

Speak, memory

"Art is a game, and a game has its rules" (Theo van Doesburg): art and games are both heterotopias, fields of a large degree of entelechy, autonomy and release from purpose. There was frequent and fruitful contrapuntal overlapping of these two fields in Modernism (most prominently in Dada, Surrealism and Fluxus). In 2008, Katharina Daxenberger operates in this art-game-interface too and in so doing she succeeds (as it were with playful ease) in taking pleasure in new aspects of this old theme.

The medium as well as the theme of Daxenberger's work called "the same but different" is a parlour game that has been popular in Europe since the 19th century and that has been known under the generic (but nonetheless protected) brand name of "Memory": a piece of mnemotechnical enjoyment whereby the players take turns to try and identify pairs of cards from among a larger number of cards that are lying face-down. Whilst these pairs of cards are in fact generally identical as they are technical reproductions, Daxenberger's pairs of cards consist of two renderings of a motif, that means two genuine unicums, which merely look similar and which have been created just for this game and reproduced in their original size (6 x 6 cm). 60 small, individual pictures produce 30 pairs of cards and central thread with – in spite of all their diversity – happily corresponding pictorial creations, which with their overlapping and often intersecting similarities often recall Wittgenstein's concept of "family similarities" (which he significantly developed with reference to the phenomenon of games).

As is the case with any good game and good art, Daxenberger's work revolves around a series of issues in an experimental and exploratory way without really giving any concrete answers (the knowledge gain lies in the very act of playing). For example, the basic question as to the relationship between the original and a reproduction: is a repetition inevitably a copy? Or is the initial version possibly more of a pre-study for the second one? How much (painterly) freedom remains in the case of a repetition? And on the other hand: how does repetition influence the original? Is there perhaps a preceding self-limitation in favour of easier repeatability? At what point does similarity turn into identity (for the artist, for the viewer)? And what significance does the motif have for the quality of the picture on which it is based?

However, hovering over everything there is still the question that is existential for the work itself (an uncertainty, a risk of failing that has accompanied the whole production process): can such a picture in such a miniature format be a picture that can be taken seriously at all (or even a painting)? And do not motifs, upon which the artist has already worked in a larger format, lose their substance so to say automatically due to miniaturization (is a landscape in this format still landscape, does the chandelier still shine so elegantly, is this eggplant still a depiction or already a mere icon, where does representation end and where does abstraction and stylization start)? "the same but different" does at least provide a concrete answer to these questions: excellent painting is also possible in six-by-six format and a good picture is a good picture is a good picture – regardless of its size.

Peter T. Lenhart, 2008.