

# Collectors Agenda

In the Studio Nick Oberthaler, Vienna



**Nick, you began studying art at the age of eighteen. Why art, and how can one already be so sure at such an age?**

Coming from a rural area – I come from the Salzkammergut – one does not have a concrete idea of what makes up the context of contemporary art. You just want to move to the big city, leave the provinces. If one wants to go into a creative direction, applied graphic design would seem to suggest itself. At the time, I spoke with a friend who studied at the *Applied (University of Applied Arts Vienna)*. However, the courses there appeared too narrow and too school-like to me. So I arrived at free art and then studied painting at the *Academy of Fine Arts Vienna*.

**In the meantime, you have left your beginnings as an artist far behind you. What has remained from your art study?**

Of course you take things with you, you get an overview of art history and learn to classify things. Beyond the field of artistic practice I have never felt the urge to work theoretically or scientifically. Art education was not valued in the way it is today. Recently however, and for the first time, I have written a short exhibition text for an artist friend – that was an interesting experience. How does one actually write something like that? How does one address another artist's work textually?

**You say you don't work scientifically per se, you are not an art theoretician, but you do weave many art theoretical themes into your work, don't you?**

Yes, I think my artistic work has to a certain extent to do with theoretical exploration and I think it is necessary to include it in my own practice.

**You don't deal exclusively with art theory. Often, your references originate in philosophy, sometimes in the natural sciences or in politics, that is, in fields that have nothing to do with art.**

The contents with which I work originate from various fields: Image theory, fiction, scientific essays and day-to-day political reports. I actually wander constantly between different areas of subject matter; it is quite rare for me to read

something in one go, rather I pursue a kind of *rhizomatic* reading method. The French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari used the term *rhizome* as a metaphor for a post-modern or post-structuralist model of knowledge organization and description of the world. According to their theory, knowledge is not imparted in a linear strand or on one level, but three-dimensionally and anti-hierarchically. My approach to research and my work process are similar.

»I am not the type of painter who is concerned with the process of the application of paint.«

**So you are not concerned with painting only colorful surfaces in your pictures, even though it may look that way to the viewer at first glance.**

Yes, that would definitely be too boring for me. It is important to me to pursue this semantic research, during which you discover various things, which serve the interpretation. From this amalgam forms something like a story, a conceptual superstructure. At the same time, my artistic practice is extremely heterogeneous. I am more concerned with a kind of setting: the relationship of images to each other, the constructing of exhibitions as situations.

**Would you call yourself a genuine painter?**

I am not really sure myself (laughs). The mere fact that I apply paint to a surface does not mean that the work can be exclusively derived via the discourse of painting. I am not the type of painter who is mainly concerned with form and composition and the process of the application of paint or material. More important to me than the painting process itself is the creation of a context into which the picture has to be integrated so that it receives authorization. I am intrigued by the idea that a painting can become more than an object on the wall, stepping into the room and becoming readable on an expanded level.

**To just produce a "beautiful exhibition" would surely be insufficient?**

Yes, that would be comparable to the concept of salon painting at the beginning of the nineteenth century. I believe a picture should do more and challenge. It should enter into an interaction with the visitor, but I don't want to impose a set of rules for interpretation to the viewer: Through the discourse, art history is being perpetuated as it were.

**After two incredibly successful but surely also very demanding years, you retreated for some months in 2015 and 2016 and now you have begun to work with full force again.**

I think it is very important, especially in this state of present intoxication to resist the urge to reduce one's speed, and to reduce one's own speed, in order to sharpen one's own perception again and again and to be able to develop new points of view – also in regard to the fact of how one defines one's own role in the art scene. For me the fulfillment does not lie in *more, bigger and still more accumulation*. I try to keep a certain calm. For 2017 new exhibitions are planned with Martin van Zomerem in Amsterdam and in the new gallery space of Emanuel Layr in Rome.

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