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Rhythms Accompany Circles of Color

by Kathrin Biegner

EXHIBITION Julie Arlene Spencer shows “Visible Sounds” in the Hildegard Forum

When individual points merge, a new combined piece is set into motion. They create feelings through their colors, composition, and the associations they trigger. “Visible Sounds” is the title of the current exhibition in the Hildegard Forum at Rochusberg. All of the exhibited eleven paintings by artist Julie Arlene Spencer are abstract and reminiscent of Pointilism, the technique where single, uniform, and precise brushstrokes form the painting. Right at the beginning of the vernissage – while individual visitors are still having a conversation – Julie Spencer starts to play the marimba. The murmur in the audience stops quickly.

Painting and music combined

The American artist works on the instrument with four sticks. Her marimba playing has become well-known in Bingen, as she has performed in several concerts. Spencer plays a different rhythm with each hand. With her right hand, she creates a constant, dropping motion. Her left hand changes its velocity perpetually. The rhythms seem to be the musical expressions of her paintings' color circles.

Dr. Gernot Blume, Spencer's husband, gives an introduction to his wife's art after an address of welcome by Sister Maria Ruf. In his speech, he takes up the tradition of artists who combine graphic arts and music. According to him, Wassily Kandinsky and Olivier Messiaen are especially important for Julie Spencer's artwork. The university at which Blume and Spencer met, the California Institute of the Arts, also supported artists' multimediality: “At this place, the Bauhaus ideal of a synthesis of different kinds of art dominated.”

Blume also speaks on artists' decision to express themselves through the abstract arts: “It is a development away from the depiction to the picture itself.” This evolution can only take place in the visible arts because music is already in itself abstract. Spencer's main instrument, the marimba, and her paintings have something else in common: “The marimba creates points and no continuous sounds.” As in Spencer's paintings, it is also points in her music that set the tone.

The large works are primarily bright and positive. On most of them, Spencer applied acrylic paint in different shades of blue, yellow, green, and red on white cotton canvas. Colored dots form circles or follow each other as on a string. In the painting “Can You Hear Me”, single points have been smeared as if they had been amplified to ensure that they would be perceived. Moreover, long stretched splashes of color appear only in this painting of the exhibition – a symbol of a source of interference between the medium and the beholder.

A source of inspiration

One of the pictures is certainly an eye catcher: “A New Creation.” The extraordinary characteristic of the piece is: the primary color is black. On this surface, Spencer has created forms of claret,

violet, turquoise, and dark blue. There are only a few singular white spots. This dark painting makes it clear that it is only through light that colors are visible so that “a new creation” can come into being.

Spencer said she wants her paintings' spectators to be able to see something, “yet they are not expected to see something specific but to gather inspiration and motivation.” This said, Spencer does not set any limits for the exciting voyage on which her mostly vivid, colorful works of points invite.