

“The Air Everywhere Resounds with Shrieks and Cries.”

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Martin Heidegger and Friedemann Hahn

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Initially, there was nothing to suggest that this would be a particularly involved or special assignment. But gradually the story metamorphosed into a gripping thriller. I was supposed to write about a painting featuring some fir trees. There is arguably nothing more boring than fir trees. So what were the facts of the matter? In 2012, Friedemann Hahn had discovered a print of an etching by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner in a book depicting a forest of fir trees (Fig. 2).¹ This discovery inspired him to make two paintings, *Lichtung* (Clearing) from 2012 and *Lichtung (nach Ernst Ludwig Kirchner)* (Clearing [after Ernst Ludwig Kirchner]) from 2015. The template for the paintings was at first something of a mystery. A poor copy of a copy with a number at the bottom was the only lead: ‘303’; not unlike the browser error message, “404 not Found”. Was this number a reference to a catalogue or perhaps a page number? Hahn was unable to recall the book in which he had seen the illustration, nor the title, nor even the date of the etching.

After preliminary research, it quickly became apparent that the etching in question must have been *Alpenweg mit Wettertannen* (Alpine Path with Weather Firs) from 1921.² As such, it must have been made at the time when Ernst Ludwig Kirchner was already living in Davos. Suddenly, I recognised the path on the etching, an “alpine path” leading into the forest,

1 The book in question is an exhibition catalogue: Magdalena M. Moeller, *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. Meisterwerke der Druckgrafik*, exh. cat., Brücke-Museum, Berlin, Folkwang-Museum Essen and Kunsthalle Bremen (Stuttgart: Verlag Gerald Hatje 1990), pp. 302-303.

2 Annemarie and Wolf-Dieter Dube, *E. L. Kirchner. Das graphische Werk*, vol.1 (Munich: Prestel Verlag 1991), cat. no. 362.

and the firs became “weather” firs. What makes a path an alpine path and a fir tree a weather fir? A path becomes an alpine path when it leads to an alp. A fir becomes a weather fir when it is positioned windward, exposed to the prevailing weather and asserts itself as a defiant bastion. The alpine path is most likely the path from Kirchner’s house “In den Lärchen”, where he was domiciled in 1921, to the hut on the Stafelalp, where he kept his summer studio.³ Half an hour’s walk uphill⁴ and he was immersed in his own world. Remote from civilisation. At one with nature.

On a path through the forest like this, one can reflect on oneself, art, the world and other people. It must have been the same for Kirchner. He had just successfully kicked his morphine and drug habit (Veronal), he was in a positive mood, and felt an urge to create.⁵ This is the context in which the seemingly insignificant motif of the etching ought to be placed. If one looks more closely, one discovers a large cumulus cloud gathering in the background, assuming menacing proportions and approaching the “wanderer between worlds” like an amorphous imminence.⁶ A change in the weather. Happiness, as a reversal of fortune, turns into danger and disaster. The peace Kirchner found on the Stafelalp is threatened by sinister forces. The path is no longer safe. Be that as it may, the weather firs seem to protect the etcher. They stand there like anthropomorphic beings that “regard” and “speak” to him. They perform their windward choreography with a lightness and ease.

When I subsequently took a look at Kirchner’s photographs, things became even more interesting. In 1919 and 1920, three photographs were

³ Based on a suggestion in Moeller 1990, p. 272. See note 1.

⁴ Eberhard W. Kornfeld, *Gut in den Lärchen. Die Geschichte eines Hauses in Frauenkirch* (Bern, Davos: Verlag Kornfeld & Cie, 1996).

⁵ Cf. Kirchner’s letter to Nele van de Velde from 6 April 1921 in E.L. Kirchner. Briefe an Nele und Henry van de Velde (München: R. Piper Verlag 1961), p. 42. Cf. also Helene Spengler’s letter to Lotte Grisebach dated 20 March 1921, in Lothar Grisebach, ed., *Maler des Expressionismus im Briefwechsel mit Eberhard Grisebach* (Hamburg: Christian Wegner Verlag, 1962), p. 131. The volume also contains an afterword by Lothar Grisebach.

⁶ The Belgian architect, Henry van de Velde, writing from Kreuzlingen in a letter dated 26 April 1918, described Kirchner as the “eternal wanderer”: “I’d like to paint you up there on the alp as the eternal wanderer, this time as an entire figure positioned between the mountains.” In *E.L. Kirchner. Briefe an Nele und Henry van de Velde* (Munich: R. Piper Verlag 1961), p. 81.

taken in the high forest: *Ein Mann, aus einer Quelle trinkend* (A Man Drinking from a Spring in the Forest) 1919/1921,⁷ *Zwei Personen auf dem Weg zur Stafelalp* (Two people on Their Way to the Stafelalp)⁸ and *Bergwald* (Mountain Forest)⁹, all around 1920, which may have served as a direct prompt or source of inspiration for the etchings *Bergwegkurve im Wind* (Bend in the Mountain Path in the Wind) from 1919¹⁰ and the aforementioned *Alpenweg mit Wettertannen* from 1921.¹¹

In one photograph, a woman and an elderly man are walking up the slope toward the photographer. Judging by their apparel, they look like townspeople. The man appears to be wearing a jacket and waistcoat and the woman a longer, open coat. The photograph was taken in the summer of 1920 on the route to the Stafelalp. Only after studying it for a while did I notice a pyramid-shaped mountain in the background, which in both photographs muscles into the frame in a strangely conspicuous way. The more I looked at the photographs, the more I got the impression that it was not a coincidence, but that Kirchner had chosen the position of the camera in such a way that the mountain peeks out between the two firs on both occasions. The viewpoint is high up in the forest, in precipitous terrain. If you look at the mountain opposite, the height of the shot is probably around 5,900 to 6,200 ft. above sea level. So it is definitely a high forest in the mountains. You can see that the fir trees have been well and truly tousled by the storms they had weathered for decades.

Which mountain was it in the photographs? Was it the Riner Horn?¹² Or the Seehorn? What does a mountain in the distance of a photograph or picture mean? In essence, it denotes something unattainable. The goal of the hiker's ardent quest is the summit. The summit also embodies unattain-

7 Roland Scotti, ed., *Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. Das fotografische Werk* (Bern: Benteli 2005,) cat. 57, Fig. p. 89.

8 Scotti 2005, cat. 282, Fig. p. 93.

9 Scotti 2005, cat. 283, Fig. p. 93.

10 Dube 1991, cat. 234.

11 Dube 1991, cat. 362.

12 I would like to thank Dr. Roland Scotti from Kunstmuseum Appenzell for this reference.

able distance. Kornfeld refers to the mountain in connection with the painting *Schwarzer Frühling* (Black Spring) from 1923 as “hope for the future”.¹³

Why the forest? Why “weather firs”? What distinguishes weather firs from normal firs? Why a waterfall with rocks? Do these photographs have any symbolic qualities to speak of? Does Kirchner merely see matter-of-fact, documentary detail or is he already registering the symbolic import, the myth of the forest, the waterfall, the stream, the water, the spring? Does the forest become protective, nurturing nature, the alpine path the path of life and the spring the fountain of life? Does he already see these things when he clicks the shutter or are they only elaborated later in the drawings, prints or paintings? These are difficult questions to answer.¹⁴ One might also ask these questions of Friedemann Hahn.

Abschied and Foresta Nera

In autumn 2011, Friedemann Hahn began writing an extensive novel in Todtnau-Brandenberg, which sprawled over the years into a 400-page manuscript: *Foresta Nera*. 2012 was a year of crisis for Hahn. The rupture had already been foreshadowed and suddenly it was there. While he had painted an average of fifteen oil paintings per year in the previous years, his productivity began to dwindle rapidly. Hahn considered abandoning art altogether. Then he created a last, large-format oil painting titled *Der Abschied* (Farewell). A strong man with a white face, painted in shadowy black, stands in front of a gravestone and salutes. Who is this person? Here, too, the painting draws on a photograph.¹⁵ It could well be a fictional self-portrait of the artist. It certainly fits, based on his stature. To whom is he paying tribute? To a specific person? To the deceased in general? Who

¹³ Eberhard W. Kornfeld, *Gut in den Lärchen. Die Geschichte eines Hauses in Frauenkirch* (Bern, Davos: Verlag Kornfeld & Cie, 1996), p. 22.

¹⁴ Kornfeld, 1996, p. 22. See note 13.

¹⁵ The photograph appeared as a supplement in the article *Schöner schleichen mit “Metal Gear Solid 4”* by Thomas Lindemann in *Die Welt* from 12 June 2008. It is a review of the eponymous computer game. The hero is “Solid Snake”, an aged, smoking mercenary, who is mourning his teacher at the cemetery at the beginning of the game. He is a frail anti-hero who has to hide and camouflage himself in the game in order to survive. Could “Solid Snake” be Friedemann Hahn’s alter ego?



Lichtung – Friedemann Hahn, 2012
Öl auf Leinwand, 97×69 cm

is buried here? Soldiers, artists, painting per se? Or is he looking back on his own life or art, which are metaphorically interred here and to whom he wishes to pay tribute once more? We do not know. The painting remains cryptic, open and enigmatic.

There is a passage in *Foresta Nera* that clearly alludes to this painted scene or its photographic template:

Innumerable star-shaped, white blossoms blanket the ground. The gravestone was roughly polished and rounded at the top. Cimetière de Saint-Vincent. Johann Meiers ... 1902–1949. Two lines hewn into a concrete block. Colmar saluted.

[...]

Again and again he had crawled away.

He had tried to erase the memories.

He had erected a tombstone in his stead.

*He had emigrated to the realm of the dead.*¹⁶

Colmar's real name is Johann Meiers. He had been implicated in war crimes in Norway during the Second World War. He had had the gravestone in the Cimetière de Saint-Vincent erected bearing his own name, his date of birth and a fictitious death date in order to legitimise his disappearance into the Foreign Legion and pronounce himself dead. Nevertheless, even if we know this information, which itself is entirely encoded in a literarily fictional way, the specific meaning of the painting remains cryptic and ambiguous. Actually, painting as such seems to be over for Friedemann Hahn. From now on, he wants to devote himself exclusively to writing.

New Beginnings and *Lichtung*

A few months later, after he had already bid farewell to painting, he discovered the etching by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. It fascinated him despite its

¹⁶ Friedemann Hahn, *Foresta Nera. Kriminalroman*, ed., Wolfgang Franßen (Hamburg: Polar Verlag, 2018), p. 101.

seemingly insignificant and trivial motif. Something could still work with this motif, he thought. And so he started painting again. He availed himself of a canvas, graphite, turpentine oil and ink and began working on a new painting. Using a pair of scissors, he cut a strip of canvas from a primed roll and stapled it to the wall. Then he began sketching the outlines of the Kirchner etching using soft graphite. He then took a rag, dipped it in turpentine and smudged the graphite outlines, creating areas of varying light grey. Hahn had been a virtuoso practitioner of this technique from an early age.¹⁷ He removed the canvas from the wall and cast it onto the floor. Then he poured yellow ink from a large bottle over the canvas, exactly at the point where, in Kirchner's etching, the white cumulus cloud loomed menacingly on the horizon. But the yellow is more positive. It is more permeable than the white and provides a communicative and extraverted resolution.¹⁸ The path seemed to obtain a direction. The darkness gradually receded. But then Hahn struck home with a baleful, starless, bible-black. He used Japanese oil-based printing ink. Having made his way through the gathering storm in the first two attempts, he covered it up again, as if hesitating. The drawing and tonal setting are beleaguered with heavy, impasto strokes and gestures of black. The mood has become tenebrous, gloomy, bleak, utterly hopeless. The path through the forest as a possible solution to the crisis has petered out, become an illusion and a dead end, a *Holzweg*.¹⁹

¹⁷ For example, cf. the drawing "Marlene Dietrich und Clive Brook in 'Shanghai Express' 1932", 1975 (pencil, graphite, Leinwand), printed in Friedemann Hahn, *Gemälde, Aquarelle, Zeichnungen, Druckgrafik. Erste Einzelausstellung Städtische Galerie Schloss Wolfsburg 11. April bis 16. Mai 1976*. No pages.

¹⁸ On the symbolic meaning of the colour yellow, cf. i.a. Coronato Occolti, *Trattato de colori* (Parma 1568), fol. 244655: "Del Giallo – puro: certezza del presente + futuro stato."; Karl Köstlin, *Aesthetik* (Tübingen: Laub, 1869), p.483f; Florian Stefanescu-Goanga, "Experimentelle Untersuchungen zur Gefühlsbetonung der Farben", in *Psychologische Studien*, vol. 7 (1912), p. 307; Heinrich Frieeling, *Praktische Farbenlehre. Eine Einführung in die Physiologie des Farbensehens und die psychologische Farbenlehre für die Praxis* (Minden: Albrecht Pillier Verlag, 1956), p. 107; Heinrich Frieeling, "Psychologie der Farben", in *Studium Generale. Zeitschrift für die Einheit der Wissenschaften*. 13th annual edition, no. 7 (1960), p. 439; Eckhard Heimendahl, *Licht und Farbe. Ordnung und Funktion der Farbwelt* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1961), pp. 201-203, p. 221, p. 224, p. 228; Heinrich Frieeling, *Das Gesetz der Farbe* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt Verlag, 1968), p. 141, p. 143 and p. 159.

¹⁹ As will become apparent in the following, the idea of a *Holzweg* is pertinent to the discussion, whereby the term *Holzweg* denotes a path in a forest that peters out and, by association, means a dead end, being on the wrong track, or in the English idiom, barking up the wrong tree, suitably arboreal!

Once again, he toughed it out. He cut out another strip of canvas, drawing on it with graphite and blurring the outlines as before. But this time he combined the yellow ink, used only sparingly at the upper edge of the composition, with a bright red ink, lending the painting a dangerously, incendiary quality. He then tossed the black weather firs onto the surface using the impasto ink. This time you can clearly see the anthropomorphisation of the trees. The large fir on the far right in the Kirchner etching, which seems to be striding towards the viewer (Fig. 2), becomes a black monster with arms and legs that launch themselves out of the painting. It is a fierce skirmish between white, yellow, red and satanic black. The work has none of the loose, playful and authentic brushwork of the earlier paintings. What is being contested here on the canvas is nothing other than furious, existential combat.

Peripeteia and Catharsis

This putative farewell thus becomes a new beginning. If you know the biographical context, you might view the two *Lichtung* paintings from 2012 with different eyes. *Abschied* and *Lichtung* are two highly emphatic, impressive works in Friedemann Hahn's oeuvre. They represent two sides of a divide, a before and an after, separated by a deep breach. *Lichtung* is a new beginning and a resolution of the crisis. In this story there is a dramatic moment of peripeteia, the reversal of the plot or circumstances that leads to the resolution of the problem. Aristotle describes this moment in his seminal treatise, *Poetics*:

*Reversal of Intention is a change by which the action veers around to its opposite, subject always to the rule of probability and necessity.*²⁰
[...]

²⁰ Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. S.H. Butler (London: MacMillan, 1902), Ch. XI, p. 41. [1452a]. Greek and English edition. Republished in an unabridged translation as part of S.H. Butler's volume *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Arts* (Minola NY: Dover Publications, 1997), p.20.

*Recognition, as the name indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune.*²¹

According to Aristotle, this reversal can lead either from happiness to unhappiness and enmity or from unhappiness to happiness and friendship. In Friedemann Hahn's case, this reversal leads, to paraphrase Aristotle, from misfortune to good fortune, from a problem to a solution and to the renewal of his amity with painting. In this instance, a person is struggling to make a new artistic start. He is searching for a new, stylistic approach. Purified by the upheaval of this crisis, he paints more freely, boldly and brashly than ever before. His brushstrokes are more combative, more defiant, angrier and geared less toward at the dynamic staging of the marks on the canvas. One has to feel the moments of peripeteia and catharsis between *Abschied* and *Lichtung* when comparing these two works. Otherwise, one will not be able to achieve a full aesthetic understanding and appreciation of Hahn's work created after this trenchant hiatus.

The Title of the Painting

The German term *Lichtung*, denoting a clearing in a forest, derives from the word for light, *Licht*. It is a relatively late coinage of a word that first emerged in the nineteenth century.²² It means the act of making the forest less dense, i.e. introducing more light, and the spreading out of the trees. A clearing is defined by what it is not, namely the darkness around it. It is a space full of nothing into which the light penetrates from above. Everyone knows the experience of what it means to step out of a forest into a clearing – the changes in temperature, smell, sight and sound. The clearing is the birth of space. It is the place where space, distance and swathes of light are born.

²¹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1902, Ch. XI, p. 41. [1452a] and Butler, 1997, p.20. See note 20.

²² Friedrich Kluge, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, 22nd edition revised by Elmar Seebold with assistance from Max Bürgisser and Bernd Gregor (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter 1989), p. 441f.



*Lichtung nach E. L. Kirchner – Friedemann Hahn, 2015
Öl auf Leinwand, 160×130cm, Museum für Neue Kunst*

The clearing is therefore a place of realisation. You can suddenly see again, it becomes bright and, presently, a horizon appears. The clearing is like an abrupt incursion triggered by light. A realisation, an act of cognition that befalls one. One's attention is heightened. Senses are strained to the utmost upon entering it. The clearing is the dialectical antithesis of the dense forest. The moment one steps into a clearing, one understands what a forest, darkness and an absent horizon actually mean.

One can understand a clearing as a metaphor or symbol for an abrupt realisation or insight. Entering a clearing gives one an overview, leads to clarity and an understanding of one's situation. This clearing within a crisis is still a struggle in both *Lichtung* paintings from 2012, where it is unclear which side will prevail, light or darkness. However, in the case of the painting *Lichtung (nach Ernst Ludwig Kirchner)* from 2015, this struggle has resolved itself in favour of light and understanding.

Heidegger's Concept of *Lichtung*

As early as 2003, Friedemann Hahn had stumbled upon Martin Heidegger's *Holzwege*²³ in a bookshop in Freiburg. At first, Heidegger's 'naïve' poems interested him more than the philosophical arguments in the book. Then, in 2012, having discovered Kirchner's etching by chance while leafing through a catalogue, he realised that these disparate ideas seemed to coalesce and so he co-opted Heidegger's concept of *Lichtung* as a title without burdening himself overly with its philosophical baggage.²⁴

Nevertheless, a brief look at Heidegger's concept of *Lichtung* is worthwhile, for it may well complement our phenomenological observations in daily life. Heidegger's concept of *Lichtung* is anything but easy to assimilate, especially for readers unschooled in philosophy. His extremely mannered philosophical vernacular, which manifestly and steadfastly overtaxes the German language, defies lucid comprehension. As though in a scientific

²³ Translated as *Off the Beaten Track*, by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

²⁴ Friedemann Hahn in a telephone conversation with the author 17 September 2020.

experiment, one has to distil the solvent of the argument, as it were, out of the hyper-mannerist formulation. The concept of *Lichtung* is used by Heidegger as a metaphor for knowledge. According to Heidegger, man exists in his *Dasein* (being, existence). What exists becomes known to him in the light of the clearing in a forest or remains shrouded in darkness. However, the term is unnecessarily complicated. For Heidegger equates *Dasein* (existence) with *Lichtung* (knowledge). One might characterise his position as an Anti-Cartesian standpoint: *sum ergo cogito*.

In the middle of everything that exists, there is an open space, which he calls a clearing.²⁵ Theoretically, then, this should actually be in the centre of everything that exists. For Heidegger, however, it actually encircles being, that which exists, like a nothing.²⁶ The clearing is suddenly no longer a centre, but an enveloping, open periphery. Is it now an empty centre or an empty periphery? The metaphor is vexingly odd and contradictory from the outset. Because it should actually be the other way round. That which exists would have to encircle an empty clearing in the centre. Or the bright light of the clearing would have to shine into the darkness of being/that which exists surrounding it in order to illuminate it. Nevertheless, what does emerge here is a persuasive metaphor for knowledge. It is equated with the light that can penetrate the tenebrity of all things.

According to Heidegger, the presence of light, which makes a clearing in a forest possible in the first place, gives man access to that which exists, to what he himself is not, but also to what he himself is.²⁷ Subsequently, Heidegger develops a metaphorical dialectic of light and dark, visibility and concealment. The light and the clearing, that is, the faculty of knowledge

²⁵ "In the midst of beings as a whole an open space comes to presence. There is a clearing." Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 30. Originally published as *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann GmbH, 1950), [p. 41].

²⁶ "The open center is, therefore, not surrounded by beings. Rather, this illuminating center itself encircles all beings – like the nothing that we scarcely know." Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 2002, p.30. (*Holzwege*, 1950, p. 41.) See note 23. The "open center" would hence be more the edge of the forest.

²⁷ "Only this clearing grants us human beings access to those beings that we ourselves are not and admittance to the being that we ourselves are." Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 2002, p.30. (*Holzwege*, 1950, p. 41.) See note 23.

and the result of knowledge, make the objects of the world accessible and visible to man. In his essay *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerks* (The Origin of the Work of Art) written in 1935/36 and which appears in *Holzwege*, Heidegger correlates the concept of *Lichtung* with the essence of the artwork and the concept of truth. In the artwork, a thing that exists enters the light of knowledge.²⁸ It is posited in an image and is manifested there, in his opinion, as truth.²⁹

If one now uses this brief perambulation through Heidegger's philosophy to apply the concept of a clearing to Friedemann Hahn's art, one finds that everyday phenomenological interpretations of the concept of a forest path, fir trees and the clearing, dovetail nicely with Heidegger's concept of *Lichtung*. Then the metaphor of the path of life and asserting oneself in nature against adverse, hostile circumstances becomes a question of aesthetic knowledge. Focusing on Kirchner and Heidegger, we arrive at the question of how images function in a visual way. And what references and models, i. e. pictures, can be generated in the specific materiality and modality of painting.

²⁸ Using the example of Vincent van Gogh's painting *Shoes*, he continues: "In the work, a pair of peasant shoes, comes to stand in the light of its being." Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 2002, p.16. (*Holzwege*, 1950, p. 25.) See note 23.

²⁹ "In the work of art, the truth of the being has set itself to work." Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, p.16. See note 23. (*Holzwege*, p. 25.) However, it has far-reaching consequences if one automatically links pictorial representations with the concept of truth merely because they represent something. One effectively deprives oneself of the possibility of recognising deceptions or errors in perception. Visual art, in particular, is a prime example of how deceiving the eye as a strategy can achieve effects that do not exist in reality. However, Heidegger believes that art reflects the "general essence of things", i. e. ultimately their conceptual reality, what they stand for. "The work, then, is not concerned with the reproduction of a particular being that has at some time been actually present. Rather, it is concerned to reproduce the general essence of things." (Heidegger 2020, p. 16 and 1950, p. 25.) Significantly, he does not take a painting as 'evidence' of this somewhat precipitous thesis, but rather a poem (by Conrad Ferdinand Meyer) and stresses that the fountain described in it is neither a real fountain that actually exists, nor does it represent the general essence of a Roman fountain (its title). (Heidegger 2020, p. 17 and 1950, p. 26.) But it cannot be painting's job to represent the general essence of a shoe (e.g. Vincent van Gogh's myriad pairs of shoes). It is, instead, the task of the word as a linguistic unit in itself. Heidegger thus equates the image of a shoe with the concept of the shoe and confuses visibility or aspect with truth. In the fields of visual studies and art history, however, we have learned enough by now to know that image and concept are, as the German idiom has it, two altogether different pairs of shoes (i. e. different kettles of fish; the pun only works in the German context, alas! Translator's note).

Hahn's Brushstrokes after 2012

In the years following *Der Abschied*, Hahn's tonal palette, brushstrokes and characteristic style underwent a transformation. Whereas before 2012, the trace of the brush was characterised by an incredible refinement, crispness and nervousness, with the effect that the very vibrant nervousness of the application itself could be felt or perceived by the viewer as an aesthetic transmission, this staged authenticity disappeared from around 2013 onward and made way for a kind of deliberate 'anti-authenticity', in which the brushstroke is applied more casually and even with an adept lack of care. This is particularly apparent in the paintings *Painting & Guns* from 2015, but also in *Lichtung (nach Ernst Ludwig Kirchner)* from the same year. With this shift in tonal palette and an emphatically casual, even 'poor' application of the paint, Hahn achieves an incredible sense of freedom and unleashes a radical impetus in his work. He liberates himself from the ghosts of his past through a fundamentally renewed, deliberately 'poorly' executed brushstroke. Hahn's brushwork after *Der Abschied* expresses a disregard for art through art, bordering on sprezzatura, a theoretical concept in art first elaborated by Baldesar Castiglione in his influential compendium of manners and ideals, *The Courtier* written in 1528. This concept is about not seeing the art in the art, that art should have a sense of ease and weightlessness, avoiding any appearance of effort, diligence or toil:

*Then again, in painting, a single line which is not belaboured, a single brush stroke made with ease, in such a way that it seems that the hand is completing the line by itself without any effort or guidance, clearly reveals the excellence of the artist, about whose competence everyone will then make his own judgement. [...] So we can truthfully say that true art is what does not seem to be art; and the most important thing is to conceal it ...*³⁰

³⁰ Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. George Bull (London: Penguin Classics, 1967), p. 70 and p.67.

The Dialectics of Painting

If we want to talk about painting, we must also talk about how it produces and engenders visibility via its own means – comprising paint, binding agents, solvents and diverse material carriers. And on the other hand, we also have to talk about how every daub and splash of paint and every painted surface can cover something up, make it disappear or conceal it. The unmarked space of a painterly distinction is much harder to recognise and grasp than overt visibility. One has to ask the question, what does a painting cover up or conceal? Friedemann Hahn's *Lichtung* paintings are dialectical, visual processes that, on the one hand, attempt to render visible an image of the world and the self and to articulate it with the visual means of art, but at the same time, perhaps without intention, destroy, conceal and cover up the world and the self. The struggle pitted around this dialectic is more than clearly manifested in Hahn's *Lichtung* paintings. One witnesses the artist wrestling with the painting and with himself, as well as with the two forces of darkness and light fighting a never-ending battle on the canvas, in which there can be neither victory nor defeat, but only a temporary ceasefire.