

Blue, Green and Orange Discretely Tipped Off Kilter

Ingrid Pröller: *Delimitation*

Art and sports are generally held to be two separate participatory social systems that not only have nothing in common but even appear to be almost mutually exclusive. Even though in times of an imperative to be good-looking and physically optimised lifestyle management hardly anybody interested in art will want, or trust themselves, to cultivate an unkempt and unathletic appearance even on a Saturday visit to the museum, training of the dynamic and dapper self remains in the realm of private practice. If one does encounter individual cases of go-getting gallery owners or critics, or ambitious artists in the fitness studio, on the football field or at a boules tournament, as a rule these activities belong more on the agenda of leisure pursuits – even if, as Richard Sennett wrote, leisure-time has long ceased to exist in more flexible economic systems.¹ The fields of professional sports and ambitious art – understood as a high-performance activities and the art market system – are hardly compatible with one another on the symbolical socio-political level: The arena of the one is the proscribed zone of the other. In the work of Ingrid Pröller, however, these two worlds meet in an entirely untypical manner. This artist links the “regimes” of creativity and a Bohemian lifestyle with the target-orientation and reliance on rules of the sports fields as the result of a comprehensive philosophy of life: as a student she took courses in fine arts while also training to be a sports teacher. Pröller taught sports at schools that, as state-run educational institutions, also have the function of transitioning from a concept of physical education and physical fitness largely derived from 19th century tenets into a more contemporary one based on bodily awareness. She pursued a holistic playful approach based on new practices in physical education where movement is playful and communicative, and has a societal and social orientation.

Ingrid Pröller’s engagement with sport is also rooted, however, in her own experiences as a youth active in light athletics, as well as in a fundamental interest in the body, corporeality and physical presence. Accordingly, she engages with the areas of knowledge and analogies in the interdisciplinary connections between philosophy, sociology, ethics and sports. The conviction that an individual’s bodily awareness is one of the core issues of empowerment in contemporary life and life sciences – what Michel Foucault calls “biopolitics” – eventually led Ingrid Pröller to the question of where the body could find a place in art. In an earlier series of paintings she depicted youths who were often pursuing sporting activities on their own: a jogger running alone towards an imaginary goal before a dramatic evening sky, or a boy in a tracksuit pondering, seated on a wooden chair in a room. Frequently, though, Pröller has also depicted types of extreme sports or practices associated with the broader context of youth cultures – a *Kitesurfer* hovering above a supernaturally orange coloured abyss, or a young *Traceur* who is jumping over roofs and walls. The de-individualised protagonists often conjure-up more associations with guerilla tactics than fun sports with their activities. These motifs clearly show that the extent of Pröller’s interest in young people also applies to the depiction of extreme psychological and social situations linked to the modern notion of achievement: to get their daily kicks the average metropolitan youth styles themselves as fighting for survival in an inhospitable jungle. The impressive portraits that Pröller has dedicated to these characters always retain an existential quality. In this sense, sport is ascribed an escapist compensatory function, regarded as an expression of the civilised urban lifestyles conveyed in the images of the mass media. “Basically, as the all permeating instruments of infotainment, it is the mass media that create the profile of sportspeople as the true representatives and figures for identifying with for all – more or less physically passive – media consumers”, writes Rainer Fuchs in reference to the work of Ingrid Pröller with an allusion to the compensatory side of the powerlessness and compulsion experienced in everyday urban life.²

In this sense one could speak of a kind of abstraction by means of the (visual) spatialisation of the socially mediated “value of vitality” regarding Pröller’s mural for APG, too. The artist developed a concept from three floor markings of the type applied in sports halls that create a visually ornamental painting while also appearing to burst the space with a controlled expressive gesture. The colourful basketball, volleyball and handball lines – following the actual pattern of a pitch – accompany the view down a section of corridor, over several walls, sections of ceiling and pillars on the 36th floor of the skyscraper. Pröller has

¹ Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character, The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*, W.W.Norton & Company Inc., New York 1998.

² Rainer Fuchs, „Malerei – Medien – Gefühle“, in: *Ingrid Pröller: Body & Soul*, Bucher Verlag, Hohenems 2008, p. 11. Here in translation

adhered precisely to the international guidelines for the organisation of playing fields, having acquired detailed information in the preparatory phase for the project: on the width of the markings as well as on the distances to be maintained between intersecting lines. The result is a “realistic” (partial) depiction of a sports hall floor, one that is instantly recognisable as such despite having been, in Ingrid Pröller’s words, “discretely tipped off kilter”, and running along the walls at an angle. It is with this trick that the office space expands noticeably – an effect that is also suggested by the title *Entgrenzungen* (Delimitation). The process of painting itself – which is what is involved – presented a number of technical challenges, which Pröller overcame with a technique she developed ad hoc: she drew the perfectly curved lines with the aid of a pliable ruler, and the circles on the wall were drawn with a pencil attached to a piece of string. To make the paint as opaque as possible the green, blue and orange markings were applied in three coats. With this work Ingrid Pröller has successfully created a visually appealing simulation of a sporting world – one intended to be perceived with positive connotations.

That in an achievement-orientated society, as well as in a didactic sense, sports also represent a standardising instrument of promoting self-discipline becomes clear, last but not least, in the face of the innumerable rules and regulations common to (most) sporting activities. In Pröller’s work this aspect of sports is already suggested in the title to the extent that it evokes a paradox. It is not the social arenas where sports are played that appear delimited here. It is an artistic practise that succeeds in gently lifting the controlling organisational instance by alluding to the potential for a transgression of social processes that makes it possible to break rules frequently in a playful manner, and cross boundaries to enable things to be looked at in new ways.

Patricia Grzonka, „Blau, Grün und Orange dezent aus dem Lot gebracht (Blue, Green and Orange Discretely Tipped Off Kilter). Ingrid Pröller: Entgrenzungen (Delimitation)“, in: art office under construction, Kunstprojekt der Austrian Power Grid, Brandstätter Verlag, Wien 2011, S. 22–33. (ISBN 978-3-85033-528-7)