

# Knowledge and Time, Left and Right

Hannelore Paflik-Huber

With her pictures, Rosa Loy takes us into fantasy worlds. It is her own fantasies, thoughts and considerations we are talking about. And it does not matter, in the process, to what extent the thoughts of the artist and those an observer might arrive at on the artist's visual prompts correspond.

The titles of her pictures, such as *Zwei Wege* (Two Paths, 2013, p. 82), *Auflösen* (Dissolve, 2012), *Die Andere Seite* (The Other Side, 2009), or *Zeitschleife* (Time Loops, 2015, p. 79), at first glance are mysterious and enigmatic. The more enigmatic the title, and the more mysterious the story, the longer our gaze will remain glued to the respective picture, and we search for a solution, for an insight, even though this may be possible only partially. There will always be a rest that cannot be decoded, a mystery that cannot be solved. It is the means of irritation through which the artist keeps challenging the viewers of her pictures. If we want to begin to understand the unsaid, we should give ourselves time.

First of all, let us name the facts in Rosa Loy's pictures. Primarily, there is the material surface, the uppermost layer that we enter into contact with at closer inspection. In most cases, we are so much distracted by the contents, the stories, and the colours that we perceive the texture of the surface only on a subconscious level. Yet it is the first important determinant, both emotionally and content-wise.

The picture surface in all her pictures is matt. There is no trace of a seductive lustre. How does such a matt surface come about? Loy uses casein as a binder which makes the surface appear smooth, homogenous and matt. It is the main component of milk proteins and is gained through the precipitation of milk. The fat content must be low and the protein content high, for the milk fat has a negative influence on the binding properties. In contrast to acrylic paints, we are dealing here with a natural, organic binder. It gives the matt surface of the colour moreover a greater colour depth. The pigments themselves are easily mixed in with this binder and permit a very large colour palette. All parameters of the surface are visible and tangible. So the tools of the trade are clearly defined. What we see and what we know determines the first impression. On entering the room, the first thing we notice is the large colour palette and its strong luminosity.

Every one of the artist's works has a coherent colour system and its very own atmosphere. There do not seem to be any clear colour preferences. One time it is blue that sets the tone (*Sophies Mondschaudel*, Sophie's Moon Swing, 2014, p. 17), then green (*Verbindung*, Connection, 2015), or the three primary colours (*Zeitschleife*, 2015), and then again yellow (*Wanderung*, Hike, 2008). The starting point at all times is the subject, though, which the choice of colours consistently and emotionally takes its cue from.

The great subject of the artist, as she herself put it, is female knowledge. If there is a concept of knowledge that pertains exclusively to woman, how does it differ from the one belonging to man? Female knowledge, that is the experiences that Rosa Loy has gathered throughout her life and that she passes on by artistic means.

Yet we must not mistake her painted experiences for a visual biography. We recognise the reference to her first qualification as a horticulturalist, the knowledge she has on plants, and realise that she orientates herself on the seasonal cycle. This knowledge, experienced and acquired by her, in her pictures is depicted symbolically, metaphorically and through narrative, not lexically. The pictures do not refer to a particular event in her life. This is her knowledge, stored in her pictures. What applies to all the subjects is that she visualises her knowledge in a way that we become curious and want to know what she is talking about.

What relevance does a female knowledge have for society? And can this knowledge also have a claim to truth for us, no matter if we are male or female? René Descartes, the French philosopher, mathematician and scientist, divided knowledge into things perceived, *res extensa*, and things deduced, *res cogitans*. In the nineteen-sixties, the British philosopher Michael Polanyi introduced the distinction between *explicit* and *tacit knowledge*. The former is accessible to anyone and can be formulated through language and images. Tacit knowledge, as the name suggests, is not accessible through language. It manifests itself in skill. All data forming the basis of knowledge are acquired through the senses. It must be sufficiently clear to us by now that Rosa Loy is both able to talk in words about her assembled knowledge and at the same time proves her tacit knowledge by way of artistic skill. What the nature of the relationship could be between the two things, remains deliberately ambiguous, which not least makes for the special attraction of her art.

In the painting *Zeitschleife* (2015), we are faced, as in all her pictures, with female figures. Here it is four of them, two acrobats and two women musing. Red, yellow, blue and green pipes wind in confusing tangles across the picture. A large rampart of wooden planks, a cave housing larvae, and the tufts of grass so often painted by Rosa Loy define the image space. The dominant large, well-toned woman, placed somewhat off-centre, has the typical facial features that we know from many of the female portraits. She appears pensive, somewhat absent, has fine features, wide-apart eyes, and her face is a little mask-like. The lips are painted bright red. The clothes, as in many of the artist's pictures, show a certain inconsistency in style. The woman wears a body shirt and leggings, combined with high-heeled shoes. Her concentration and the tense posture are necessary in order to keep control of the pipes winding around her. Which appears to come easily to her. We can make out neither the beginning nor the end of the time loops, which the pipes synonymously stand for. The red pipe, undoubtedly, is the present. Which she is in contact with in several places and which she takes hold of with an assured, double-handed grip. Beside her, a second acrobat hangs head-down from the red pipe, significantly reduced in scale – an impossibility, as far as perspective goes.

When it comes to the dimension of time, we Europeans think from left to right. The past, and what is far away, is situated on the left and leads via the

now, the present, to the right, into the future. The third female figure in the picture, who has taken up position on a viewing platform, equipped with a telescope, in vain tries to look into the future, over the top of a wooden construction spewing steam. No matter how we look at it, no matter how much we would wish for it, the future is not visible or even graspable. The ladder, leaning against the side of the warehouse, is much too short to be able to climb or to get on top of anything. It symbolises the vain attempt at thinking against time.

Not so bleak, meanwhile, are the prospects of the fourth woman who, musing quietly, looks back into the past, a landscape with a lake. She stands in some sort of cave. The scene, spatially and temporarily, is located in the left-hand section of the painting. The large lake, spreading in front of her, is the reservoir of memories and past experiences. Which will the protagonist go for, the past, the present, or the future? The manner in which she grabs the pipes makes it quite obvious, she says yes to the present.

All the time levels, be it red, yellow, blue or green, entwine her at once, just as time, in our memory, cannot be divided cleanly into past, present and future. We never think the present in isolation, we contemplate it in combination with the other two. We think we have a firm grip on the now, just like the acrobat. But which time level does the latter believe to be able to influence by holding the red time loop together in the one place with a grip of her hand? Time is irreversible and cannot be bundled up in any way. This sort of interference, i.e. to be able to grasp two time levels at once, is thinkable and can be depicted, but it has nothing to do with the actual passing of time. On the ground in front of the acrobat, the artist casts the pipes in loops, in smaller and larger coils, one on top of the other. With the left foot, tapping the ground lightly, she tries to keep the situation under control, to prevent an inextricable chaos. There is repetition and there is recurrence. As far as the dimension of time goes, though, repetition is an illusion. Nothing exists doubly in time. We do not recognise what else is being transported in the pipes but time. Water, oil, or electricity? It is time itself that Rosa Loy is applying the metaphor of flowing to. But we cannot make out the velocity of the flowing. All that is left to our imagination.

The last time symbols to be mentioned here are the larva and the crystal. Inside a cave-like space, surrounded by crystalline structures, larvae are lying huddled together. At some point in the future, as we know, the larva optically and aesthetically changes into a totally different state. It undergoes a metamorphosis. The crystal symbolises endless past time. The clear colour is the result of a very long development process. The transparent structure stands for the infinity of past time, pressed into the smallest possible space. In a period a long time ago, the crystal was formed, symbol of the past, of torpor and death. Consequently, two different models of duration are to be found side by side in the painting entitled *Zeitschleife*: the crystalline structure, visualising a time past that cannot be measured, that is abstract, endless in duration, and the future that we are eagerly awaiting at every moment. It hatches from the bulging larvae and passes into a totally different state of beauty. The larva is transformed into something utterly different.

In summary, the following could be said: our relatively young life rests encapsulated in a loop of the past. All the knowledge that we have today has not

been assembled in the present. It is based on knowledge that has been passed on from one generation to the next, in pipes and crystals. It is our own knowledge and the knowledge of the Earth. The crystalline and the lake represent the store of knowledge and thus are the media of memory. The better we are rooted in and act in the here and now, thus the athlete confidently conveys to us, the better we are able to tame and pass on the existing, the present knowledge in the shape of the pipes. Many details in the pictures of Rosa Loy can be interpreted in at least two ways. Many things carry two meanings. Which should not be mistaken for ambiguity, though. It does not exclude something else. There is always a basic theme which can be interpreted in one way or another. This also applies to the future. It can only be depicted abstractly. And we cannot perceive it through a telescope or even climb it with a ladder. No matter how much we would wish for it, it cannot be influenced.

Is there a knowledge concerning time that must be attributed to women only? Yes, there is. It is the cyclical time, the cycle of a woman that on average lasts twenty-eight days during her child-bearing years, i.e. approximately between ages fourteen and sixty. This recurring division cannot but have an impact on every sense of time and body. Whenever it is out of kilter, the result must be irritation and trepidation. The linear sense of time prevalent in the Western world thus is split into cycles, which determines the perception of time, especially for women. We learn to interpret every symptom not fitting into this time frame.

Looking at other pictures by the artist by way of comparison, be it the more iconographic *Himmelsmantel* (Heavenly Cloak, p. 106) of 2014, *Wanderung* (Hike) of 2008, or *Muse* of 2015, we realise that we can apply this method and process of deciphering to all of them. The individual objects, the colour mapping, the characterisation of the women in each case, the animals, plants and rock formations all carry at least one meaning within the respective picture's system. Moreover, there is the big orchestra, the interplay of colours, symbols and forms which, depending on the subject, can take on different meanings.















