

# Rebekka Steiger

*des chromosomes dans l'atmosphère*

Exhibition in Lucerne: 6.2.2021 –24.4.2021

The Galerie Urs Meile is pleased to announce *des chromosomes dans l'atmosphère*, our third solo show of works by the artist Rebekka Steiger (\*1993 in Zurich, currently working in Lucerne). It follows the exhibitions *猫头鹰—virages nocturnes* at the Beijing gallery in 2018 and *wild is the wind* in early 2019 at the gallery in Lucerne.

The current exhibition is inseparable from the experiences Steiger had during her month-long residency at the Galerie Urs Meile in Beijing in 2018. Her study of both Mandarin and Cantonese, as well as the impressions she gathered while in China, have had a lasting influence on Steiger's artistic development.

Works on display, such as *翻風* (Faanfung; 2020, tempera, ink, and oil on canvas, 170 x 240 cm) or *bridge over troubled waters* (2020, tempera, ink, and oil on canvas, 200 x 240 cm) are part of a new series that began with the painting *noise* (2019, oil and gouache on canvas, 180 x 240 cm), one of the last works she produced in Beijing, in December 2019. While Steiger was working on a large-format painting, the canvas only absorbed the water-soluble paint in stripes. Through this accident, the landscape (inspired by traditional Japanese ink painting) unexpectedly and surprisingly took on abstract, rhythmic qualities. Instead of correcting the mistake, Steiger adopted this effect and continued to use the pattern in the rest of her work on the painting.

Oscillating in the broadest sense between landscape and abstraction, the paintings in the current show further another one of Steiger's series, which deals with this theme. The meeting of ink, tempera, and oil paints creates new effects based on the materials' various characteristics, leading to a fascinating blend of forms and colors.

Steiger's new paintings are generally developed in two steps. Balancing on long, narrow metal slats above the canvas lying on the ground, the artist glides along the slats with a brush dipped in ink, moving it across the canvas. She adds water to the rhythmic stripes thus created, then tilts the canvas so that the pure inks begin running together. The painter manipulates the liquid colors until the rhythm of the composition forms a coherent starting point for her. As soon as the colors are dry, a slow and less intuitive process begins: the artist works her way across the surface of the painting, centimeter by centimeter, carefully inspecting what has happened on the canvas. In the attempt to find and highlight the most beautiful details, no matter how small, Steiger emphasizes different spots, paints over others, or fills empty surfaces with oil paint. Like the painting process, the task of titling the work later is also intuitive and associative.

Translated literally from Cantonese, *翻風* (fan feng) means "recurring wind." In Hong Kong the expression is used to describe a developing typhoon. When choosing a title, the artist is concerned about the dynamics of the composition as well as the landscape aspect of the painting. Like many of Rebekka Steiger's titles, *muddy waters* (2020, tempera, ink, and oil on canvas, 300 x 240 cm) has several meanings. The title literally refers to the dirty water from the soaking brush that was used to paint the picture, as well as to the painted landscape itself, which, for the artist, could be either an ocean or underwater scene. At the same time, it is a tribute to the musician whose jazz she listened to on her headphones on her way home, as she thought about the title for this painting.

In other paintings, such as *des chromosomes dans l'atmosphère* (2020, tempera, ink, oil, 240 x 200 cm), which lent its name to this exhibition, a line from one of the artist's favorite songs functions as a title. Upon closer inspection of this work, a recurring figure in Steiger's oeuvre appears: the galloping rider. Here, however, the figure seems to be dissolving, although its remaining components carry enough basic information to make it recognizable. Steiger creates this unusual effect by taking a photograph of the painting, then editing it on her mobile phone with the edit and erase functions, and finally using it as a template. Her direct adaptation of digital sketches is a surprise to Steiger herself, since up to now she would have described herself as an "analog person." However, using the telephone as a sketch pad or a

drafting tool as an independent form of art does not interest the artist; rather, it serves to expand her repertoire of ways to discover forms for her paintings, while also making them more abstract. It remains to be seen whether this method will become an established part of her work process in the future or evolve into a new approach that is independent of the digital world.

The poetic ambiguity of the Chinese language and the ambiguity of the translation continue to be an important source of inspiration for Steiger's works. Depending upon how it is pronounced, one syllable in Chinese can have different meanings. "The Chinese language is almost like an exegesis of my work," the artist once noted.

The title 山水花 (2020, tempera, ink, and oil on canvas, 200 x 240 cm) refers to the name for traditional Chinese landscape painting: 山水画 (shanshuihua). However, the artist replaces the character 画 (hua: painting) with the similar sound 花 (hua), which means "flower." Hence, translated literally, the title is "mountain water flower." Mountain, water, and flowers are, in turn, a description of what is depicted in the painting.

Rebekka Steiger was born in Zurich in 1993. She studied art at the Lucerne School of Art and Design from 2013 to 2016. In 2016 she was awarded two prizes: the Exhibition Prize from the Kunstgesellschaft Luzern and the Advancement Award from the zeugindesign-Stiftung. Among her most prominent solo shows are *Rebekka Steiger - boxing the compass* at the Kunsthaus Grenchen (2020), the *Werkschau Zürich 2020* at the Museum Haus Konstruktiv (Zurich), and the group show *Zentral!* at the Kunstmuseum Luzern.