

Blind Gestures

“Christoph Rütimann approached painting in a hesitant and somewhat roundabout fashion, even though he had longed to paint from the beginning. Yet for a long time he skeptically observed developments in painting [...] He pondered over the possibility of creating his own position and specific approach, how he could begin to paint, deal with the burden and the wealth of a long history of painting and the current options without becoming merely a continuation of it, without becoming part of a tradition. He wanted to open up and transform painting without denying its particular medial characteristics, paint and surface on which the paint is applied.”¹ This hesitance about painting seems even more resolute when you consider that Christoph Rütimann’s artistic approach is precisely that he radically challenges all the conventions of artistic genres and develops his own take on the specific media such as drawing, photography, and painting. He came to painting by way of photography. For *Chi ha detto che il giallo non è bello* (Who Said That Yellow Is Not Beautiful, 1983) he threw a camera with a self-timer function into the air several times as he was walking past a canola field. He enlarged and combined the chance shots of yellow flowers and blue sky to produce a wall-filling work that has the overall impression of a painting. This, along with Rütimann’s personal commitment to the color yellow, led to the first reverse glass works: monochrome glass panels painted yellow and leaning against a wall or as at the Venice Biennale in 1993 against the thick columns of the church of San Stae. This strategy permits him to reverse the painterly process and literally to challenge painting. The process of applying paint and allowing it to dry produces extremely fine interior structures that remain visible from the front through the glass, while the surroundings are reflected in the painting, thus completely reversing the concept of the painting as a window to the world. Additional colors are subsequently added when the artist combines monochrome glass panels or pieces of broken glass to form wall-filling installations.

The concept of the gesture, with which he had already extensively experimented in drawings since the mid-1980s using the most varied “tools,” found its way into his painted work in an additional developmental step: *Untitled* (1994), a three-part reverse glass painting. The backs of the first two glass panels are covered in purple or yellow paint. The third panel, which is positioned in front of and between the other two, features a poured, flowing gesture painted in bright signal red. The painterly mark confidently asserts itself in front of the monochrome surface, and it also seems to supersede it metaphorically. This was established in Rütimann’s painting starting in 2004 in the ongoing series *Untitled* (acrylic behind glass on canvas). The layer of paint—first acrylic, later oil—lies between the glass panel and canvas that serves as a support and reverse side, holding them firmly together through the power of adhesion. The painting is protected by the glass. The gestural movements in the painting are created blindly by pressure and manipulation of the painted layer using a scraper or a squeegee from the backside of the canvas: the artist cannot see what kinds of structures are produced on the front by his movements. Thus, for a moment, he allows chance to take over the process of creation. Ultimately it is a deliberate case of playing with chance and composition. Rütimann has found an intriguing way to make the gesture useful to him and his painting, to challenge artistic handwriting radically and consider it in a significant, new way. KB

1 Volker Adolphs, “Inversion der Farbe,” in: Volker Adolphs, Konrad Bitterli, and Markus Landert (eds.), *Christoph Rütimann. Der grosse Schlaf*, Nuremberg: Verlag für Moderne Kunst, 2007, pp. 15–19, here p. 15.