

Translation: The Patterns of a Berlin Romantic  
Frank Piontek, Norbayerischer Kurier Friday, July 14, 2000

When I still had time to read the “right” books, I discovered Walter Benjamin, who had once lived near us in Berlin on the next street. In Berliner Kindheit um 1900 I came across the chapter “The Fever”, where Benjamin describes how as a boy he lay in bed and thought and did strange and funny things, things that one can think and do only as a child. At one point he writes, *“How a man in ecstatic intoxication of fever at times calculates and thinks, merely to be able to see: and so I counted the sunray shapes that staggered across the ceiling of my room, and the pattern of the wallpaper, which I grouped and regrouped into ever new arrangements.”*

The pattern of wallpaper, yes, yes! There is likely no other place in the world where wallpaper is as “wallpapery” as in Berlin. Berlin, where wallpaper culture between Charlottenburg and Kreuzberg (turkish pattern orgies) and Friedrichshain (realistic socialist standard décor) blooms. Mara De Luca lives in Berlin, and is now exhibiting her work “Wallpaper” in the CampusGalerie. In wonderful exhibition prose we can read that she lives in Berlin because “the energy and visual aesthetic of the city inspire her work.” She aims to “show the inherent decorative quality of painting and reduce the artform to this basic function.”

In plain German: she uses curtain lace and parodies several household patterns... so we stumble across upholstery, tiles, and most importantly, wallpaper. Or, better said, squares reminding us of the better things we were tormented with as children. Later in life we succeed in acquiring our own living quarters; for such a situation, the clever artist’s work gives the appropriate decorative tips. Compared with the paintings of the “monolith” Josef Albers, whose work is currently on exhibit in the Kunstmuseum, Mara De Luca’s Wallpaper paintings simply smile in high baroque style. Once again exhibition prose: “By presenting a pattern as a painting’s subject, the character and atmosphere of particular rooms are described, and associations are awakened in the observer.”

And thus: the whorehouse red with the overly meaningful title “Bordel” says quite a lot. “The observer” associates Straps-Harry Topless Stage, which at one time was located close by the Berlin Wall. The wall squares possess a strikingly damaged and neglected quality, and the observer thinks of the ruins left by the war, still to be seen patiently gathering dust in Berlin’s back streets until late in the eighties.

The deepblue, shiny varnished tiles...clearly, one sees in them Islamic Kreuzberg, tiled baths and trusted Donerkebab interiors, titled, sensibly, “Turkish Tiles.” And so, (sincere thanks, Ms. De Luca) the Wallpaper art with its unusual titles such as “Upholstery:Jennifer” and “Siebild/Quadra” becomes in the end a meeting place of wonderful childhood memories.

Alone, five small pieces are called “Kachel Romantik” (Tile Romance). Let no one say that the Romantic is foreign to the Berliner, or, pardon, the Berlin Guest. Have you ever heard of the Berlin Romantic? Only scholars of literature claim that it was already over in 1840. One who is familiar with Berlin and its wallpaper knows there is nothing more closely related than Berlin and the Romantic. Only a romantic could arrive at the idea of more closely considering the patterns of wallpaper. Or to immortalize them in pigmented abstractions of varnish and latex. Benjamin, if the Nazis hadn’t sent him to his death, would have rejoiced.