

Bernd Ribbeck's small pictures operate outside of today's world of images. The geometric patterns seem at first glance to derive from the stock piles of classical Constructivist and Concrete Art or from those accumulatively geometrical years of "New Geometry", "Neo-Geo" for short, which, by virtue of a revival in the second half of the Eighties, pre-occupied Western thinking about art. Certainly one has come across one or the other of Ribbeck's formations in the universal language of the fine arts, they would also be present in the vocabulary of design or in a painting course in, say, the adult evening class syllabus wherever work is being done on Kandinsky's circle-rectangle-triangle schemes or Johannes Itten's colour circle.

Radiation and Quanta

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In fact the circles, rectangles and triangles operate in Ribbeck's scheme in a completely different context and with individual intention. As geometric forms designed to fill the pictorial formats, they appear to emanate more from a craftsman's than an artist's repertoire of effects. The view of an abstract world of signs and forms with seemingly playful penetrations is then to be taken literally in the sense that a triangular arrangement of different coloured circles resembles a self-chosen test assembly of these elements; not only pattern before ground, but also

form before or in world. Ribbeck thereby lends this existential understanding of composition a deeper significance, by processing the painting's ground more intensively. The background – a partially sanded piece of hardboard repeatedly painted with layers acrylic paint – penetrates the geometric pattern with its colourful world, which is itself designed with coloured biro or permanent marker pen. By means of the translucence of its painted structure and colouration, but also through the fluidity of its cloud-like appearance, the ground pushes itself to the forefront rather like an energy field, muddies or confuses the constellation or conversely lends it a symphonic tonality; symphonic, because the composition can be read as a space filled with music, which can in turn cause the mood to slip into the elegiac, dramatic or tragic. However, the patterns themselves also give off energetic flow through their graphic characteristic style, so that a certain motor function arises, suffusing the whole composition. In reciprocal interpenetration the pattern/ground scheme dissolves now and then and multiple levels of radiation and quanta come into being, whose position – whether in front or behind – is no longer possible to determine. In more recent works with ink on paper, Ribbeck engineers an atmosphere also inherent in leaded stained glass windows by partially washing away the ink and allowing the outlines to fray, whereby here, too, he deliberately breaks up the surface's geometric continuum.

What the precise design intention of his *harmonia mundi* is cannot simply be described with a mere listing and arrangement of geometric components. Perhaps one would require the vocabulary of particle physics or perhaps the volume of expression of the opera, theatre or film in order to penetrate an analogous world. One thing is for sure: Bernd Ribbeck's painterly vision has already left the stage in the theatre of abstraction at the very point where it seems to enter it, where darkness and shadows are the constant companions of the light – in the place so to speak, where Novalis and Ingmar Bergman have left their traces.