

Regula Syz

**Introductory text for book/ catalogue on the work of Regula Syz
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A Black Spring

Beauty and decline. Strength and weakness. Light and dark. Positive and negative. Joy and grief. Effusiveness and reserve. Life and death. Yin and yang. The paintings of Regula Syz are anything but unambiguous. They let you see both sides of the coin, and it is just this duality which has everything to do with the paradoxical situations which have arisen in the personal life of this Swiss artist. Her painting reveals conflicts, frictions and tensions, but also passion, inspiration, a will to live and enthusiasm. When Regula Syz paints, she unconditionally surrenders to her work. The passion she puts into the process of creation reflects not only her nature and personality, but also her need to express her emotions and share them with others. Her paintings thus function as an intermediary in this process. They are a bridge between the artist and her public, making the viewer a full participant in the creative process.

The contrasts to be found are many in the work of Regula Syz. And yet her paintings are never inconsequential. They do not contradict one another, but rather they complement each other nicely. They need each other, to make the whole, the larger picture complete. For Syz,

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life and art are inextricably connected. The changes of mood and attitude which come over her are all to be found in her paintings. The images are often vehement and dynamic, but they also sometimes incline towards surprise, temptation or even contemplation. In all cases, however, they have been lived through and are genuine. The imagery is universal and timeless. The same is also true for the metaphors and the symbols which supply us entry to the artist's vast world of experience. The images chosen do not throw up any unnecessary barriers to the understanding of her work. They are understandable and accessible to all who will respond to them and come to them with an open mind. An unbiased attitude will give you many more discoveries than an analytical approach to the content, forms or colours used.

Whoever succeeds in penetrating to some of the deeper levels of the paintings will be rewarded with some very special perceptions. The most valuable discoveries are to be made in that place where the world moves from empirical observation to the domain of deepening meaning. The painting of Regula Syz does contain, however, a superficial as well as subdued component. The first impressions which manifest themselves directly and clearly outline the moving life story of an artist who oscillates between extremes. Life is generally maintained when the middle ground is tread, but its value emerges in the extremes of our experience. For Syz this is particularly true. Her paintings are, quite literally, coloured by personal experiences and feelings. And sometimes these can hardly be kept under control. The artist's hand hints at an unprecedented urge for expression which borders on anxiety. It is as if she were afraid that the emotions rising

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within her will lose their power of expression and intensity if they linger too long during the creative process.

Great events (such as the construction of the Tower of Babel in Biblical times or the currency of the disaster of September 11th, 2001, in New York) cast their shadow over the work of Regula Syz. Yet alongside these, happenings a bit closer to home can also serve as catalyst to creation. The death of a sister-in-law, the unforgettable impression of a city, the impact of a vase of flowers upon her or thoughts about a field of tulips can all set the creative process rolling. This mostly occurs intuitively. The painter meets this confrontation with an empty canvas and lets her feelings and thoughts flow. Associations are given all the space they need. Stimuli from outside mix in a special way with her gut feeling. Syz literally paints from the level of her abdomen. She allows everything which presents itself from her subconscious. This process is something like a purification, a kind of housecleaning of brain and mind.

The release does occasionally elicit some fierce reactions. The dialogue with the image media and the interaction with the vision arising from under her hands, produce painting which leaves no one unaffected.

It is, however, not really important what Regula Syz paints; what really matters is how she does it. Her choice of subject does remain subordinate to the world of the artist's experience. She allows herself to be guided by unadulterated and pure emotion in the creative process. Her handicraft, use of colour, brushstroke and touches of paint are always, fully in service to the final result. This result must in

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all ways respond to the feelings which have guided her during her intensive sessions of painting. Syz, with a mixture of unconditional surrender and unbridled energy, enters into dialogue with the paint which she applies to the sharpest edge of her subject. She becomes, as it were, one with her subject.

Paint becomes synonymous with the blood which flows through her veins. She disappears, as it were, into the paintings which reflect her inner world of experience.

Vitality, compassion, social involvement and attention to one's fellow human, a need for intimacy, affection and safety and admiration for the beauty of things are regularly recurring themes. The motto of her work is clear: go with the flow. Syz lets herself be carried along on waves of emotion and the power of her imagination. She gives a good go at translating her personal fascinations, affinities and moods into pure, individual painting. She is what she paints. Although aesthetic aspects can indeed play a similar role in her work, she never deliberately seeks any kind of 'comfort zone'. She has no wish to please people with beautiful pictures or the portrayal of atmospheres, but rather jolt them and shake them awake. The search for a 'trigger zone' - no zone of comfort - springs from the longing for equanimity, harmony, beauty and balance. The keyword here is 'genuineness'. This, indeed, is the true motivation. Sincere painting is much more important for Syz than the 'aesthetically responsible' work of art.

In a part of the paintings, the artist composes through the use of delightful lighting and colour effects. The poeticism and dynamic nature of the composition can be inspired by entirely different themes.

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Sometimes the creation of a manageable order from apparent chaos plays a decisive role. The frictions between order and chaos are a regular occurrence, almost a given here. The changeability of abstract imaginative processes, the sputtering possibilities of wild brush technique and the surfeit of colours are kept under control by figurative base elements or channelled by drastic colour reduction. Here the artist's intuitive method delivers alarming or blood-curdling works of art; in other paintings fairy-tale-like sensations dominate.

For Regula Syz, the creative process is much more than just a question of letting off steam. She submits entirely to dialogue with her subject matter. Quite often, no questions asked, all kinds of animals sneak onto the canvas, them serving as metaphors for thoughts or as symbols for certain ideas, feelings, insights and views which carve a path to the surface from the caverns of the soul. Thus there are gnawing mice which overrun a city, similar to one's thoughts (literally: something eating at you!) which can settle in the human mind as a bothersome bugbear, difficult to dispel. In other paintings threatening crocodiles surface. Elephants highlight independence, indomitability, perseverance and the urge for survival. Syz refers indirectly to elephants which – kept alert by their senses – sought shelter in higher ground before the devastating tsunami hit. Lions also play an important role in the projection of human qualities upon animals. They radiate power and an ancient force. Not for nothing, after all, is the lion viewed as the great protector and the king of beasts.

The urge for survival is the prevailing theme in a cycle of paintings which is based on the Biblical story of Noah and his ark. The crocodile which threatens the ark gets the chance to launch a devastating attack.

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The rainbow indicates that Noah's hope for a good outcome will become reality. In the magnum opus on the ark, all the great themes are present which dominate not only the work of Regula Syz, but also our human condition in the broadest sense of the word: hope, reconciliation, threat, fear of dying, life and survival. Animals are the great messengers in this story. They announce the one final, true message to us all. That which is the lot of animals, will also ultimately be the fate of all of humanity. Regula Syz infuses her paintings with this unequivocal warning through her handling of relationships with animals. Without respect for creation, humanity will also certainly perish.

The person who does not take seriously the wisdom of life's lessons which appear in the Bible, will be digging his own grave. The story of the Tower of Babel also teaches us this. In actual fact is it a matter of total miscommunication. In one of her paintings Regula Syz stacks television monitors up on top of one another, which only just fuel the existing confusion. People often forget to listen to one another. The information wave and mess of words which are showered upon us do not solve the problem of the lack of personal attention of our times. This sounds a bit serious; as indeed it is. Yet Regula Syz manages never to proceed from a negative attitude about life. Rather, she transmits her messages to the world via her paintings, wishing to warn those who will listen, perhaps preventing worse. Occasionally this is so difficult for her that she needs a light-hearted alternative to keep standing upright. In these cases she begins a search for positive elements which may offer new energy, or which radiate warmth and intimacy. Thus we have the blossoming woman who symbolises fertility and a new beginning. The positive composition is also to be

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found in compositions created expressionistically which show fields of flowers and colourful still-lives of flowers.

Yet even flowers wither, and beauty fades. With this single statement, the phenomenon of dualism returns once again. Thus light-heartedness and an airy composition change into seriousness and fear, into doubt, uncertainty and even panic. Birds are threatened by poisonous snakes or a rising storm. Black clouds are a metaphor for sombre thoughts or threatening circumstances. Dualism of certain moods culminates in impressions of a black spring. Nowhere are life and death so close to one another as in a budding spring which, ominously, holds the threat of death within it. This does sound unpleasant, but it is a reality which we all as human beings must learn to live with.

Regula Syz draws attention to this inevitable fact in her work. Paintings help her to relegate or process events and experiences, but this is not the main reason why she paints. Until 1999 she mostly made art to please others and to nourish a need to experience beauty. In the year prior to the change in millennium (!), a great reversal occurred in the Italian city of Genoa. It was there that the understanding that beauty alone is not enough got through to her, that life has two sides and that it is meaningless to reject the existence of the 'dark side'. Therefore since that time she has painted not only what she finds to be beautiful, but also, and particularly, what touches her and occupies her thoughts. All kinds of new discoveries overtake her, and she allows this sense of turmoil into her life. Moved and inspired, she responds to the doubts and questions which come over her. Alexandre Dumas observed this already in his novel 'La Tulipe

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noire': black tulips do exist! This may perhaps sound like a giant cliché or like a contradiction in terms, but in every new beginning the seed is sown for an end which is approaching. Through a universal language of image Regula Syz makes this phenomenon visible to us. She exposes herself to and moves within a shimmering field of tension. Through animals, people and flowers, she brings the viewer into her painting, which is simply bursting with paradoxes. Taken as an entirety, they form a body of work which manifests as a unique whole with contrasting parts. It is these, the extremes, which affect and consummate one another.

Wim van der Beek, art reviewer

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