

**Artistic Director  
of IKOB,  
International Art Centre  
of the German-Speaking  
Community of Belgium,  
Eupen**

**A**t the beginning of the 1950s, Paris was still an important cultural and artistic capital; the cultural fertilization and the frenetic run to modernity could be diagnosed as a real sickness. In the field of painting, the abstraction, partly detached from the inspiration of nature, evolved towards a free play of forms, as an artistic promise of spirituality and freedom. Concurrently, in post-war America, a generation of artists was working in abstract expressionism; the main representative painters were seeking to a formlessness, when the “drip paintings” of Jackson Pollock already presaged the idea of painting as performance; from his point of view, as movement, the gesture of the painter is the main act; so he set up the frame of references of gestural abstract painting.

In Yves Zurstrassen's work, we mention a “radicalism”, which is expressed itself with rare discipline, rigorousness, and perfection. The artistic quest for the absolute of artists like Ad Reinhardt, Ellsworth Kelly or Mark Tobey is not alien to him. Up to a few years ago, there are also some similarities with Sam Francis; we are thinking about his brushstrokes done in many layers of a single transparent colour, bringing about a general effect of floating.

Then, apparently at once, Zurstrassen achieves maturity and his work seems to be completely changed. Was it

because of the threshold of a new millennium? Did he want to get it over with the past? Or has his new studio created such conditions that he might look at everything with new eyes? Possibly, all the afore-cited factors have urged Yves Zurstrassen on developing a new conception for his abstract painting; anyway, his new work is a reflect of our globalised world, mainly driven by rational thinking. Man is now moving at dizzying speed on information highways, powered by the networking of complex communication technologies. And new technologies always mean new possibilities for expression in images, languages and ideas. New patterns of communication are emerging comparable to windows that can be opened at will.

Zurstrassen has devoted a full year to produce a series of large-format paintings, conceived especially for the exhibition at the Contemporary Art Centre IKOB in Eupen. In so doing, he stood by Malevich's guiding principle, that every art theory is following the artworks. Every exhibition is a new challenge, another possible performance, a new release from himself and his surroundings. As Pierre Soulages said, “there is no more stirring belief in man than that which pays a great deal of respectful attention to the creative process, rather than trying to codify the past, in order to invent a future in his own image.”

Here however, it is well worth asking what has now changed from Zurstrassen's earlier abstract and gestural expressionism? Definitely the answer is in the way of working the picture area and, above all, his new approach of the production process.

As regards the organisation of the picture area and the distribution of simple forms in the space, we could think about Matisse's paper collages. Indeed, Zurstrassen is in the line of this technique, but transforming the original project, he does just the opposite: a kind of “decollage”; mainly, through this personal approach, he does not abandon painting, but he comes back to the painting; and using contrasted or subtle hues, he creates paintings full of very special atmosphere. This “modus operandi” is very complex and brings about results that any other technique could make. On a coat of paint, he applies several layers of thin paper forms; then every coat is covered with another colour; finally, removing the paper forms, unexpected views appear, as if we are looking through several windows.

In this delicate and fast succession of working steps, there is a serial intervention in time and space, which is the originality of such a technical procedure and perfectly represents its actuality. The potential of expression of this way of painting seems nearly unlimited. Here we only perceive a

small fraction of it. However the creative prospects are unpredictable. Precisely, complexity, diversity and uncertainty are the main aspects of present global phenomena; Zurstrassen succeeds to express these novelties and achieves a really new quality in communication elasticity.

That is why we consider that Yves Zurstrassen is in the forefront of a new abstraction.

Eupen, 2003