

Janik Bürgin

When viewing a work of art from the series “K-S” by Janik Bürgin, one experiences an aesthetic sensory impression that is primarily characterised by colour, abstract form and composition. Since no concrete object can be discerned in the photograph, the pictorial information is based solely on the play between the colours and their arrangement. In each work there are different colour combinations, some of which flow into each other, others are set against each other creating a strong contrast. Intensely pigmented areas of colour are connected by gentle transitions, creating a tension in the picture. Due to the flowing colour transitions, the viewer’s gaze is always redirected; rarely a primary focal point, which is intended to immediately captivate the viewer’s eye, is recognisable in the works of the series.

When one encounters a work from the “K-S” series without knowing that it is a photograph, the purely aesthetic value of the image is based on the radiant luminosity of the colours. Another level of the photographs unfolds as soon as the technique of the work is considered. Since a photograph is created in a real space, it can be concluded that a real subject was captured in front of the lens, and this must be present in the blurred photograph. The blurring that is brought into the image, however, simplifies the once concrete photograph to such an extent that the final product of the artwork becomes entirely abstract. Any hint of a concrete subject in the picture is obscured. The search for this once concrete subject in the picture remains in vain; the artwork appeals to an abstract aesthetic sensory impression.

The obscuring of what lies behind is a relevant theme for Bürgin in his works. The photographed objects in the works of the “K-S” series, which become beautiful aesthetic abstract colour images through blurring, are pieces of plastic from the waste. The devastating issue of environmental pollution is obscured and beautified through photography and blurring. A colourful image is created from waste, which radiates and glows from within. This concealment is also taken up in the title of the series. The two letters that make up the title find their origin in the German term for plastic, which is “Kunststoff”. The captured object, the technique of the photographs and even the title of the works are abstracted.

Bürgin has been working with a strong use of colour in his artworks for several years. Starting with his “Toast” series, he not only experimented with colour surfaces as primary means of expression, but also approached the question of combining photography and painting. The “Toast” series still features a concrete object as pictorial content, but over time this developed into an increasingly profound abstraction. The early works of the “K-S” series still suggest possible outlines of plastic objects, the current photographs completely conceal the references to an object through the obscurity.

Experimentation with abstraction in photography goes back almost to the beginnings of the technique itself. One of the pioneers of abstract photography is Alvin Langdon Coburn, who clamped a kaleidoscope-like instrument in front of the camera lens and thus created his series of works “Vortographs”. In Coburn’s works, but also in the works of contemporary photographers who dealt with processes of abstraction in photography, such as Wolfgang Tillmans, the artworks show more concrete forms. Janik Bärger’s work progresses even further along the path of abstraction. The blurring obscures any concrete pictorial information and suggests such smooth colour transitions that are reminiscent of oil painting. Bärger seems to combine two techniques, those of painting and photography. However, this is done differently from, for example, Franz Gertsch’s monumentally painted portraits, which have such hyper-realism that the paintings look like photographs and attempt to simulate this technique. Instead, Bärger breaks down this dichotomy of techniques. His photographs in the “K-S” series do not attempt to imitate a painting. The depicted object in front of the lens is merely abstracted to such an extent that at first glance it is impossible to identify which technique was used to create the works. The “K-S” works do not position themselves primarily as representative photography, but identify themselves as works of art.

This series of works pulsates, characterised by various fields of tension. Be it the contrasting colour combinations or their brightness and darkness, the concealment of concrete information through blurring, the obscuring of the boundaries between photography and painting, or the juxtaposition of the tragic underlying theme and the beautiful aesthetics of the works. Answers to questions regarding the concrete content of the works remain veiled, the blur grabs the viewer’s attention and arouses a fascination that is stimulated anew with each work in the “K-S” series. The works are not only convincing because of their deeper subject matter and the suspenseful handling of the technique of photography, the value of the “K-S” artworks is also completely unfolded through the successful visual impression.

Author: Vivienne Heinzelmann, art historian and curator

Appears in: HOLD ON // K-S 2020/2021, NOA Publishing, 2022