

TALE OF THE ROOMS

In her paintings Anke Armandi engages with complex spatial circumstances. Mostly there are several rooms that in connection with each other form a single movement space. One can imagine wandering about in them or following the suite of rooms into the depth of the painting. The movement space is essentially a passageway for an event that takes place or could take place within it. These rooms, although usually devoid of humans and their inventory, have a strong expressive power, a narrative suggestion solely by themselves. In one portion of the exhibited paintings Armandi engages with the workspaces and work situations of well-known artists. Studios are a kind of intermediate world where that, which is going towards the public realm (the creation of artistic work) interweaves with that, which is retreating into the privacy of individual life stories. These paintings not only tell us how a certain studio is arranged, but also how their owners have arranged themselves in this world. The biographical becomes sedimented through the objects and via the pathways by which the gaze reaches them. Whilst I am writing this, I am looking at a picture on the wall that Anke Armandi painted of my own studio, and I realise - almost shocked - how precisely traits of my own personality, of my attitude towards, the world manifest themselves in it. The other artists might feel the same way. In attempting to capture the spatial constellation and its inventory as completely as possible, Anke Armandi un-covers biographical structures. I think, that is her actual subject.

The homeliness that the artists enjoy in their studios stands in stark contrast to the situation of homelessness that Armandi describes in the large triptych with the ironic title 'Smart City'. There, where such planned ideology is meant to become reality, stood just a short while ago, the ruins and remains of buildings belonging to the former Nordbahnhof of Vienna. Armandi examined the devastated area as part of a film project by Ludwig Wüst. In one of the remains, a concrete pipe, a homeless person found a sleeping place. Here, as well as in other places of the triptych, the space aligns towards a brightly light outside area, in which residential buildings can be schematically discerned (on the left and the right panel) - as a 'normality' of life that is unattainable for the homeless person. In the middle panel the exploding exuberance of light seems to signal the imminent destruction of any trace of the former buildings and facilities. The presence of the homeless person reminds me of a biographical structure (or rather its opposite) that I once noted down following a text by Achille Mbembe. I am thinking of those people for whom life planning is impossible, who spend their days "searching for opportunities to find something to live on, wandering about without any set purpose or aim. For them time is not a reasonably solid structure of work, the regular satisfaction of desires, of plans and their execution. It is like a horizontal plain where objects and bodies exist next to each other, where bodies and bodies, objects and bodies meet here and there and then move away from each other again."

Anke Armandi painted the homeless person's unreal hope for a miraculous change, that can be achieved without one's own doing, into the light flooded space: however, first of all this future change meant the removal of his refuge in the concrete pipe. In contrast, the inhabitants and users of the studio spaces have written their own biographies so to speak, they have obtained abilities, knowledge and income, have acquired things, have made relatively autonomous decisions and have thereby reduced the contingency of their lives. One could specify these differences even further, but it would go beyond the scope of this text. Through her interest in the biographical, which starts early on in autobiographical paintings and then continues with the creation of a doppelganger, the Franconian prostitute

Renadde, Armandi reconstructs a layer of meaning of the European painting tradition with which the invention of movement space, of passages and corridors has been genuinely linked since the early Renaissance. Then, however, it was narratives and passed on tales of the life of saints that were brought into a new form. I am not suggesting that she places herself in a line of tradition (that has long been interrupted), but that her work also shines a light on what came before.

Leander Kaiser, 2020