

MARIA MAGDALENA Z'GRAGGEN: Alba Albula

February 28 – April 13, 2018

Vernissage: Tuesday, February 28, 6 – 8 p.m., in the presence of the artist

Looking through the large windows of Maria Magdalena Z'Graggen's studio, one's eyes are inevitably caught by the word GRENZE ("border"), written in sizable letters on the grey wall of the building opposite.

TERRA is the title of the new cycle of works Z'Graggen has created for her second exhibition at our gallery. In Romance languages, TERRA denotes earth not only as a planet, but also as soil; in English, the term stands for "any of the relatively light-colored highland areas on the surface of a moon or a planet" (Merriam Webster Dictionary). In her new cycle, the artist has worked with pigments from the most diverse regions of the globe, with each painting becoming an encounter of just two colours on a wooden panel. Throughout the cycle, different continents or "parts of the earth" get in touch with each other, drawing attention to overcoming boundaries, separation, isolation. A universe of colours is thus created in her studio – a world of colours that belongs to all of us. "Alba Albula" is not only the name of this exhibition, but also of the pigment ground from rocks of the Albula Valley in Switzerland and of the painting that uses this pigment alongside oriental indigo, Terra Ercolana from Italy and Russian jade. When mixing her paints, Z'Graggen uses such pigments deliberately to conjoin most diverse cultures in her works.

Z'Graggen started to work with oil paints when she was still a student. Oil has given her the means to manipulate paint and colour with great precision, thus to shape the physical as well as optical presence of her paintings. Today, they have a radiance reminiscent of rare silk or an almost pitch-black shade of night blue. Paint is her medium. After several primings with gesso, she uses a brush to apply monochrome layers of paint onto the wooden panels. From the very beginning, the artist works with the entire series of works in mind and chooses the colours of the first layer in view of an overall tone. The same holds for the final, solid, undiluted layer of paint. Up to this point, each work has been exactly orchestrated, thought through, and built up. In the final step, when she finishes the painting wet-on-wet, her method is determined by instantaneous and hence unpredictable factors. The material, the chemical, the physical now all gain in importance – there is a thin line between success and failure. Z'Graggen spreads the paint on a spatula and, applying measured pressure, slowly draws circular bands or vertical stripes. The viscosity of the paint, a momentary pause in her movement, or a gentle tremor may well determine the tenor of the final work. Although the artist is largely in control of colour and shape, there is always room for the emergence of unintended, unexpected colour gradients or paint applications that evoke the impression of patterns. It is these spontaneous circles, arcs, or stripes – at times exuberant, at others delicate – that lend her paintings this fascinating lightness of being.

Maria Magdalena Z'Graggen (CH/I) lives and works in Basel. Her paintings are part of the collections of the Anderson Museum of Contemporary Art in Roswell, NM (USA), of the DSV Kunstkontor in Stuttgart (DE), and of various Swiss institutions such as Bank Julius Bär, Christoph Merian Stiftung, Kunstcredit Basel-Stadt, Sammlung Nationale Suisse, UBS Art Collection, the Kunstsammlungen (Art Collections) of Baselland, Canton Uri, as well as the Cities of Baden and Zürich.

A concurrent exhibition of works by Z'Graggen – "Dimension der Farbe" ("Dimension of Colour") – can be seen at Trudelhaus, Baden, from February 23 to April 24, 2018.

The monograph "Luminous Flux" by Markus Stegmann was published in 2016 (Verlag für Moderne Kunst, Vienna) and is available in the gallery.