

Between Yesterday & Tomorrow 2016

Mckee Gallery, New Zealand

Review by Dr. Sara Tröster Klemm, Art Curator, Leipzig, Germany

Collapsing rotten roof trusses. High rising are the cranes in the background, painted in soft colours, white, light grey, nearly inconceivable. But yet they are present and show the viewer - here something is happening, here something is moving. Things are changing and people are moulding their future. In the painting *What is not started today is never finished tomorrow* (2016) by Lisa Chandler, the artist is not only reflecting on her impressions of Leipzig, but is also referring to a proverb by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe - like every title in this new series.

Coming from New Zealand, Chandler sees the art city of Leipzig with a fresh view and open mind. She shows the city to the public with totally new eyes. Not only does she analyse the specifics of the historic city - which is now, after a long break, a booming business and book printing town, she also combines various artistic techniques. Mixing acrylic paint, wax crayons and pencils, she now works with graffiti spray, an innovative artistic technique. This is an entirely new approach for her. She just started with a spray can one day and in an extremely courageous and risky way: she started on a nearly completed canvas. And it worked. Additionally, her paintings are often laid on the floor and worked on with palette knives, scrapers and squeegees. Thereby she has developed an unmistakable and unique picture language.

In this series Chandler deals with her impressions of Leipzig - a small but quite dynamic and extremely vibrant city, especially the creative and artistic scene. With its long but ambivalent history, Leipzig inspires many people with its magnificent architecture, which spans from the Renaissance to Baroque and the Gründerzeit. But, especially the famous building complexes of the Gründerzeit which suffered badly during the German Democratic Republic regime. Back then they were ready for demolition. Some of these buildings still stand abandoned, more than 25 years after the downfall of the wall, but others are currently being re-developed as a wave of gentrification sweeps through the city. Chandler relates to this special area of tension in the title of her series *Between Yesterday & Tomorrow*.

Each painting features “*a window or a door or some kind of building structure that you can look through - as a kind of portal or passage. Or perhaps a boundary or space for looking into the future ...*”, as Chandler points out. This is not only very personal to the artist herself, because she is currently turning her life upside down by moving from New Zealand to Germany. But, it is also a profound art historical reference to the question about the nature of painting in itself: Is the picture “*una finestra aperta*”, “*an open window*”, as the Renaissance Italian humanist writer Leon Battista Alberti suggested? And what does the view through the window show? Are we as beholder confronted with a distant view or is it an introspection? Perhaps, it is both, a combination, a liaison of inside and outside, of inner and outer landscape.

Chandler shows us dilapidated structures and unroofed trusses in repetition - subjects, that you might think of as being depressing, ugly and uninteresting. But again, courageously, Chandler paints these urban scenes with powerful fresh colours: a radiant ultramarine blue, a strong rust red, kelly green and snow white. This is a genuinely aesthetic appropriation of her new surroundings.

In the painting *As one approaches one's goal, the path becomes ever more difficult* (2016) Mondrianesque structures and clear lines bring order into her ornamental and floral sections. Trees and branches become nearly abstract ornaments. Chandler's drippings remind us of Jackson Pollock. And there is a connection to artists such as Daniel Richter and Peter Doig. Seldom discovered in contemporary art, the Jugendstil visibly plays a major role in her art, as well: These

soft flowing floral lines and curves, clear contour-lines and luminous colours seen in *Everything we encounter leaves traces behind* (2016) reminds us of Art Nouveau and Pop Art alike. In this way, multiple art historical and contemporary artistic references link her art to modern picture languages, not even stopping in front of comic. For example, in *You only see what you know* (2016) we see a comic-like figure with big staring eyes and a gentle impression.

Another major painting by Chandler is *Those who live must be prepared for change* (2016). The floor is designed as if a white pyramid would be growing from the bottom of the painting. Completely new colours are now enriching her palette: dark violet, various shades of mauve and aqua. Again some abstract grid systems are appearing, but they maintain a lower profile, are unobtrusive and difficult to conceive compared to some of her other work. The small building is bringing in a cosy atmosphere - on the other side it also could be understood as a very modern townhouse, as you find them currently quite often in Leipzig. This kind of architecture usually combines the coolness and conclusiveness of 'Bauhaus' with the German style of *gemütlichkeit*. In this work Chandler is developing a pastose and expressive painting style. On the left side, colour flows down the canvas, creating drips in black on russet, mauve and light white-grey.

A man is standing in the right third of this painting. He is one of the 'characters' that frequent Lindenauer Markt, where a regular market is held. Chandler saw him often, just standing, drinking beer and staring off into the distance. In Chandler's artistic interpretation he wears a white shirt and grey sweatpants. Interestingly, he is slightly over painted by a breath of turquoise colour, which is mixing up both space and body through colour. Concluding this analysis, the interpenetration of spaces, forms and colours is an eminent characteristic of these new works by Lisa Chandler. The colours are developing their own life, and claiming their rights.

Between rotten roof trusses and cranes, between a flourishing present and a difficult past, between nature and architecture, Chandler shows us the realities of Leipzig *Between Yesterday & Tomorrow*.

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Art Curator, Leipzig, Germany

