



**INSTALL\_17\_1  
2017**

Ausstellungsansicht  
Bundesrat, Berlin  
Metallrahmen, Acryl auf  
Werbeplanen  
4 Teile, je 285 x 135 cm  
// exhibition view  
Bundesrat, Berlin  
metal frames, acrylic on  
advertising banners  
4 parts, 285 x 135 cm each

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**INSTALL\_17\_2  
2017**

Ausstellungsansicht  
Bundesrat, Berlin  
Metallrahmen, Acryl auf  
Werbeplanen  
4 Teile, je 285 x 135 cm  
// exhibition view  
Bundesrat, Berlin  
metal frames, acrylic on ad-  
vertising banners  
4 parts, 285 x 135 cm each

## UNEXPECTED ILLUSIONS

THE ART OF FRANZISKA HÜNIG:  
BETWEEN EXPANDED PAINTING, PAIN-  
TED SCULPTURE, INSTALLATION, AND  
SCULPTURAL PICTURE

At first glance, one might be tempted to categorize Franziska Hünig's art as a form of expanded or spatial painting, as we will see, however, that captures only part of her practice. She applies paint to various grounds, most commonly large advertising banners that once hung on the sides of buildings and other public surfaces and have now been artistically recycled, so to speak, by Hünig. She cuts the banners into long, narrow strips and paints their unprinted backs with acrylic paint, using a broad brush attached to a long handle. The paint layers are often thin and translucent, but in some places they form thick impastos. Hünig applies paint to a surface, an act that can be unambiguously classified as "painting." But the support itself often plays just as important a role as the paint on it; it takes on a sculptural quality. When the banners are draped over metal poles or construction fences, or lie creased and crumpled on the ground, one could also call them a sculpture or installation. Hünig's artistic method thus fluctuates not only between two- and three-dimensionality, but also between media and genres.

When we turn our gaze back to the painted surface itself, here too, nothing is really clear-cut, or rather, it is often something other than what it first appears to be. Where the paint is relatively transparent, it recalls the way watercolors soak into paper. But while the paint has been thinned to varying degrees, the appearance of absorption is produced by its opposite, as the banners do not take up the paint uniformly. And is this "pure" painting that only signifies "itself," or can the brushwork actually be read as "representations"? The brushstroke really "is" just that, for what we see are direct traces of the act of painting. But the broad, straight markings in luminous green, blue, or orange are also reminiscent of lines made by a highlighter and then "represented" at greatly enlarged scale.

This oscillation between self-reference and illusionism becomes clear when we compare one of Hünig's earliest wall pieces with a series of works on canvas first shown at Kunstverein Augsburg. At her 2011 exhibition *Neverwhere* at Autocenter in Berlin, bands painted green were installed vertically and horizontally on the wall (pp. 40/41). Atop this shaped canvas-like field with its irregular edges, a canvas painted in India ink was mounted directly on the banners. At Kunstverein Augsburg in 2018, three large, unframed, almost square canvases are attached directly to the wall (pp. 4/5). Like the smaller canvas from 2011, they display irregular structures painted in watercolor. In addition, there are also a number of rectangular fields which, in the context of Hünig's work, at first look as though banner strips had been painted with acrylics and collaged or otherwise mounted on the canvases. Optically, there is also a sense that the green bands are floating slightly in front of the canvas – and yet they are painted directly on it. One could therefore speak of an illusionistic emulation of the painted banners, of *trompe l'oeil* elements within an abstract-self-referential environment.

Contrary to the claims so often made in superficial art histories of modernism, the nonobjective painting that abandoned the perspectival space of the Renaissance has by no means always been averse to illusionistic games. For example, in one of Georges Braques' most famous paintings, *Violin and Jug* (1910, Kunstmuseum Basel), a 'crumpled' pictorial space broken down into facets is 'hung' on a painted nail, so that the picture plane, if read illusionistically like the nail, appears to be raised in relief. When Hünig crumples banners and lays them out in a room, that could be seen as an updated transference of a cubist image onto real space.

This produces complex forms, some of them the result of chance, which cannot be completely comprehended at a glance or from a single vantage point. That contradicts every maxim of classical minimalism, a tradition in which Hünig nonetheless also has a foot. Take for example the installation *INSTALL\_18\_4* shown in Augsburg (pp. 2/3), in which painted banners filling the entire wall run down into the room to create a sweeping form reminiscent of a skate ramp. It is a clear sculptural form that can be completely comprehended, at least from the front; minus the paint, it could have been thought up by a minimalist sculptor. One is vaguely reminded of Richard Serra's curved steel sculptures, whose surfaces also display 'painterly' effects produced by varying degrees of rust. This is even more true of Carl Andre's slabs of iron laid flat on the ground, some of which vary considerably in coloration. If we think of Hünig's large-scale works in terms of sculpture rather than painting, we might view the paint as a 'surface treatment' of the sculptural form, an extension of what happens with corrosion on the surfaces of minimalist objects. After all, Hünig's use of prefabricated industrial materials links her to the minimalist tradition as well. Thus, in recent years, she has made increasing use of roll-formed metal alongside the plastic banners, its hardness offering more

resistance than they do. To produce the final form, it must be actively bent and folded, leaving less room for chance shapes. These metal works, then, are even more 'sculptural' than those involving banners, but they are still comparable in terms of the behavior of the paint on their respective surfaces.

The industrial connection also manifests itself in installations that suggest a provisional situation or construction site, such as when Hünig drapes or stretches the painted banners over barrier fences, as she did in 2013 in the Künstlerhaus Balmoral exhibition space in Bad Ems (pp. 45-47). The 'construction site effect' is further enhanced by the choice of exhibition venues outside the usual gallery and museum spaces. This was the case at the Viehmarkt baths in Trier, for example, where the Balmoral residents held another exhibition (pp. 27/28, 37-39). At the same time, though, there are also often evocations of natural motifs. In Trier, for instance, Hünig positioned blue-green painted banners along a narrow passage between two wall sections (p. 28). What might be a covering for some construction or repair project could also suggest a flowing stream of water. And even for viewers who do not make that association, concentrating instead on what is directly visible, it creates a distinct and memorable image at any rate. To speak only of expanded painting here would be - like any one-sided perspective on Franziska Hünig's art - insufficient. For are we not, in fact, looking at a sculpture here, which can, if we wish, call up a nature scene in our mind's eye, or the memory of river landscapes from art history? Or is it, perhaps, simply a 'sculptural picture', but much more intricate and extensive than those ones of sheet aluminum with which the German minimalist artist Charlotte Pezensek, working in the 1960s, systematically effaced the boundary between (painted) image and sculptural object?

Ludwig Seyfarth

