

SALON STUDIO ILGEN
THE NEW FAMILIAR

17th December 2023

Dear friends and guests,

Jacqueline and I are pleased you all have come for this event!

As most of you know, my own works are most of the times not the subject of our Salons, but this time is an exception. As announced, there is a new catalogue and obviously there are various new works.

Therefore, I will now present a short introduction to the subject of this catalogue with the title ***The New Familiar***.

Since long I am fascinated by the question to what purpose we as humans have an interest in art. A question that led me to write my three theory books, in which it will be logical how knowledge from neuroscience has been decisive and motivating to me.

The tradition of art history builds on the description of a pictorial analyses and additionally on historical links and explanations of the narrative, the story that the artwork would seem to propagate, as well as on the explanation or statement by the artist. This counts for both figurative and abstract art.

Such analyses and explanations may be helpful to you for understanding what one considers to be a work of art but says all but nothing about your own reasons for looking at such a work of art merely briefly, or longer, or maybe even repeatedly. Like possibly the historical background of a specific chair can interest you but does not help much to understand why you consider such a chair to be comfortable. Comparable to how a designer must follow the knowledge of ergonomics, the facts how furniture should support the needs of the human body, it is my conviction an artist has to consider perception and visual knowledge. After all, it is the viewing itself, which by our eyes and brain makes an artwork into a work of art, not the words or the explanation.

In perception many aspects play a role: your knowledge, your personal memory, psychological features, but even more decisive are the quite complex and multiple biological aspects.

This may sound very mechanical, but in its complexity and immediate interaction with your memory, such leads to an experience that is very individual and personal. Important is that such biological processes, like the motions of the eyes and the consequently processing in your brain, are triggered by **the appearance** of the artwork.

Here optical contrasts in shape and color, the quality of execution (the craft factor) and the choice of material play logically decisive roles. Again, this counts for both figurative and abstract art, although figurative art has the advantage of an immediate recognition of one's own kind which contributes to a spontaneous focusing.

You may ask what all of this has to do with the subject of *The New Familiar*?

First, it is important to recall, how we kind of automatically scan our immediate or larger environment for potential danger and possible threats. This can be as pedestrian in a busy shopping street, as driver on the highway, even while hearing or watching the news media, or also in social interactions. Likely as psychological contrast we need to perceive things and interactions in everyday life that have a more comfortable impact.

Maybe provocative, but likely also logical, knowledge from neuroscience implicates how the everyday focusing of our eyes and brain leads us to unconsciously and spontaneously seek out things that appear familiar.

Second, our brain is easily bored, which is why our focus of attention can only be triggered by things, like works of art, that do not only offer something wholly familiar. An artwork's visual appeal may attract our eyes spontaneously, may capture our attention immediately and only briefly, but when a work of art should appeal for anytime longer, the artwork needs to have a balance between familiar and surprising elements.

Since quite some time, in museums around the world I do not only enjoy looking at the art, but also at the behavior of the viewer. In museums, like here in Berlin the Gemäldegalerie or the Bode Museum with its Old Masters, one can observe quite well how many visitors react to just the visual quality of the works, how they spontaneously look at almost every work, some longer, some shorter. The familiar and timeless subjects, the elegance and visual appearance of the Old Masters again speak to many people today. Even though the majority of visitors has no or hardly any art historical knowledge.

Just as a sidenote, this phenomenon is not limited to Western Old Masters, but certainly matches also "Old Masters" from, for instance, Asian cultures.

Although it will be clear how people in every time with its own Zeitgeist prefer this or that kind of art, in current time it seems how a broader public decides for themselves to look for that kind of art that offers a certain positive experience and initially includes familiar subjects in rather surprising executions.

In art, I personally have always been intrigued by the notion of *continuous change*. A notion that across times and cultures appealed and has been explained by philosophers and scientists in different cultures and times.

When I noticed how the optical dynamics of the compositions – or, in other words, the artistic transformation of continuous change in nature – in the use of colors and shapes by the Old Masters, happens to be the same in the works of the masters of abstraction, like Kandinsky, Jackson Pollock, Ernst Wilhelm Nay or Frank Stella, I was motivated to explore a path in paintings and sculpture that may speak to many viewers.

In principle, a familiar artistic execution transformed in a new way through my personal choice of colors and compositions. A present overview is offered today by the new catalogue

and the here exhibited originals. I leave it to your own opinion if these works appeal, or not at all. Whether you will enjoy such artworks, or may even be tempted to take one home ... I also leave to your own judgement.

As many of you already know, our Salons are pretty informal. You are welcome to stroll through the whole apartment including in the back, the office and other rooms.

I gladly hear any questions you may have.

Please enjoy and have good talks,

Fre Ilgen