

The latest works developed for his large personal exhibition at the Neue Galerie offer a thrilling insight into his astounding ability to experiment with various materials and the way he deals with the picture space, which is not only to be understood as a physical space but also as extending into the ambiance. The beholder losing the safe distance from the picture finds himself caught in an immerse image environment, similar to fascinating historical panorama views, or finds himself somehow reconnected with Claude Monet's hypnotic water lily paintings from Giverny.

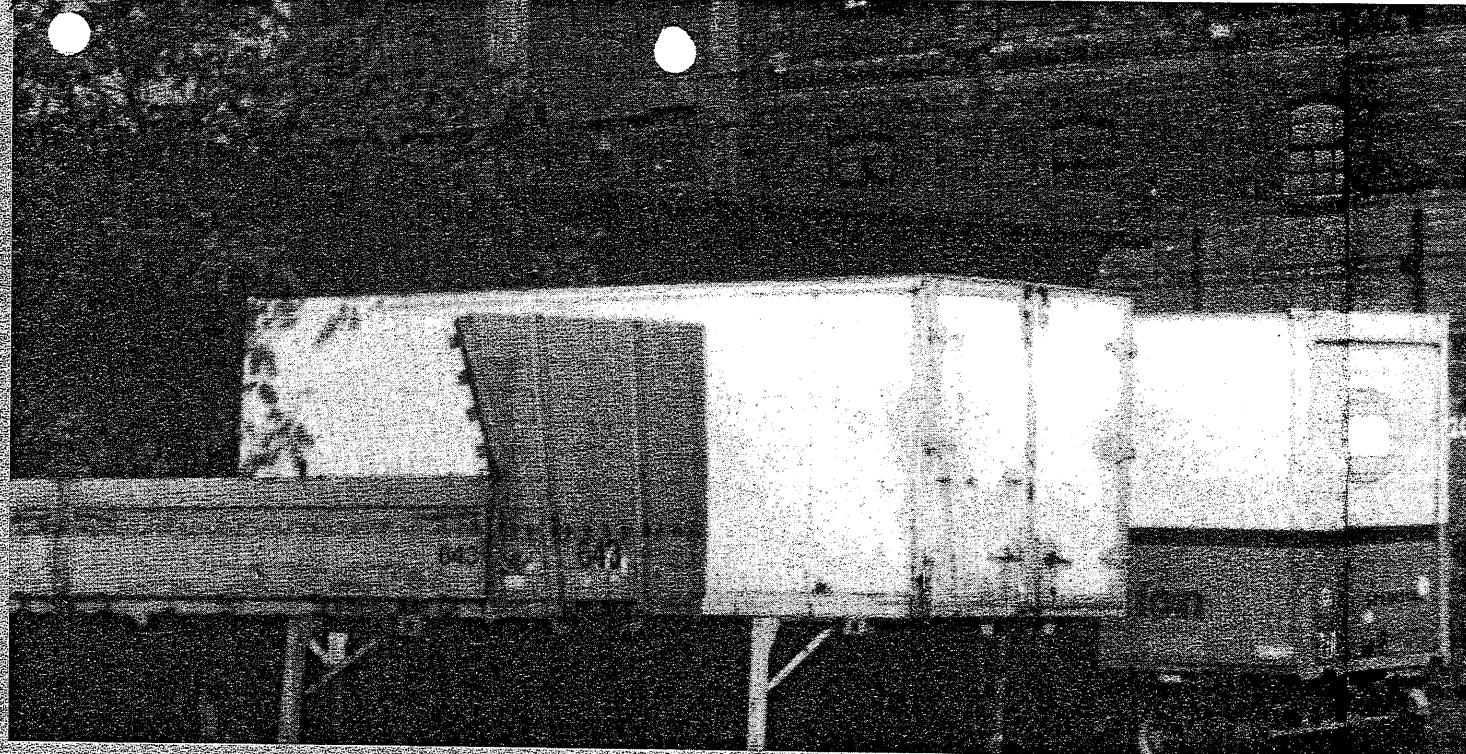
1 Cf. Exhibition catalogue, Neue Galerie at the Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz, Rudi Molacek, 5 months, Christa Stemle (Ed.), Triton Verlag, Vienna 1999

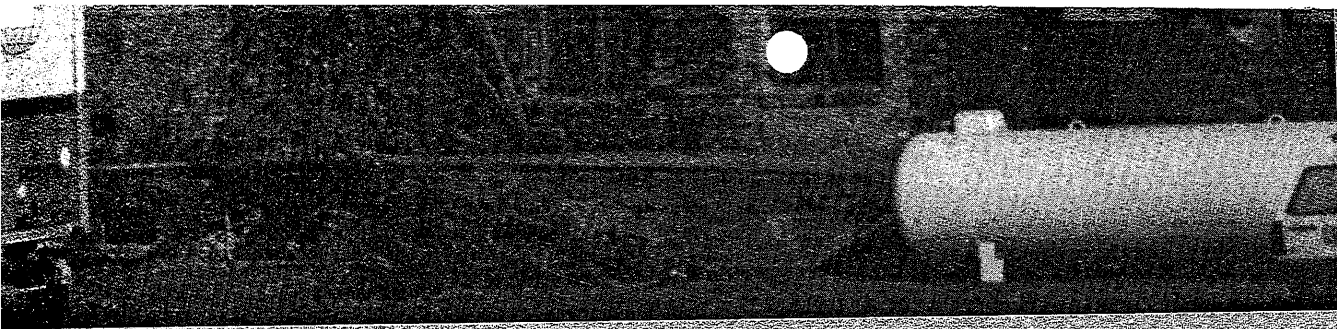
**Peter Weibel (2002)**

The process of rendering color absolute began in the 19th century and led to monochrome painting. At the same time a scopic regime emerged from photography which produced panoramic painting. This was an attempt to stretch the panel into space so that a picture was not just a "window" (Alberti) on reality, representing a fraction of reality, but instead something that showed everything (pan). A round painting, giving an all-embracing panorama, could outdo photography. It provided an updated continuation of paintings and frescoes. It was from this logic of the expansion of color and image that Monet's famous large-scale paintings in Giverny (murals with water lilies, 1925) originated. The large formats of the

American expressionists likewise gave a spatial extension to pure color rendered absolute, not as a spatial illusion, but as a surface. The color surface extended further and further into space. The distinction between picture and wall was reduced. The demarcation between picture and wall became less clear. With his industrial fluorescent tubes, whose color flowed out across the whole (pan) room, Dan Flavin defined an end for color in space. The scopic regime led to the disintegration of the image; only color rules. Panoptic color field painting was the sum of experiments with the expansion of color and image. Within this modern tradition of color painting, which defines itself spatially, within this spatial painting, whose deve-

lopment the Neue Galerie has already represented in several other exhibitions, Rudi Molacek has opened up a new chapter. He first took large test-strips, waste products from the photo industry, and gave them a new use. (1992 Neue Galerie Graz, Studio exhibition). His experiments with digital paint programs have brought to light new possibilities involving color on surface, an alternation of strokes and diffuse zones of color that suspends the historic rules of color distribution. The results are compositions that do not follow the rules of vision as was the case in early abstraction, but that also do not follow the intrinsic values of color as in art informel. Instead the same properties which photography gives to color, sharpness





and blur, effects and distortion, become the starting point for a freed idea of color. Just as photography is the godfather of the logic of the expansion of color, here it acts as the mother of painting. We are experiencing the birth of painting from the spirit (not music, not form) of color. Monochrome painting, which with Flavin's monochrome immaterial color spaces completed the expansion of color into space, did however not complete the expansion of the picture into space, because Flavin expanded only the color and not the picture itself. In Rothko's color fields, which owe their effect to sensory inhibition, it is, despite the large format, only the color area that extends, and not the painting itself. The return to panoptic

painting as the origin of the scopie regime, under whose dictates modernism has operated until today, is Molacek's cognitive achievement. It allows him to pursue the expansion of the picture into space without silencing the wide vocabulary of painting, as is the risk when only one color predominates and form is suppressed, as in monochrome painting, or only the form or even inform as in art informel. In Molacek's work the expansion of the picture into space becomes an expansion of painting as a whole into a new terrain, into a new vocabulary, a new horizon. The fact that associations with the history of painting emerge during this process is indicative of the inner logic of the ambivalent painting of Rudi Molacek.

ty in the awareness of the danger of pathos, a necessity also a leaning towards the light and the inherent movement of Baroque painting.

Molacek has however increasingly distanced himself from the image, and is moving towards an absence of images. On the one hand this occurs through a choice of abstraction as a means in the medium of painting: the simple broad brush strokes and narrower brush rhythms and the amorphic forms emerging like clouds of cream from the East Frisian tea, no longer contain any hint of an object (beyond the picture) but show instead the shifting form in its fleeting manifestation. On the other hand Molacek has started on a large number of experiments that involve the outer framework of painting, the material and carrier medium, so to speak.

Apart from huge formats whose width and length are defined by the proportions of the roll of canvas, he also works with strips of canvas, painting on the waste products of frame shops. In a way these waste strips serve as a fitting vehicle for his