

eugenia a. burgo
seen by **Oskar Meise**

The Bliss Of Being a Butterfly

Once Zhuangzi dreamt he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn't know he was Zhuangzi. Suddenly he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakable Zhuangzi. But he didn't know if he was Zhuangzi who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Zhuangzi. (Zhuangzi, Chapter 2)

The full, earthy colours of the large-size paintings illuminate the contemplator. The pastose applications on the untreated linen form a striking contrast to the precise brushwork; its flow seems energetic and yet at the same time shows a controlled expressiveness. Skilfully used shadows and contours give structure and space to the colour fields and create a depth inside the picture that is reflected in the chromatic panels.

The motif that the observer discerns at a first glance will blur coming closer and new ways of perception will open up; pictures emerge from the picture. The detail of a flower blossom will dissolve into her pictorial components, will be transformed into colour fields and material structures but will retain – even in its abstracted form – its essence; what Hermann Hesse would call its inner resonance.

Eugenia A. Burgo finds her motives, the objects of her studies, in nature, in her beloved garden, on hiking tours, at the beach. The grass, the stones and flowers are the source for a contemporary painting, which, at a first glance, can be misunderstood as a still life. The term still life was being formed in the 17th century in Holland and was being subsumed by the German art history pioneer Joachim von Sandrart (1606-1688) in his book *Teutschen Academie der edlen Bau-, Bild- und Malereykünste* (1675) – the first substantial work of German art history – as *stillstehende Sachen* (stagnant things). The French term *Nature Morte* emphasizes the difference in the approach of the artist. Even though the motives that are being employed by Eugenia A. Burgo are the classics of the still lives, she still comprehends them neither as *vanitas* themes nor as naturalistic finger practices nor as allegories. They are rather the dynamic centre of a pictorial study, of an almost meditative journey of the brush, of the observer and of the artist herself.

To understand the contemporary approach and the uniqueness of the art of Eugenia A. Burgo it might help to make a sojourn into the history of Chinese painting and its concepts. An important difference exists there between court art and literati painting. The court art was mainly used for decoration, for representation and as an allegorical pillar to the principles of Confucius, which were ultimately legitimising the claim of power of the imperial court in the Mandate Of Heaven.

The literati painting was the alternative draft thereof and pursued different aims. Bizarre mountain landscape accommodate little hermitages, grand waterfalls disappear into vertiginous ravines. The painting, which is often done in monochrome ink and mounted on a hanging scroll, might irritate the Western observer at first. The -for Westerners- all important perspective is missing, the landscapes seem to be convoluted, clouds and water divide the image space and there is no horizon. The rocks, trees and buildings are

rather suggested with a few ink lines than actually illustrated, because the literati wanted to grasp the essence of an object and not merely depict its form. The key to understanding how to approach such a painting to fathom the intentions of the artist can be found in the dissolving of the correlation between the image space and the observer. There are innumerable theoretical texts, poems and inscriptions that ask to leave the perspective of the recipient and to immerse oneself in the painting, to become part of it and to go for a stroll in the depicted landscapes. We are being instructed to shrink mentally to the size of an insect and to observe the picture from the image space. Chinese ink drawings do not depict real nature but rather landscapes of the mind.

Eugenia A. Burgo provides us with an indication that her oeuvre can be absorbed similarly: she works in series. Her object of investigation is not dealt with in only one image, rather examined in a multitude of large sized canvases with the same colour palette, illuminated from all sides and scrutinized. Her untamed curiosity asks her to get to the core of an object, not to be satisfied with one angle or with the mere surface of things. She radically challenges her own perspective and tries to grasp the essence of our world.

We, as the observers, can attempt to help this working process by abandoning our accustomed distance and, in accordance with the Chinese example, to shrink to the size of a butterfly and observe the image from inside the image. If we dare to endeavour this mental experiment the painting of Eugenia A. Burgo become timeless and imperatively contemporary: painting is not just painting but rather a certain manner how to perceive our world and how to engage in it. So it is easy to imagine, that Zhuangzi would love this kind of art.

Oskar Meise, 2012