



K.H. Hödicke at the PalaisPopulaire An Overview

At the beginning of the 1960s, the painter K.H. Hödicke (*1938 Nuremberg) was one of the spokesmen for a small group of young lateral thinkers who wanted to revolutionize painting. No sooner had German postwar modernism caught up to the international abstract tendencies than it rebelled against this new doctrine and opposed it with a renaissance of figurative painting, which had been declared obsolete.

In 1957, Hödicke went to Berlin. Previously, he had spent the formative years of his childhood and youth in Munich after the end of World War II. Here, the intoxication of colors of the artist group *Der Blaue Reiter* had made a deep impression on him during his many visits to Lenbachhaus. In addition, he had discovered and become enthusiastic about the painterly freedom of the Old Masters in the Pinakothek—an artistic maxim that would influence his own work in the future.

In 1959, he began studying painting in West Berlin at the Berlin Hochschule für Bildende Künste (art academy), from which he graduated in 1964. During this period, the divided metropolis was at the cultural crossroads of the conflicting political interests of the major powers. A short time previously, in the midst of the political ice age of the Cold War, Tachism, Informel, and Abstract Expressionism—universal visual languages of a free Western world—had conquered the painting classes at West German academies. Soon, however, they solidified into an academic style. K.H. Hödicke, as part of a group of young students, protested against this ideologically decreed, regulating freedom of abstraction. With expressive, provocatively realistic, and contemporary visual worlds, Hödicke and other artists of his generation radically set themselves apart from the previous generation of abstract artists. His early urban subjects, which concentrated on motif extracts and which he titled *Reflexionen* (Reflections) or *Spiegelungen* (Mirrorings), bear his unmistakable signature. Painted with a dynamic-flowing gesture that oscillates between representationalism and abstraction, they shine in luminous-expressive coloration.

Ten years later, in 1974, K.H. Hödicke was appointed professor at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in West Berlin. His direct painting would have a formative influence on an entire generation of subsequent artists who in the 1980s were called the *Neue Wilde*. K.H. Hödicke still lives and works in the city, whose insular life he has long appreciated.



The works in the current show at the PalaisPopulaire have now returned to Berlin, in whose western part he founded one of the first producer galleries in 1964 together with Markus Lüpertz and Bernd Koberling, the legendary Großgörschen 35. Hödicke has captured West Berlin visually like hardly anyone else for decades: the wall, the ruins, the courtyards, the nighttime streets, the neon signs, the snow—and repeatedly the nervous energy and attitude to life of this frontline city, whose culture he has decisively influenced with his art.

Today his painting, beyond fleeting phenomena, is a mainstay of recent art history and an important reference for young artists. K.H. Hödicke undoubtedly belongs to the classics of German contemporary art. The combination of drawing, painting, and sculpture shows how surprising and topical his work, created over decades, still is today.

The retrospective exhibition at the PalaisPopulaire, which was previously on view in Munich, presents central phases of the artist's work from the early 1960s onwards. For this project, Hödicke for the first time gave a curator, Michael Hering of the Staatliche Graphische Sammlung Munich, the opportunity to view all the works in the artist's possession over a period of two years, to bundle them into groups of works and to arrange them thematically under specific curatorial aspects. Thus, an "Informel section" illustrates not only Hödicke's break with non-objective painting, but also his continued productive engagement with it.

"My interest in a motif can be purely painterly: Is it a composition or is it rather a state, could it become a composition or is the composition already condensing too much?" This statement gives an impression of how Hödicke understands his work, which can be called *alla prima* painting. He no longer has only a classical composition before his eyes, but considers the phases of creation equally worthy of the image and regards them as possible pictorial versions. This working method recalls that of the Tachists. Perhaps it can also be viewed as a reminiscence of the painting of his teacher Fred Thieler (1916-1999) when Hödicke remarks: "Composition is not my primary concern. It is more important to me that the movement is preserved and that you can see this."

The *Berlin Suite* illustrates that he should not be regarded as a chronicler of Berlin. Rather, it is the genuine attitude to life that fascinates him about this city and that he documents. "I'm not sure whether I felt it as clearly then as I do now, but in Berlin you come to yourself more than elsewhere," Hödicke once said.

The focus of the exhibition at the PalaisPopulaire is on K.H. Hödicke's large-format paintings on paper from the 1970s and 1980s, in which he implemented his artistic research over two decades. He also refers to them as "trial runs," in which he



composes motifs, varies them in series, and during the working process comes up with ever new artistic solutions.

The over 2,000 paintings on paper represent a unique pictorial atlas that was created parallel to Hödicke's paintings and yet can be viewed in isolation from them. What both groups of works have in common is the painter's casual style and the openness of the composition.

The paintings on paper, however, possess an incomparably higher speed in the line, which understands the unpredictable emergence of the composition as a part of the genesis of the work. This is a risk that the artist consciously takes in order to achieve a dynamic painterly quality that is decisive for the paintings even after they are completed. Hödicke loves to play with risk, although the composition may be over-stimulated by too much and get out of control.

The artist describes his working method as follows: "You apply a color to the canvas and the color will decide on the next step. I always tried not to spoil this state of things and to let the color proceed to paint. This is how I prefer to make the motif appear."

The paintings on paper were preceded by so-called *DIN-A4 Zeichnungen* from the late 1960s to the late 1970s, which occupy a special position in the group of small-format drawings. Their pictorial ideas seem like contemporary documentation of this decade. With more than 140 drawings, 60 of which are on display in the exhibition, the present *DIN-A4* catalog is devoted exclusively to these works.

The works on paper are completed by a selection of his so-called *Croquis-Studien* on found cardboard, which were created in a short, intensive creative period in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In these studies, Hödicke once again reduces his coloring and captures a pictorial idea with just a few brushstrokes.

The many works on paper are juxtaposed with a concentrated selection of major painterly works from the *Reflexionen* series from the mid-1960s and *Spiegelungen* from the late 1960s and early 1970s, supplemented by some characteristic paintings from the 1980s and early 1990s and, last but not least, a group of small-format bronzes.

CATALOG

An exhibition catalog was published in two volumes by Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König on the occasion of the premiere at the Staatliche Graphische Sammlung Munich, containing 370 full-page color illustrations.



- Volume 1 *K.H. Hödicke. Din A4*, 364 pages, with a foreword and essay by Michael Hering as well as a biography and an exhibition catalog
- Volume 2 *K.H. Hödicke. Mixed Media*, 400 pages, with a foreword by Michael Hering and 100 aphorisms, aphorisms and quotations by K.H. Hödicke

The total edition is 500 copies, including a numbered special edition in a slipcase individually painted by the artist. Museum edition: 180 euros / Special edition: 280 euros

Press photos can be found at: www.photo-files.de/db-palaispopulaire

PalaisPopulaire
Unter den Linden 5
10117 Berlin
Daily except Tuesday, 11 am-6 pm, Thursday until 9 pm