

STUDIO TALKS

MARION FINK

Malte Bülskämper



After I got to know Marion as part of the group exhibition “Tangerine Dreams” at Funkhaus Berlin, I visit her a few weeks later in her studio in Potsdam. As soon as I arrive, I enjoy the peace and quiet and nature - out of Berlin and into the magical world that Marion has created for herself here. Your studio is in a beautiful location right on Sanssouci Park. Among other things, we talk about how this location affects her work, how she uses monotype to produce her mostly large-format pictures, and how you end up here in Potsdam from the Allgäu via Stockholm and Hamburg and finally arrive at yourself.



Marion, when we met in the broadcasting house, you already explained a little about your work process and talked about the technique of the monotype - can you describe again exactly how you go about it?

Yes, sure. So, I work with very thin, flexible Plexiglas because it is the easiest for me to use. First, I make mirror-inverted preliminary drawings. Then I paint on the plexi with oil paints, flip it over to the other side and print it on the paper. It is actually a relatively simple process, but it just becomes more complex the larger you work. I don't have a huge print that I paint and print once, but rather it puzzles together on the paper from several parts. With my technique I am of course based on a print aesthetic and I like it a lot that this aesthetic flows into the painterly.

I find it very interesting how the painterly feeling in your pictures connects with the classic print aesthetic. I am just wondering why the transitions fit so perfectly, even though you “puzzle together” the motif from several printing plates as you called it. Do you make markings or how does that work?

Yes, exactly, I make markings so that I paint in the right place so that I can then create and print it appropriately. I developed this technique in order to be able to paint large formats. The biggest work I've done so far is 4.40 meters high. That is of course a lot of printing processes. The technique somehow also fits the motifs, because they are also created by “jigsaw puzzling” or let's say they are put together like a collage. When I do the sketches, I also put elements together and move them back and forth. And then of course I always look, what does it actually look like when I mirror it? It was also interesting for me to see that the compositions are different because of the mirrored printing. I work longer on the compositions until they are really balanced.



Is it the case that you sometimes surprise yourself with the mirror-image printing? Or do you plan it so perfectly that you always know what to expect when you print it?

I can't control the technique 100 percent the way I can control the brushstroke on the canvas. When I print it, it is sometimes stronger and sometimes weaker on the paper.

What is a great side effect of this technique that you can give up control, right?

Yes, in any case. This is interesting for me because I tend to be more perfect and always have to go a bit against it. I always work a little against perfection, and this technique certainly helps me. This is how things come about that I have no control over or that I hadn't planned on. I also like the structures that arise when printing and that it always looks a little different from what I actually painted. It's just more appealing to me at the moment. I've been working with this technology since 2016 and I still find it very interesting and keep learning.

The technique of the monotype is already very old, I mean, that was already done by Edgar Degas and what do I know who uses everything.

Yes, Dürer already worked with monotype. I think it was also used a lot as a sketch medium to try things out quickly. It was then a bit forgotten and was later used a lot in the hobby area, simply because it is a simple process that can be done well with children, for example.



I find it exciting that you have learned that. I don't know any other young painters who work with monotype these days like you do.

I don't know anyone who works like me. I have seen that the technique was used in abstract painting, but not figuratively, as I use it. I haven't actually seen that anywhere before. It developed for me first ...

... yes, how actually? So how did you come up with the technique?

That was actually more of a coincidence. Back then I had Plexiglas lying around in the studio and just tried it out. First, I made small sketches and at some point tried a larger picture and it worked out perfectly for me. I thought to myself: wow, that's totally exciting because it combines what I like best about painting and what is most fun. When I used to paint on canvas, I always only painted one layer, so the picture only consisted of one "layer" and in principle I only had one chance. The typically painterly aspect of painting over and over again layer by layer and so on, I never did that. At that time, I already primed my canvases endlessly until they were completely smooth and hardly had any texture. I've always enjoyed working on very smooth surfaces. And when I work on paper today, it's similar: you actually only have one chance. You can correct small mistakes, but not a lot. If it's messed up, then unfortunately it has to go (laughs).

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But that also seems to me to be a very special paper that you use.

Yes, I've been looking for the right paper for a long time. I've also used a wide variety of papers, from watercolor paper to normal drawing paper. The paper I'm using now is actually used for plotting with large printers. You can use this for fine art prints or to print photos really big. I mean, in the end I also print on it, just manually. I've been to all kinds of art supply stores in Berlin, but I've never found anything that is so fine, so absorbs so well and reproduces the color so well. I finally discovered this paper in a printer's shop and I am super happy with it.

What are the best working conditions? Or to put it another way: Do you have rituals or are there any things that help you paint?

What works very well for me is meditation.

So, I meditate before painting and again after lunch. Collect yourself, empty yourself and establish focus. Above all, focus on the right thing. I've been doing this every day for over a year. When I drive through the beautiful nature here in the morning, that's where it actually begins, then I'm already in the now. I just noticed how good it was for me and that's how I got around to doing it consciously. I actually find it difficult to keep such habits, but that's really something else. This is my time, even if it's only 10 minutes or a quarter of an hour. In summer I sit under a tree in the morning and recharge myself with good energy. Meanwhile I also have a good structure, I no longer work so much into the night, but get up in the morning and go home in the evening. We always eat together here at lunchtime, which is also really good for me to take a break at noon.



Somehow there is a communal feeling here, right?

Absolutely. There is always someone cooking here and everyone can eat. The next day someone else cooks for everyone. That's very good for me, because otherwise I just forget about it or "prioritize it away" (laughs). Giving yourself this structure is very important because there is no employer or anyone who does it for you. I just learned to deal with it. In the past I would never have taken the time to meditate because I would have thought it was lost time.

But the exact opposite is the case.

Yes, it is just the opposite. This time improves all the rest of the day by 100 percent.

And here in nature it somehow fits well, so the meditation and allow yourself some rest.

I agree. That really worked out right here. I don't think I would have gotten there if I hadn't moved here. It's totally amazing what this place has changed for me for the better.

That's really great. I think I should get out into nature more often from Kreuzberg. Do you actually listen to music while painting?

I did a lot in the past. But sometimes it doesn't work at all. That has to be the right thing at that moment. At the moment I tend to listen to audio books, mostly when I'm doing something that doesn't require much thought. It's great when you can inspire yourself with something like this while painting, or even learn something. But sometimes I also need music, that is very emotional for me.



I can understand well. But briefly back to the location: where did you actually live and work before?

In Neukölln, on the border with Treptow. Before that I was in Hamburg for 4 years and before that in Stockholm for 3 years. In Stockholm I lived by the water and I noticed there that I really enjoy being close to nature. I come from the village in the Allgäu. And I always wanted to get out of there because it was just so boring. When you grow up there, you can't even appreciate what a great landscape and nature it actually is. As a teenager you just think, I can no longer see it, I finally want to go to the big city. And I had that until last year and when I moved back into nature, I noticed how important it is for me, for my well-being and my soul. I now really have the feeling that I have arrived. A feeling that I hardly knew before.

I also think that when you are more with yourself as a person, that is also reflected in your work.

Yeah, probably already. My works come out of me very strongly anyway or are very closely linked to me as a person. It has always been like that. As a child or as a teenager, I drew a lot to express my emotional state.

How did it develop to the point that you really saw art as a profession for you?

I couldn't foresee that I would ever make art. I didn't grow up with it either and that didn't exist in my environment in the village in Allgäu. My parents have very down-to-earth jobs and there was no interest in art in my family or anywhere else.

That I drew in order to put my feelings on paper was private and nobody saw that either. For me that had nothing to do with art either. After graduating from high school, I got to know a Swede on a trip with whom I later lived in Berlin, and there my interest in art slowly arose. We were two idealists with the romantic-naive idea that we didn't want to be a cog in the system and that art is the real thing (laughs). And based on that motif, we went to an art school in Sweden, where I then started painting.



And then you went to the HFBK in Hamburg?

Yes, at some point Stockholm was too much of an ideal world for me. I wanted to go back to Germany and check for myself whether it was valid here too. That was pretty tough at first. The relationship had broken up, I lived on the Reeperbahn and it was all very different from what seemed like perfect Stockholm. But I also longed for this contrast. When I finished, I thought: amazing, that was 7 years of intensive art studies - what's next?

How do you rate the course for yourself from today's perspective?

That was a certain toughening up for me. You had to be very true to yourself and defend yourself against others. At the HFBK I had the feeling that I had to maintain my position because I was pretty much alone with what I was doing. At some point I was happy to get out of this "bubble" because that at university has little to do with reality. In the beginning it is definitely a good thing that you don't have to deal with the art market and all that just yet.

What class were you in there?

I never really found myself with Anselm Reyle, Werner Büttner or Jutta Koether, so I was in Andreas Slominski's sculpture class. I think that was better for me than studying in Düsseldorf or Leipzig under a lot of painters.

Your older work from your student days was very different from today's, but it seems to me like a preliminary stage that led to it. The "dismembered figurative", as I call it, has already been hinted at, as has the very personal or intimate in your pictures.

Yes, that's right, there were already some indications at the time. In the past, my work was more closely interwoven with me. That was sometimes uncomfortable for me, because my pictures were quite intimate and I always revealed myself as a person, even though I am actually a very private person. My older pictures often made a strong impression on the viewer and particularly impressed loans.



That often comes from the craftsmanship. Then people like to say: oh, but you can paint well. But that's more annoying, doesn't it?

Yes, that really annoyed me (laughs).

Your current things seem somehow more self-confident and freer to me.

I also feel freer with it. To work with this technique on paper. The motifs also develop very differently than if I were to paint it directly on canvas.

I think your works also have interesting titles. Some sound very lyrical or poetic. And there is something very poetic about your pictures and that is reflected in the titles. Other of your titles could in turn be the beginning of a story or the first sentence of a novel ...

That's true. In general, I find it very exciting to work with text and language. My titles are often created from text fragments or things that I have picked up somewhere and put together in a new or different way. In the meantime, I have collected a large archive from such text fragments. My texts are composed of individual parts, similar to the pictures, even if you often do not notice this directly in the text. I like to use language not as an explanation but as a stylistic device of my own. Instead of an explanation, my titles should rather show other perspectives on the picture. If you know the title, you look at the picture very differently - I like that.

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I actually wanted to ask you which topics you deal with in your work - but somehow, I have the feeling that it all comes from you as a person or is about yourself.

Yes, the images arise in my head and for me it is a way of thinking about life. For me it's philosophy in pictures. I am concerned with fundamental questions of existence and identity. I am not working on a specific topic, but rather it is a combination of different influences, of things that I observe in my environment and questions that I ask myself: Why do I wake up every morning on a rotating rock somewhere in space? What's all this about? It doesn't stop there either, I used to ask myself such questions and I still ask them today. It used to be very strong for me that I transformed an intense feeling into a picture, a desperation, longing or whatever. Today more other influences flow into it, but it's incredibly difficult for me

What kind of reaction to your pictures would you like?

I don't really think much about it. I don't want to provoke a special reaction in someone. Everyone is completely free to react to the pictures as they wish. But I can tell when a picture of me triggers something in people. Even if the pulse rises a little for a short time. Of course, you want the work to move something in people, in whatever form. The question is anyway: why do you do that at all? I always stumbled with the question.

I like to take up the question: Why do you even make art?

I just want to be free and do what I want. This is the greatest gift of all that I can live here every day.

I can well understand it, it is indeed a tremendous amount of luck. Having the time and freedom of thought is incredibly valuable. But of course, it is also a great luxury that many people do not have.

It is a mega luxury and I am fully aware that it is something very special. That I can and may do that and that I also admit to myself. You have to assert yourself against everyone who always says: do something clever. Everyone said that back then, my parents and other people around me. To this day, I am sometimes surprised by myself that I took this path, although it is very insecure and you are talked into many things and everyone asks you: Can you make a living from it? And you hear from all sides that it is not a safe way of life and so on.

You can certainly listen to one thing or the other while drinking coffee with your relatives. Girl, do something decent ...

Oh yeah. But for me there is something almost spiritual about walking this path. Art is a way for me to deal with life and reality while remaining free. Expressing yourself and trying to find out something about yourself and your existence. And just not to be controlled by others. Of course, you also have the struggle, because the money has to come from somewhere.

But to a certain extent everyone else also has this struggle.

Exactly, and even if people have their secure job and a good income, they still ask themselves the question of meaning and what do I do with my life.

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Yes absolutely. And against the background that everyone is scrambling anyway and wondering where the whole point is, the artist's path is damn good compared to the supposedly bourgeois life, if I may differentiate it from one another.

I'm a bit surprised - or maybe not. In any case, it is very difficult for me to do something where the motivation does not come out of myself.

I can understand well. But think about how many people go to work without such intrinsic motivation. So you should actually come in here every morning and cheer first.

Yes! And it is also so great to do something that is neither controlled nor does it have to make any sense.

Indeed! But now something completely different: You recently not only exhibited in the Funkhaus at the show curated by Johann König, but also had an exhibition at EIGEN + ART, among other things. How about you with a permanent gallery? And what's next?

First of all, it's great that there is interest coming from different directions. Of course, I want to work with a gallery on a long-term basis, but this current stage is also very exciting when you work with different actors. You have to be patient and see how things develop. There has to be trust and a friendly relationship between the artist and the gallery, loyalty is required, that's important to me. It is a natural growth process and the delicate little plant will turn into a tree! Let's see, a lot can still happen ... and a lot is also being planned: a solo show for Gallery Weekend in the Aperto room in Mitte, for example, which I'm really looking forward to. Then an exhibition participation in the Villa Schöningen in Potsdam and in June a duo show in Hamburg.

That sounds great, I'm very excited! Thank you for your time and the great conversation.

With pleasure, thank you for your visit!

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