

The works of Markus Lüpertz in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum collection



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**BILBOKO ARTE
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The sculpture of Markus Lüpertz: *Frauenkopf (Kopf meiner Mutter)* *(Head of a Woman (Head of My Mother))*

Kosme de Barañano

A robust, almost hairless head on an enormous neck that extends to the shoulders, the left amputated by a single cutting blow. This part of the torso rests on two cylinders on a rectangular pedestal, the back part bearing the anagram signature and the edition number (ML and no. 4/6). Markus Lüpertz presents this portrait [fig. 1], cast in bronze, polished and painted, as a sort of classical ruin with a specially made support.

This sense of ruin, this exercise in style designed to imbue the portrait with an antique touch, is also appreciable in the break in the material at the neck; it is as if the artist had either not quite mastered the bronze casting techniques or as if time had corroded the alloy.

Pursed lips in lightly painted ochre evoke the lips on Etruscan terracotta figures. Suggestively drawn eyes, leaving very slight marks on the modelling, and the incision of the iris circles powerfully recall, for example, the terracotta with the head of the god Hermes from 490 BC at the Villa Giulia in Rome [fig. 2]¹.

Lüpertz presents the sculpture or portrait of his mother as a votive head. This serene, and yet majestic head, modelled as a compact, solidly constructed mass, has details like the really exquisite line used for the eyes, lightly drawn on the original wax or on the plaster with a fine-headed punch.

Markus Lüpertz's exercises in style are not "works after, or, in the manner of"; nor does the memory of the model come into play. They are exercises in memory, rewritings of art history: their paraphrases are invocations. In his early writings he describes them as "dithyrambs", the title, indeed, of one of his paintings. As Friedrich Schlegel wrote, "Jeder hat noch in den Alten gefunden, was er brauchte oder wünschte, vorzüglich sich selbst" (We all find what we need or desire in Antiquity, fundamentally ourselves). Lüpertz is well aware

¹ For other examples of this style, see Sprenger/Bartoloni 1983.



1. Markus Lüpertz (1941)
Frauenkopf (Kopf meiner Mutter), 1987
Painted bronze, 97 x 75 x 47.5 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Inv. no. 02/185



2. *Head of Hermes*
Etruscan, late 6th century BC
Terracotta from the sanctuary of Portonaccio, Veio
Museo Nazionale di Villa Giulia, Rome

that memory, *Mnemosyne*, is the mother of all works of art (and of history too). As he puts it, "...eigentlich ist die Antike eine überpersönliche Welt. Eine Welt, in der alle an einer einzigen, einmal gefundenen Idee gearbeitet haben. Ein Olymp der Künste, wobei das Individuum des Künstlers völlig überflüssig werden konnte" (Antiquity is an extra-personal world. A world in which everyone has worked on a single, already found idea. An Olympus of the arts where the individual being of the artist can become totally superfluous).

Each version of this work, with a different patina of colour, accentuates the morphology of the unchanging casting in a different way. The masking effect of colour on bronze draws the observer into the complex relations between the original form (the cast) and the subsequent form given to it (painting). Colour is used to break with the closed, undeviating form. This is not just an avant-garde idea; it also comes from the tradition of archaic Greek sculpture. As the artist reminds us, "Jede griechische Skulptur war bemalt, was man heute nicht mehr sieht, aber die Legende von dieser Bemalung ist hinreißend als Erinnerung" (All Greek sculpture was painted, something we don't see today, but the legend of this superimposition of colour remains attractive as a memory).

His objective is not to provide a period portrait, nor is it the sense of a classic monument (in a line descending from the *Marcus Aurelius*, through the *Gattamelata* to Rodin's *Balzac*). Avoiding both Pop Art irony and minimalist reductionism, Lüpertz composes a classic *monumentum* (a statue of homage or commemoration) and, at the same time, a contemporary work that looks out at us like a votive head while also conjuring up the powerful ghost of maternal potency and vigour. In Lüpertz's works, the fantasy, the phantoms, lie in his ability to arouse and ward off images even when the objects or sources of such sensations are not immediately present. *Phantom* (from the Greek *phantazo*, apparition, itself from the verb *phaino*, to shine) is what appears, vaguely shining, thus distinguishing it from *phenomenon*, the normal, the real (which for Plato was but the shadows and reflections produced by "true things"). *Phantom* has an onus, a vibration that links it



3. Markus Lüpertz (1941)
Titan, 1986
Painted bronze, 253 x 59 x 196 cm
MLP 28/4

to another sensibility. Landscapes in Lüpertz—like his Mozart—are not simple memories; they have an evocative touch that takes them into a more profound sensibility, no less pictorial for being less analytical. Phantoms, images produced by fantasy, are not improvised out of nothing: they have their origins in representations or are equivalent to those same representations. The pictorial eye is not the instrument of other knowledge, the image is not the illustration of a prior thought; in his work, Lüpertz's eye transforms what he has seen and *makes evident* other registers and other intentions, when his vision becomes gesture, when like Cézanne *he thinks in paint*, when his enigmas are converted, are translated, are shaped into phantoms.

This is not one of the most exhibited of Lüpertz's works. Sculptures have always been relatively scarce in his exhibitions, except for some sculpture-specific shows, like the one at the Manheim Kunsthalle in 1985, the inclusion of his *Titan* [fig. 3] at the Munich Glyptothek in 1986 and the earliest exhibition of the five works in relief called *Die Toten Tanz Reliefs* (1989-1990) at the Michael Werner Gallery in Cologne in 1991. Another occasion was the 2007 show devoted to Mozart entitled *Body and Landscape*, at the Baluarte in Pamplona, which I myself curated.

In Spain *Frauenkopf* was seen at Madrid's Queen Sofia National Arts Centre, which in 1991 offered the artist's first retrospective, although the work was not included in the catalogue. In 2002 it was shown at Valencia's modern art institute IVAM's convent of the Carmen, as part of an anthological review called *Memory and Form*, opening a series of mythological figures. However, it was not included in the Gemeentemuseum exhibition in The Hague entitled *In Divine Light*, a show of almost 300 works by Lüpertz that highlighted, in several sections, the artist's production in sculpture.

Lüpertz's personal style in sculpture is based on modelling, on working wax and plaster, which he carves, going at it in the same way he attacks the canvas with his brushes. Rather than painting from the wrist, Lüpertz paints with his entire arm, firing off his powerful brushstrokes and violently dragging the brush to bring his forms into the required shape. Plaster gets the same aggressive treatment, almost as if he were working stone. Look here at the arm amputated by a single blow. His sculptures are striking, in the first place, for being figurative, but at the same time for including abstract forms, both imbued with historical reference. Many of them are painted, the colour giving new formal and structural meaning to the works.

Lüpertz is a painter's painter, in the sense that his painting is self-representative: *Malerei as Malerei*, painting as painting. There is nothing new in the idea, also found in this sculpture, of front-on portrayals, which runs from Russian icons to the painting of Jawlensky. Lüpertz always evokes a nature that is not painted to be "seen", but is instead lived, humanized. The image of the landscape is transmuted into one of a soul on which the sun never rises: hermetic, absent and, at the same time, full of solitude, of the sort to be found in the works of Friedrich. In Lüpertz the image of his mother also transmutes into the image of a goddess, absent and hermetic, like an interior landscape.

The artist believes in a form of expression between abstraction and figuration. As he once wrote: "I don't think narration matters, narration is simply the surface. I come from abstraction and I go from painting to the subject that finally imposes itself during the act of painting". This sense of figurative features structuring the composition with tinctures, stains and streaks that compress rhythms is found in European painting from mediaeval stained glass windows. And, also, in the entire series of paintings entitled *Vanitas*, where the Dürer-like craniums structure the composition. Electricity and combustion are the two words that best sum up how Lüpertz acts on the canvas, or on the plaster he uses when starting on a sculpture.

Where Giacometti scraped plaster with a chisel or a knife, Lüpertz fights it, first by modelling it and then by breaking it with an axe or cutting it with a saw. It is not just a question here of the cut to the arm; the process is also clear in the knocks to the torso and the base. It is physical graft that has more to do with a woodcutter or a quarryman's efforts than with the modeller who works on the press. The figure continues to be something for artists to portray and, as always, it remains important as a theme, as motif, as subject matter, subject to an artistic vision.

This frequently gives rise to paradoxical effects: firm volumes we can take in at a glance begin to vibrate and break because of the drawing. The portions of the sculpture, not consistent in volumes, assert themselves and gain solidity by means of colouring that may be calm, serene and at other times baroque, ironic in its talcum-powder whites (as in the portraits of Mozart).

In his sculpture, Lüpertz renovates the *monumentum*, memory and the iconography of the mythical figures, much as he did with the Greek heroes and the small figures of Mercury.

Lüpertz is one of the living artists seeking to bring new life to painting and sculpture. Portraits of people, like the one of his mother or, twenty years after, of Mozart, seem to be involved in a process of metamorphosis, translated somehow to a perennial, a-critical, proud image set against time. Ever since the pre-Socratic "know thyself", man has strived to understand his own spiritual and material being, searching out the secrets of the human body, the process from birth to death, the emotions and adventures of the soul in its bid to hold on to life. The pose of a sitter is not a natural pose, proper to the subject portrayed, but one imposed by the artist. His vision of reality, his rendering of characters, is a vision that is not natural, but one that is emphatic, in line with an *iconic consideration* of painting and sculpture. Thus he arrives at an intellectual satisfaction, because he proposes ideas and develops painting imbued with his Dionysian temperament.



4. Markus Lüpertz (1941)
Ganymed, 1985
 Painted bronze, 230 x 80 x 80 cm
 MLP 26/1



5. Markus Lüpertz (1941)
Hirte, 1986
 Painted bronze, 230 x 95 x 65 cm
 MLP 29/6

The tendency towards the grotesque, towards the shout or laugh is not a tendency towards caricature. It is a tendency towards nakedness. Bacon's formal reflections, like Giacometti's or music's, is a visual consideration on the disfigured figure, converted not only in an expressive shadow, framed in the paintings the way death notices in the newspaper are framed, or resting on their own pedestal bases, but also fundamentally converted in erosion. With this nakedness, this erosion, Lüpertz, like Bacon before him, breaks the limits of portrayal, as if the figure dissolves in its own painterly apparition.

This portrait from 1987 derives from Lüpertz's re-presentation and re-consideration some years previously of Greek mythology, an incursion ranging from a Titan to several portrayals of Apollo. At Munich's Städtische Galerie de Lenbachhaus in 1985 he presented, under the title *Belebte Formen und kalte Malerei (Living Forms and Cold Painting)* a selection of paintings and sculptures from the 1960s to his latest works from 1985, including the first version of the *Titan* sculpture mentioned above. As we know, Lüpertz summed up the importance of the ancient Greek world to his work in describing Greek Antiquity as an extra-personal world, a world of artistic perfection, where a style of sculpture that everyone worked to guided by a single, once-for-all idea transcends the specific individual we call artist. And that's why, like the Greek sculptors, Lüpertz paints his sculptures. As in the present case, the colour he endows them with simply enhances the juxtaposition between the horizontal and the vertical. Besides this bust, in 1987, he finished his impressive sculptures *Ganymed (Ganymede)* and *Hirte (Shepherd)* [figs. 4 and 5], which he presented at the 1988 Venice *Biennale*. The first portrays the young and stunningly handsome Trojan prince, taken off by Zeus, converted into an eagle for the occasion, to serve as a sort of barman to the gods, thus making him one of the im-



6. *Moscophoros*, 570 BC
Marble with stone incrustations, 165 cm (height)
Acropolis Museum, Athens

mortals. Lüpertz ladles the portrait with irony. Instead of an eagle, this "particular" Ganymede, tranquil, in repose, holds a dead chicken in his right hand. The shepherd (*Hirte*), symbol of the guide of souls and bearer of peace, has been pretext and model on many occasions for the visual arts, particularly sculpture: Picasso's *Man with Lamb* (1943) is a case in point. Curiously, Lüpertz's figure is imbued with an archaism absent from the Picasso sculpture; it is evident in the posture of the torso and legs, which evokes the man with a lamb in the Acropolis [fig. 6].

In this portrait of his mother, Lüpertz finds inspiration once again in the classical world, an inspiration recognizable in the set of the mouth, in the plastic purity of the closed volume and in the sheer capacity of the incised line to describe and express, especially in the penetrating eye of the sitter.

Lüpertz, who that same year rented (and later acquired) a house in the town of Cortona, clearly has in mind the votive sculpture of the Etruscans. With the memory of their works in terracotta, he produced this impressive bust: from there stem the firm, determined expression, the smooth modelling combined with solid carving in the arm, the serene expression, the sense of power in the gaze.

The line of her non-symmetrical eyes emphasizes the resolution of this woman looking out at the world; a pair of overly small shoulders against the thick neck give the face greater presence. Where the Etruscans assimilated the Greek canon by transforming it in their delicate terracotta figures, Lüpertz retakes the Etruscan by transporting it into contemporary sculpture, beyond Pop figuration, with all the force of the Expressionism that comes from his painting. Truly, a painter's painter and a sculptor (like Matisse or Derain) who comes from painting.

The structure of abstraction and figuration in the painting of Markus Lüpertz

Carolina Andrada Páez

Über Orpheus, 1982

Über Orpheus (Over Orpheus), a drawing in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum [fig. 7], is one of a series of sketches made for a group of paintings presented in *Markus Lüpertz. Über Orpheus*, an exhibition held at the Galerie Hubert Winter, Vienna, from 11 April to 14 May 1983² and subsequently at the Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac in Salzburg. Orpheus' presence (Ὀρφέυς) in Greek mythology is the theme of the entire series. According to classical legend, when Orpheus played his lyre, fitted with nine strings in honour of the nine Muses, all men came to listen and rest their souls. Orpheus' playing won him the heart of the beautiful Eurydice and he even charmed the terrible three-headed Cerberus to sleep when he descended to Hades to try to bring her back to life. The Orphic mysteries, rituals of esoteric, enigmatic content, were developed in his honour. The myth Lüpertz uses is Thracian in origin.

The artist sees himself in Orpheus as musician and poet, which accounts for his 1983 self-portrait "*Ich als Dichter*" ("*Me As Poet*") [fig. 8], a sketch for the *Das Ende des Orpheus (The End of Orpheus)* series. He is also linked to the same year's painting *Selbstportrait "Ich voller Angst"* (*Self-Portrait: "Me Full of Fear"*) [fig. 9]. Distraught after losing his lover Eurydice, Orpheus wandered aimlessly through the Thracian mountains; several bacchantes he had previously scorned cut him to pieces and threw his head and lyre into the river Hebrus³.

But to grasp the significance of this drawing in Lüpertz's output in general, we need to put into its proper context his return to the Greek myths⁴, already present in the vision of his dithyrambs, begun in the 1960s. This revision of the Orphic myth came in early 1981, when he took part in London, together with a large group of leading contemporary artists, in the Royal Academy's *A New Spirit in Painting*, which was followed by the publication of an anthology of his poems entitled *Und ich spiele, ich spiele (And I Play, I Play)*. That same year he took up sculpture, producing works with clear Cubist reminiscences, particularly in a bronze he painted in a range of editions, *Du weißt nicht viel, versetzte die Herzogin (You don't know much, replied*

2 Vienna 1983.

3 About the myth, see the catalogue for the group exhibition *Tra mito e stereotipo*, at the Galleria In Arco, Turin, March 1990 (Turin 1990).

4 In the following analysis, I have used as reference the biography of the artist written by Maita Cañamás under the supervision of Kosme de Barañano for the exhibition catalogue Valencia 2002, pp. 65-91.



7. Markus Lüpertz (1941)
Über Orpheus, 1982
Gouache and Conté pencil on paper, 70 x 49 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Inv. no. 84/10



8. Markus Lüpertz (1941)
Selbstportrait "Ich als Dichter", 1983
 Oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cm
 ML 499/00



9. Markus Lüpertz (1941)
Selbstportrait "Ich voller Angst", 1983
 Oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cm
 ML 490/00

the Duchess), first of a series of works based on Lewis Carroll's *Alice In Wonderland*. For two decades, a steady stream of works on mythological themes, including 1985's *Ganymed (Ganymede)*, *Titan* and *Hirte (Shepherd)*, from 1986 [figs. 4, 3 and 5] issued from the artist's studio. Lüpertz thus entered an artistic world of painter-sculptors, in the wake of Degas, Renoir, Matisse and, in particular, Kirchner and Gauguin. Not forgetting, of course, his activity as a musician, which he has kept up throughout his entire artistic career.

The beginnings of the *Über Orpheus* series in 1982 coincided with Lüpertz' participation in two shows, *Documenta 7* in Kassel and *Zeitgeist* in Berlin. Twelve years later, in 1995, after its presentation in Vienna, he would return to the same theme in *Gedichte von Markus Lüpertz (Poems by Markus Lüpertz)*⁵, poems set to music by the artist and accompanied by new illustrations. Later, in 2004, he again revisited the subject in a series of 260 x 285 cm paintings portraying torsos⁶. About these paintings, one of which was shown opposite *Emerging* (1982) by Emilio Vedova in an exhibition at the Deutsche Akademie Rom Villa Massimo in 2004, professor Joachim Blüher, the institution's director, wrote:

Inspired by the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, *Orpheus* (2004) by Markus Lüpertz is a painting in which the artist's ironic, revelatory eye is inescapable. Strong colours, a technique very much at the service of the materials used and the mythological references are all regular features of the artist's working methods.⁷

5 Karlsruhe : Compatype GmbH in-house music, 1995. Print run 1000 copies; 89 pages; 30.5 x 30 cm; coloured plates in offsetdruck. Includes an etching and hand-coloured dry point of *Orpheus mit Lyra* (24.6 x 24 cm), signed in pencil, and a CD entitled *Ich Orpheus...*, featuring music by Lüpertz and the voice of Freddy Sahin-Scholl.

6 Some of these torsos were shown in *Body and Landscape*, curated in 2007 by Kosme de Barañano at the Baluarte, Pamplona, although they had previously been seen at Galerie & Edition Bode GmbH, Nuremberg, in December 2004.

7 Rome 2004.



10. Markus Lüpertz (1941)
Rüstzeug des Architekten, 1988
Oil on canvas, 162.3 x 200.5 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Inv. no. 09/6

Lüpertz' pictorial work combines a number of basic visual takes that interweave myth, cultural construction and historical concept, which in the resulting mystery and alchemy head towards a new reality. This is true of the drawing under consideration here and of the oil painting *Rüstzeug des Architekten*, also in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum [fig. 10]. Both works transcend description to penetrate to the core of the object the artist displays in his art. They reveal a reality that encloses and condenses an essence, thus converting something intangible, something that cannot be captured solely by the senses, into an image. In these examples, the artist attempts to unveil a reality that is there and which holds magic. Carl Gustav Jung, a great connoisseur of the art history of many and varied cultures, observed the similarity between the circular, recurring patterns in Oriental religions, known as mandalas. In interviews, Lüpertz has described his way of painting as a meditation on the objects and the trees surrounding his studio.

One is ineluctably drawn to the conclusion that Lüpertz' entire oeuvre constitutes a dialogue which, in its own ongoing process, lights upon the themes and forms it then addresses and embodies. At the exhibition *In Divine Light*, staged at the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, in 2011, the galleries given over to "The serial method: tree trunks" or what was called "Art History" demonstrated this serial quality. Lüpertz' painting is, as Kosme de Barañano suggests⁸, an archaeology of the strata and scars of art history; but it is no less a

8 Pamplona 2007.

reminder, a memory, of the themes that have invaded our collective images since ancient Greece. A painter's painter, an artist of cultured citations and references—his work is a display of the strata and the echoes of iconographies of all ages past.

Of Lüpertz Siegfried Gohr has this to say:

The path taken by Lüpertz in the twenty or so years from 1960 to 1983 led him away from Dionysus, i.e. away from the dithyramb, and gradually closer to Orpheus, to the poet who could charm wild animals and stones with his song, but who could not overcome one thing, death... The myth of Orpheus signifies the artist's return to himself⁹.

Born more than seventy years ago in Liberec (Bohemia), Markus Lüpertz belongs to a generation of German artists indelibly marked by the economic and ideological reconstruction of post-war Germany and whose artistic context was basically international and American. With Baselitz, Penck, Immendorff, Kiefer and Kirkeby, from Denmark, among others, Lüpertz produced a corpus of work that could well stand as the great epic poem of the German people of the post-war period. "The essential motivation in art is a state of permanent conflict. And the struggle against death is the most important conflict the artist has to face up to, consciously or unconsciously", Lüpertz once declared¹⁰. "In der malerei gibt es keine zeit" ("In painting there is no time"). What he means is that the antidote to the fatality of time is to renew hope in everyday life, by painting or sculpting as would a new Orpheus. It is the contemporary view, his view, of a hugely important theme in the European tradition.

Rüstzeug des Architekten, 1988

Rüstzeug des Architekten (The Architect's Tool), a painting in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum collection [fig. 10], comes from a time when Markus Lüpertz was captivated by the painting of Nicolas Poussin, a classical 17th-century artist who left Paris early on to settle in Rome. From late 1987 to 1989, Lüpertz made a series of paintings *après* Corot and *après* Poussin, i.e. following the themes, compositional structures and colour ranges of these artists. Between 1987 and 1988 he was also working on the *Zwischenraumgespenter* series, which might be loosely translated into English as "spectres of interstitial spaces", which is what *Rüstzeug des Architekten* also possesses.

In this painting, which portrays a jungle of elements that dance against a background while addressing the spectator, the power of colour is to be found in the intermediate or interstitial spaces. More than an architect's tools, they resemble more than anything thick flowers that seem to devour the onlooker. As Siegfried Gohr put it:

Painting and inspiration enter into a new relationship, one in which the fundamental advantage is the new flexibility of colour. This flexibility is the essential requisite for the creation of motifs during the actual act of painting. The pictorial aspect does not therefore take on an abstract mode, nor is it predefined by some "idea"; it remains firm and exclusively linked to the artist's fantasy, which emerges in intermediate space during the dialogue between the artist and his painterly motifs ... If we consider seriously the concept of the interstice, the painting is increasingly oriented towards the viewer, instead of suggesting a space in which the spectator becomes an observer of the artist attempting to master discontinuity¹¹.

9 Gohr 2001, p. 153.

10 Roma 2004.

11 Gohr 2001, p. 181.



11. Markus Lüpertz (1941)
Blauer Garten: Distelreich, 1988
 Oil on canvas, 200 x 250 cm
 ML 831/00

What we are dealing with here is a sensorial rather than an intellectual fantasy, one that seeks modes instead of forms. Markus Lüpertz fabricates combinations of clues that constantly pay homage to art history. In 1988 he was named principal of the Fine Arts Academy of Düsseldorf, a post he held until he retired in 2010, where he tried to change the conceptual spirit of Joseph Beuys.

Most of the ample series of paintings based on Nicolas Poussin are large scale, dated between 1987 and 1990, in which Lüpertz sets up a dialogue with the work of the earlier, rarely studied artist and masterfully staged at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum¹². In "The Poussin-based paintings of Lüpertz", Robert Fleck notes:

The fact that one painter uses painting to measure up to another painter immediately and rightly generates major expectation [...]. In many respects, Lüpertz presents us with a new, hitherto unseen Poussin; this is probably the first time that Poussin has been shown to us as a painter with huge "post-modern potential" [...]¹³.

To provide some context for the work, I should say it is a landscape, like 1988's *Blauer Garten. Distelreich* (*Blue Garden. The Kingdom of the Thistles*) [fig. 11], or *Poussin-Philosoph*, from 1990 [fig. 12]. In my opinion, the painting in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum should be included in the four-phase *Nach Poussin* series¹⁴. In

12 Bilbao/Nueva York 2007.

13 Fleck 1991, pp. 154-158 (p. 154).

14 This I argued in my dissertation "The four phases of landscape in Markus Lüpertz", 2010 (published in part in *Support/Surface* 2011, pp. 215-229).



12. Markus Lüpertz (1941)
Paussin - Philosoph, 1990
 Oil on canvas, 200 x 300 cm
 ML 907/00

the first phase, "Bildern nach Poussin" (Paintings based on Poussin), Lüpertz and Poussin seem to exalt the sculptural form of the figures, this being the link between the two. While Lüpertz puts the expressive force of the figure to the test, he also makes it his own, taking them to the heights of allegory, something Poussin did through mythology. In his interpretation of Poussin, Lüpertz discovers a pictorial freedom bound up with the mythological, a freedom that demolishes the concept traditionally associated with the French painter of aesthetically interpreting his painting as cold, remote classicism. Here we are not confronted with some nostalgic wish to reconsider the forms of Modernism three hundred years before the fact; nor does it have to do with Modernist dogmas on abstraction typical of the 1960s. Lüpertz' interpretation is associated with the sense of philosophical investigation to be found in Poussin's paintings, and this became a contemporary theme for him and a reference point he marked out for himself. In this case we may plausibly say that Lüpertz was moved by a desire to reconcile abstract with figurative, while imbuing with an allegorical character the search for and renewal of history painting, at a time (the 1960s) when abstract painting was the predominant form.

Following on from this would be a chapter that could usefully be dubbed "Variations on Poussin", in which the interests of both artists are made explicit in the results of what we may describe as "dialogues", which in Poussin derive from the themes of mythology and are here set out in the confrontation of mythological elements with others of a post-Baroque spirit. Lüpertz does this by making use, like Poussin, of the equivalence of these themes and by noting the same conclusions. The final dialogue would be set up as equivalent and with conclusions that exemplify a contemporaneousness infused into a single canvas.

Entering into a "final phase of synthesis", there comes a series of paintings of Apollo that Lüpertz made by returning to the original theme of "the sculptural expressivity of figures". Here the full weight of the mythological blends with the interest of "another" renewal of the pictorial image through a mythology of the

present, just as Poussin did in his own time and which Lüpertz now rediscovers, concluding the initial dialogue mentioned above as an interrelation and an analysis of post-abstract painting (Lüpertz' own) inspired by post-Baroque painting (Poussin's).

Here we underscore, as quoted in the chapter on Poussin in the catalogue for the 1991 Markus Lüpertz retrospective at the Queen Sofia National Art Centre Museum in Madrid¹⁵, "the Baroque constellation" present at every step in Poussin and which will also be there in Lüpertz. This is why the attention Lüpertz gives to the movement of figure-persons, in the frame of an infinite perspective, is so important. The leading role, too, of light not restricted to the closed forms of "a classical-linear nature". And painting not bogged down in closed forms and where the arabesques flow free. This is precisely what happens in *Rüstzeug des Architekten*.

As a final point, some emphasis should be placed once again on the relevance of a "new mythology of the present", something Lüpertz achieves by addressing "the baroque of the pictorial", much as Poussin did in his last years, when he took the structures of his paintings towards "abstraction", through axis and orientation of the movement of figures marked by a penetrating light. The expressivity achieved by Poussin is what Lüpertz captures, insofar as he then begins a process of deconstruction, which in turn is in direct relation to what in the 1960s was called "the German school", with his fellow artists Baselitz, Immendorff and Penck. It was the first school in Europe to kick down the Modernist dogmas of contemporary art and open the way to a renewal of modernity that today goes by the name of post-modernity.

Although we are faced with the problems to which Lüpertz' relation-dialogue with Poussin has led, at the same time this is precisely what Lüpertz overcomes in reconstructing mythological painting for the present, based on the constant search for identity in post-abstract painting; this, with the existence of the "German school", helped to override the opposition between figuration and abstraction. This is perhaps the most important thing of all in this phase; indeed, it is what puts Lüpertz in an analogous position in his search for the post-modern, just as Poussin did in a time of crisis one hundred years after the Renaissance, and which revealed the meaning of post-modernity at that time, something that Cézanne and Picasso would take as an example.

Finally, while I would not dispute that the sense of motif in *Rüstzeug des Architekten* is difficult to grasp, this is not the case with composition or colour. Poussin's colour resounds, the measuring instruments of his paintings, as do the sensation and atmosphere of Watteau's *The Embarkation for Cythera*; above all, we intuit Max Beckmann's acid colour structures, the discontinuity of his forms, his spectres of intermediate spaces. This painting in particular is one more example of the reliability of the German artist in every step he has taken throughout his career.

In his oeuvre, Markus Lüpertz continuously plays at art history. As the prince of painters, he projects himself as artistic genius, he makes his appearance in communion with art, his vision becomes gesture, "die grosse Geste". He transforms what he has seen, bringing to light other registers and intentions. His notes to other paintings are in effect commentaries of meanings that give title to what they do, disguised with sticks and leggings like his own figure¹⁶; this strengthens the intentionality with which he has overridden the myths of modern art and of an age in which references to art history are not merely narrative in his painting, but abstractions that give order to a new figuration. Indeed, the essential purpose of the painter originates in this creative evolution.

¹⁵ Fleck 1991, pp. 154-158.

¹⁶ The best example of these disguises, aside from his rather unusual mode of dressing and public appearances, goes back all the way to one of his earliest sculptures, now disappeared, dedicated to the poet Heinrich Heine, seated and dressed up as Harlequin, with leggings and walking stick. Although Lüpertz destroyed the sculpture, he made a number of drawings and even a few paintings of it, and dedicated an exhibition entitled *Bleiben Sie sitzen Heinrich Heine (Remain Seated, Heinrich Heine)* to it, held at the Pavilion of the Secession, Vienna, June 1984.

As Siegfried Gohr says:

In the same way that we would be misinterpreting the work of Lüpertz if we ignored the double structure, i.e. the discontinuity of each work, it would also be a mistake to attempt to explain the development of the artist's body of work as a sort of reflection of his social environment. Neither the formal interpretation nor the interpretation of the content of these paintings would justify such an attempt, and much less in the case of those works in a complex position with regard to fiction, and which interweave with the repertoire of memories and with the artist himself, and, through his person acting as a kind of membrane, also with his age¹⁷.

In my view, Lüpertz' journey to the past, in search of figuration, theme and archetype, as well as formal and compositional structure, is clearly a way pointing to the future. In other words, it is the journey of an artist who clears the way for others and who reorients our vision, a truly avant-garde artist despite using traditional materials.

¹⁷ Gohr 2001, p. 179.

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