting. In this ambiguous form of representation, and certainly not as subjects, these male nudes become figures of sexual desire and its constantly postponed fulfilment. Seeing as a sexualised bodily experience beyond feeling or touching may also be regarded as a result of the careful separation of the senses in the structures of optical perception as they were understood two hundred years ago, and absorbed into the ambivalent make-up of certain metaphors of seeing: to devour someone with one's eyes is pleasurable ingestion at a distance, and is based precisely on the lack of physical proximity to the desired object, possibly even increased by the latter's non-participation or unwitting indifference.

⁶ This example is cited by Crary in his investigations into the technology and ideology of seeing in the last century (as note 1).

⁷ Cf. Crary, as note 1

Grandville (1803-1847), another artist who Utermöhlen studied,⁸ was a political satirist and caricaturist. He also made lithographs and woodcuts, illustrated proverbs and fables, giving his works surreal subtitles such as *Transformations, Visions, Incarnations, Métapsychoses, Zoomorphoses, Lithomorphoses, Métempyschoses, Apotéoses et autres choses*. In the last year of his life, 1847, he made a drawing with the title *Nighttime Versions and Transformations (Guilt and Retribution)*, a depiction of a nightmare that is to be read like a rebus: according to choice it is either the dream of a murderer tormented by his conscience or of a person who is terrified that he/she is capable of committing some crime. Here the eye is at one and the same time the subject and its own gorily transmogrifying persecutor, for what worse persecution is there than all those - in the visual sense - dark, traumatic, undefinable notions? On one occasion Grandville turned to his publisher asking him to print his own (the artist's) explanation of this drawing. His letter includes the following sentence: "You could then perhaps draw the reader's attention to the art of reforming and reversing forms, the art of these transitions, which follow on each other in parallel according to a moral sense; double difficulty which although an element of strangeness and bizarreness may make it baffling - is nevertheless likely to interest people with a tendency towards dream-like visions or with a preference for the new and, as one says, for the mighty tricks of the spirit." Amongst these "mighty tricks of the spirit"⁹ one might also count the changed notion of seeing, where the relationship of interior and exterior now took on that mysterious dimension whereby the eye could not even distinguish a vision in a dream from reality.

What Grandville constructed as a relatively linear story contains exemplary elements which Utermöhlen also uses in his multi-part pictorial narratives, certainly believing that *memorable* images which leave an *impression*, subjected to the most obscene of metamorphoses never adhere to the strict division between metaphysical and physical desire, between vision and projection.

The result is an agglomerate which Roland Barthes describes as the basic form of disgust: "The body begins to exist at the point where it feels disgust, rejects, and yet wants to devour what disgusts it, and savours the taste of distaste, at the same time letting itself become giddy (giddiness never ends, it disconnects meaning, postpones it to a later date)."¹⁰ Giddiness, however - from exhaustion, as in the male figure in *Das ohnmächtige Modell* for instance - is not the only important anti-referential phenomenon in Utermöhlen's work: there is also the delight in rejection, the pleasure of surfeit, inaccessibility that induces a kind of a trance whether driven by a religious impulse or by being in love: it is no mere coincidence that a person might talk of adoring his/her lover. The spectrum of Utermöhlen's giddiness takes in distance, melancholy, longing - all of which finds material form in the iridescent actual colours of the spectrum and in his citations from different epochs and works: from the Baroque (*ERREICHEN GLEICHES TOR DURCH DAS ZUERST GEGANGEN WURDE*, 1989), from Classicism which in turn was drawing on paradigms from Antiquity (*Vor dem Tempel der Ungerechtigkeit*, 1991, illus. p. 28), Blake's *Vision*, the photograph of a young boy by Thomas Eakins, or Carl Blechen (1798-1840). In the case of the latter, Utermöhlen takes a cloud motif, with romantically dramatic contrasts of light and dark, turns it upside-down and juxtaposes it with a lethargically unattainable youth from the 1960s sitting at the edge of a fountain (with water-lilies), with the result that the strongly sensual atmosphere of nature mysticism in the one is strangely, 'unredeemably' rocked by the popular-erotic atmosphere of the other (*Untitled*, 1994; illus. p. 58). In terms of colour Utermöhlen took his motifs apart, but in terms of form he distorted them and often played them through the mathematically possible sequences of colour super-imposition. But he does not leave it at that, for the photocopies are 'thinned' from the behind and fixed to aluminium or

⁸ As note 3

⁹ Translated from Grandville's first letter to his publisher (26 February 1947), in: Grandville, *Das gesamte Werk*. with an introduction by Gottfried Sello, Munich 1969, p.1611

¹⁰ Roland Barthes, *Requichot et son corps*, in: idem, *Oeuvres complètes*, édition établie et présentée par Eric Narty, vol.II, 1966-1973, Paris: Editions du Seuil, Paris 1994, p.1624

canvas. Utermöhlen applies the remaining layers of colour to the latter in such a way as to let the texture of the weave show through and thus strengthen the impression that this is painting. But 'Something is showing through', the sizing for instance, is generally a reference to an inadequate technique on the part of the painter. Art, but particularly painting - as Utermöhlen makes clear - is the end-product of a combination of craft-skills and categorisation. In his case he is concerned with a critical definition of the materiality of depictions, which nevertheless, at exactly this point, come up against metaphysics. When a copy, worn away from behind as though it had been dematerialised, portrays a motif in one or more layers of colour, then the ground and its metaphors become the theme of the work, in that the sizing of the ground is regarded as a fetish of painting and the ground, in metaphysical terms, is the starting point - that one can never get behind - and the cause of all that subsequently follows. The fact that the softened, sometimes even torn photocopies nevertheless receive a carrier seems less an attempt to stabilise them than to create yet another manifestation of appearance, of 'as if'. Utermöhlen uses the objective depths that every frame has - albeit neglected as an optical pictorial measurement in Classical painting - as a paint surface, and often applies glowing colours to his pictorial series, graded according to the spectrum, which are reflected on the wall as a shimmer or colour (*Untitled 1*, 1991). It is less a shadow which sets the picture off against the wall than a shimmer that mediates between the picture and the wall. This coloured glow is perceived as light, not as material. Fluorescent paints intensify the ironic quality of these citations of craft-skills, which is also the motivation, for instance, behind the imitation of hand made paper at the edge of *An Infinite Painting ...* Day-glo colours and artificial 'handmade' paper traditionally belong in the decorative realms of the applied arts, advertising graphics and poster designs, perhaps even in the realm of amateur art. And from here they throw a metaphorical light on high painting.

Nikolaus Utermöhlen's body of work is not very extensive. It is only on closer examination that one can reconcile its motivic heterogeneity plus creative methods, that go against the grain of the 'dominant' extended concept of art, with their multifarious critical allusions to the classical dimensions of painting. His achievement lies in his critical handling of artistic processes, which he uses to mediate between painting and technical reproduction, to mediate on a theoretical-philosophical basis between the sciences and metaphysics, and which he uses physically in connection with the body and the dynamics of its desires. And, as he does so, painting and the body intersect at the point where the two may be seen as a representational construction of do's and don'ts, of incorporation and exclusion, a grid with history. The result - of necessity - is 'impure' art as a productive outcome, if we take as our measure a strict division between the different strands of art and if we accept the commandment traditionally observed by high art that a medium - for instance, painting - must reflect itself with its own means. Utermöhlen breaks not only this law; with his decidedly visual and distinctly craftsmanlike acuity (in preference to epistemology) he seems to become increasingly interested in an age - plus its scientific and artistic output - that has even been neglected by the all-reviewing art-machine of the late 20th century: namely the early 19th century. This age, with its Classicist sprinklings and historicist references, its disintegrating or long invalid artistic and scientific paradigms and its 'inventions'¹¹ provided a point of reference for what I call Utermöhlen's 'techniques of desire' using citation to alienate painting from its own rules and quite obsessively creating connections between painting and that contemporary picture-making machine, the (colour) photocopier. His themes circulate on various levels in sequences of associations, in his titles (*Phoenix Spektrum*, *ERREICHEN GLEICHES TOR DURCH DAS ZUERST GEGANGEN WURDE*,

¹¹ Around 1800 painting stood in a metonymic relationship to various optical instruments such as the 'green glasses' or 'black mirrors' which were supposed to perform the following functions for the compositional organisation of landscape scenes: they were to frame the scene, focus the composition, create sequences, and beyond this to harmonise colours and to lay the ground for preserving the image, for instance in drawings. Elsewhere painting had to compete with the spatial illusionism of the stereoscope, that could capture an immaculately plastic image of objects at short range.

Vor dem Tempel der Ungerechtigkeit, and so on) and above all in his reading. Whether clad in metaphysical or scientific garb, his desire shines out burningly and longingly, just as the colours under the layers of clear varnish seem both distant and glowing. If we separate the concept 'metaphysics' into its two halves, then in Utermöhlen's work the physics manifests itself in the sense of (thought) patterns and elements (*Miniaturen*, 1993, illus. p.63) while 'meta', meaning 'above' or 'beyond' in Greek, circulates in his language. Meta ... has no signified, no referent, as a signifier this prefix wanders into the titles, crosses between the titles and in the titles and in and between the spectra.

Translation: Fiona Elliott