



## The "Panta rhei" series Origin, conception and interpretation

### 1. Development

In 2000, with the retirement from professional life and the purchase of the old community centre in Keidelheim, my artistic career changed fundamentally. At the beginning, during my studies and also afterwards, my orientation was not yet fixed on a specific artistic field. The first exhibitions in my group of artists were filled with paintings, prints, drawings and sculptures. Only after my employment as a teacher, my move to a one-room apartment in my collegetown and in the first years of my family did I turn increasingly to painting, preferably watercolour painting, and drawing, mostly pen and ink drawing. Later I often combined both techniques in my paintings.

As I was also very limited in time, I was only able to fulfil my artistic ambitions during the holidays and the teaching hours of the adult education centre. I never felt this as a disadvantage or was never unhappy during this time, because family and job as an art teacher were fulfillment enough.

In our own house in Keidelheim, which we moved into in 1974, there was plenty of space and I was able to paint very large canvases here and there, even at home. Increasingly, three types of painting emerged. Firstly, landscape painting, which I had loved since childhood and which was always created on site in the region or while travelling, and secondly, thematically oriented paintings which were created in rooms, for example the no less beloved still life painting. Thirdly, there were the larger panel paintings with abstractions, in which I increasingly turned to acrylic painting. Especially my profession as an art teacher ensured that there were often experiments, so that I never felt bound to a consistent concept. I was not market-oriented and never tempted to give in to foreign influences and compulsively follow a certain style in order to find success in it. This attitude is based on my life principle, which I try to follow in all areas of life.



I got to know artists who only mark their works with a pseudonym, as if they were not allowed to reveal themselves. Others are divided and produce masses of cheap goods for the market. Their valuable, personal works lie in the drawer. Again and again I meet artists who invent a new stylistic concept and thus try to put the cart before the horse. But those who are most successful are those who submit to the laws of the market and work within a clearly defined, narrow design framework from which they are not allowed to break out. On the other hand, I feel free, "freelance" in the true sense of the word, but which is rarely the case.

The painter Westphal, a little older than me, whom I asked some time ago about his current painting, said "...now the harvest is being reaped." I liked that very much and I reflected to what extent this also applied to me. My leaving the profession has caused decisive changes in my artistic work, the concentration on suddenly essential things, the almost 100% work in the studio. It seems to me as if what I have been creating since 2000 is a conglomeration of life experiences and ways of life and a condensation of all the artistic activities I have practiced so far.

## 2. Creation

After some small preliminary studies, I approached the new challenge. The more one made fun of it, the less I let myself be diverted from the new path.



For years I have been drawing and painting anonymous human figures with spread legs and raised arms on paper with watercolours, watercolour chalk, oil chalk and pen. I was surprised how many possibilities of design and expression opened up and never tired of repeating this constantly. Then the time had come to switch to larger formats. I fell in love with the square picture format 1 x 1 meter. It is directionless and thus does not pretend to move. Since I have always preferred a quick, gestural painting style, this picture format is best suited to "keep the design within the frame". The next, inner form often follows the circle. It too is directionless, but you can set it in motion and bring the design into a circle. I have no given concept, no preliminary drawing, nothing in my head, no occasion, no theme. I start with a wide flat brush and a base colour, mostly yellow. A second colour is added, then a third. The result is a colour tone, there are focal points, contrasts, directions and movements, not painted by hand, but with the whole body. Until then, everything is abstract and the picture still contains more or

less white areas. But I do not want to paint an abstract picture. What do I actually want? In the back of my mind I have my anonymous figures that won't let me go, the animals, the plants, water and land, mythology and reality, day and night, movement and rest, in short: life.

I drive abstract painting so far until an association arises, until I believe to see forms that go beyond the informal.

This is what I get into. Usually this is followed by a phase with dark lines, with which I grasp what I have recognized. Then it often happens quickly, one thing leads to another. It is a constant interplay between colours, forms, movements, light and dark, a compositional challenge. Usually everything is completed in one go. But it can also happen that the result is unsatisfactory and remains unsatisfactory even after changes have been made. Then a juggling with the pictorial means of design, which may last for weeks, begins.





But what has actually been created there in terms of content? Before the picture is assigned to the stack of over 120 paintings in the format 1 x 1 meter, a picture title must be found. I absolutely don't like titles like "untitled" or "composition xy". Visitors in exhibitions are grateful if they want to get involved with the painting, to find an introduction in this way. A good picture is not banal decoration, but rather communicates itself. In the casual search for a figurative association, I or other viewers usually find what they are looking for. I have pictures that I especially love, temporarily or forever. But it only gets really exciting when creating a new picture, when everything starts all over again.



### 3. Content

All these pictures, which have the same format, the same genesis, the same degree of abstraction and similar set pieces, i.e. the picture series as a whole, I have been calling "panta rhei", Greek πάντα ῥεῖ, "Everything flows" for some years now. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus, to whom this saying goes back, compared being with a river by saying that no one can step into the same river twice.



This series of pictures is literally flowing. This is true for each picture content as well as for a sequence of these pictures. So far I have been able to show 30 to 40 of these paintings in exhibitions several times, once in long bands and very close together. At first I thought the visitors would be overwhelmed by this flood of pictures and one cannot do justice to a single picture. You have to keep a certain distance if you want to capture the pictures completely. This was possible in this exhibition, but then you could see the pictures to the right and to the left at the same time. The view wandered from one picture to the next and so on. It was a surprising realization for me, which strengthened me even more that everything flows. In addition, the pictures are not really what the title promises. They are not clearly the named "XY", they are the BEING, the life itself, the becoming and passing away. The pictures are me and you, ALL and EVERYTHING. A high claim, no, no presumption, no calculation, only created from within. The pictures are not images of the surface of our life, the so-called reality. They go deeper and reveal essential connections of our world.

### 4. Interpretation

The picture content is composed of human, animal and vegetative forms. Architectural structures appear very rarely, rather archetypal forms. The other contents are also archetypal forms. Animals and plants cannot be determined botanically. The human figures are often genderless, without facial features. Mostly they are upright, in groups of several, with spread limbs. The pictorial elements can merge with each other, so that for example animal-human figures appear. The background of the picture contains fragments of form in an imaginary spatial structure, which is rarely realistically revealed. The structure of heaven and earth is often



communicated. The only form that occurs more often is a circle, which can be interpreted as a source of light or sun.

Pure colours are preferred. The primary colours yellow, red and blue predominate. Black is often used to limit the colour areas, which are densely structured in themselves. The saturation of the primary colours allows strong colour contrasts. Their contrasting use for foreground and background creates dynamics and spatial depth. The light-dark distribution follows this principle. Soft tones are more rarely heard. Pictures that are predominantly in the proximal area, for example low-contrast paintings that are generally light or dark, or those that largely contain only variations of one colour range are rarer. If they do occur, they are usually located in the blue spectrum. The overall composition is based on the human figures.

Nature, life, being are seen as something indivisible, which presents itself in an infinite variety of forms, colours and species. The human being appears as an ordering principle. His actions are aimed at primal drives. Each picture is a story of creation, a parallel world of perception to our reality in which we live.



I myself see myself more in the background, exclusively emotionally guided, attached to intuition, with an insatiable interest in the manifold forms of life, striving to express harmony, beauty, power and pleasure. I see my role in Paul Klee's definition: "Art does not reproduce the visible, art makes visible." My paintings will please those who are able to switch off their intellect, who allow more than what they know, who include the immaterial and live on earth with an open heart.

2010-Oct.-29 © Karl Kaul

