

A Conversation with Ati Maier

Conducted via e-mail
by Corinna Ripps Schaming, curator

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Corinna Ripps Schaming: The first thing that attracted me to your work was the color. It's been about eight years since I saw my first Ati Maier painting, and I remember thinking, "I know this color." For me it belongs to a specific German palette: to Der Blaue Reiter, to Bauhaus cut-paper exercises, to German children's books. Am I right here? I remember my German grandmother sending me this amazing paper with a sticky back that you had to wet (or in my case, lick), and you could use it to make all sorts of cut and collaged images. The color was unlike any American kid's construction paper, so much more vivid, not fluorescent, more primary but still really glow-y. The first time I saw one of your paintings, that's what I thought of.

Ati Maier: You are right about the color! Growing up in Munich, I was surrounded by the Blaue Reiter painters from the beginning. We had a wonderful Franz Marc print, *Grazing Horses*, in our hallway. My first big influences (before I even went to art school) were Marc, August Macke, Wassily Kandinsky, and on top of

everybody, Paul Klee.

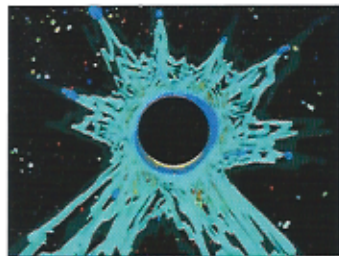
When I went to art school in Vienna, I had a very different color palette, very dark earth colors, mostly brown and red. I was inspired by aboriginal cave paintings after a trip to Australia. I then developed large expressive hunting scenes in oil and egg tempera on canvas. My recent vibrant colors have only just started to develop since my move to Brooklyn about ten years ago. Now they're getting even more vibrant and vivid.

I wanted to get to your recent video work a bit later on, but your comment about pushing the limits of vividness begs the question: has working in 3-D animation changed how you approach color in your paintings? I think there are a lot of formal and conceptual relationships between the two media that are really soaring back and forth for you right now. Space, for example, which we can talk about now or later.

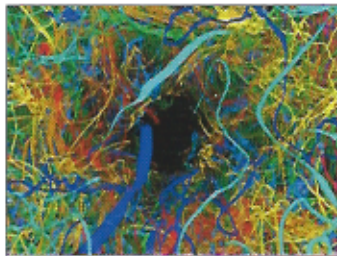
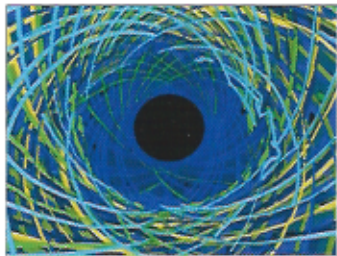
In terms of color (and I would say in everything else too), the 3-D animations really work parallel to the paintings, each influencing the other as I try new concepts in both media. In the *Space Rider* [2009] video, I rebuilt two of my large-scale paintings, *Twin Peaks* [2008] and *Dérive* [2007], in 3-D so I would be able to move inside the space of the painting and experience it in a whole new way. Then I tried to get a 3-D effect in the followup paintings by starting to use airbrush, which gives the work a different sense of speed. So yes, there's definitely a strong formal and conceptual relationship and competition going back and forth between the two media.

Space Rider, 2009, video stills





Event Horizon, 2010, video stills



So how does this relationship or competition manifest itself in terms of the space in your most recent video?

Event Horizon [2010] explores the idea that everything is built out of single lines. I reworked the same landscape I used in my painting *Savvy* [2010] by digitally distorting and warping it in multiple layers through Photoshop. Then I drew directly in 3-D: three different landscapes, each in eleven separate, slightly distorted layers that make a conceptual connection to M-theory, an extension of theoretical physics' string theory in which eleven dimensions are identified.

Could you talk about the show's title, *Event Horizon*, in relation to the video and to the other work in the show?

I'm interested in trying to work conceptually with certain ideas in physics. These ideas influence the work. What strikes me most about the "event horizon" of a black hole is that it's the ultimate boundary. Nothing can escape beyond the event horizon, not even light. I'm trying to reach that boundary; I'm trying to get as close to it as possible. I want to see what's behind it. I want to jump into the black hole.

Risky business...

Well, my vision is to act like a space pioneer and try to go where no one has gone before. I am driven by the desire to visually interpret the emerging spatial realms implied by new technologies, where signal, wavelength, energy, and speed define space.

Thinking back to our earlier discussion of *Der Blaue*

***Reiter*, I was wondering if you ever think about lost utopias? Maybe you're not looking back at all?**

I like to look back in time the same way I like to go into the future. When I first lived in Berlin, I did extensive research on the oldest drawn maps at the Staatsbibliothek Berlin archives. I use structures and visual dynamics derived from scientific theories, satellite views, images from NASA websites, and technological and geological models, as well as from landscapes, maps, and photos. As a sampler of unlimited information, it's all equally important. Past, present, and future become a single but dense coherence in my paintings.

About *Der Blaue Reiter*: I don't think their ideas were about utopias. They believed in the promotion of modern art and a spontaneous, intuitive approach to painting. They marked a dramatic turn away from a Eurocentric, conventional orientation.

And also from early modernity's shared quest for a heightened sense of being. The hybrid and experiential nature of *Der Blaue Reiter*'s goals seems particularly related to your video *Space Rider*, in which you digitally merge the space of two paintings to stage a new experience of space in a new form.

In *Space Rider* I give the viewer the unique experience of traveling inside my paintings with regard to time and space. I have my own experience in the moment I create the work, each time in a new and different way. I visually walk through my paintings in search of the thrill of yet another spatial realm. The viewer has to take his time to sink into the land- and space-scapes, and his awareness will also shift.

Could you touch on how Situationism relates to your approach to painting? Theoretically the two are locked in mutual cancellation... but I'm not so sure of this. What do you think?

The Situationists experimented with the construction of situations. They developed a series of experimental fields of study for this, like psycho-geography and the *dérive*, both of which became very interesting to me when I was out West riding on horseback through the plains and mountain ranges of Wyoming, exploring (for me) unknown territory. I never knew where I would end up when I rode out in the morning. I just headed up the mountain and waited for what would come my way.

In terms of my painting process, I think about the Situationist practices of the *dérive*, which is an attempt at analyzing the totality of everyday life through passive movement through space, and of the *drift*, which is the path of least resistance that is automatically followed in aimless strolls, the appealing or repelling character of certain places. I experiment with these practices by reacting in a subconscious way to images that are already on the canvas and are drifting into new ones. I'm creating partly by chance and experiment. Again, I never know what a painting will look like when I start out. It starts with the construction of a situation and then the process takes over. It's an evolution.

You still make paintings. Clearly you believe in painting. Do you envision a point in your practice where painting would play a secondary role to video, or do you think painting will always be your point of departure?

I think painting and drawing will always come first in terms of working out and manifesting a new idea. I then develop and explore the idea by going back and forth between the two media. I'm always working in multiple, evolving phases.

As a self-proclaimed "space pioneer," you explore new terrain all the time, whether literally experiencing it on horseback riding through the American West or metaphorically considering the farthest limits of time and space. How do these experiences affect your relationship to edges and the boundaries of a given pictorial space?

Of course, in pictorial space the boundaries are very strict. The border is given by the measurements of the canvas or paper, and you can only work in two dimensions. This is a huge challenge! I use new techniques like airbrush, which gives the paintings more of a three-dimensional character. I am always on the lookout for new "special effects," trying out different views or perspectives, playing with optical illusions, putting still and empty spaces against active and energized fields, finding some new space-scapes.

And in video?

The videos have endless options to be projected or screened. With each new video, I go further into a new dimension. I created *Event Horizon* to be projected onto a dome-shaped ceiling. My next video will be a complete room installation with multiple projections using the whole room, possibly the ceiling and floor too. I'm just starting to explore my boundaries in video. ■

LEFT:
The Giant Dipper, 2010
Airbrush, ink, wood-
stain on paper.
94½ x 53 inches

COVER:
Event Horizon, 2010
(detail)
3-D animation video,
3:09 min, loop
Animation and sound:
Reni Pawlowski

INSIDE:
Sawy, 2010
Airbrush, ink, wood-
stain on paper
94½ x 53 inches

An abstract, high-contrast image featuring vibrant green and blue swirling patterns, resembling liquid or smoke, set against a dark background. The patterns are dense and fluid, creating a sense of movement and depth.

ATIEVENT
MAIERHORIZON

February 1 through April 2, 2011