

The art of a circular painting.

The essence of a painting is that it concerns a two-dimensional surface onto which a binder affixes pigments. Originally, this surface was a cave, having no frame or relief to speak of. Via taut walls with frescos replacing windows, this surface evolved into the canvases we now find everywhere. The canvases still refer to the windows in which one could frame an image, something which also accounts for their rectangular or square shape. Even if the origins of such windows were subject to practical considerations, manufacturing a square window is much simpler than fashioning a circular one. Tondi, circular paintings, are still very much an exception in visual arts.

A rectangular and square frame come with certain advantages: a composition is easily made because the shape itself already suggests a direction or – at least – a top, bottom and two sides. A circular shape does not; it does not have a predefined frame. A circle is a fluid form, equally rotating in its visual effect. In a work with a standard frame, the work itself dictates whether it is put up straight, or to be more precise: the canvas itself is straight. If the horizon follows a different angle, one may assume that this must be the artist's intention. In a circular work, the horizon is the only reference point in terms of direction and, as a consequence, constitutes the decisive element in the composition of a circular work.

This means that, in practice, the creation of a tondo is considerably more complex than the standard rectangular work, at least what concerns a genuine composition (I do not regard centered compositions to be compositions as such within the surface, but rather echoes of the circular frame).

One aspect of painting which has become less evident for nearly a century is spatiality within the pictorial surface. Until the invention of abstract art, the image had always been connected to reality. The pictorial surface, whether deformed or not, was still a window onto reality. Rendering this spatiality has always been a complex undertaking for a painter; after all, it concerns a flat, level surface that should create a certain illusion of spatiality. Matters become even more complex when an artist does not only attempt to render the spatiality of reality on a flat surface, but also a reality which itself presents a flat-surface-in-reality-with-a-pictorial-element-thereon. Or, in other words, the painter does not only produce the illusion of spatiality, but also, for example, what a painting would look like on a painting.

In combining the difficulty of a tondo with the problem of the illusion of a painting within a painting, one amalgamates two complex properties of the art of painting. This combination does not suggest a summation, but rather a multiplication as the problem of spatiality and composition has become doubly complicated.

Stefan Peters strictly paints on circular volumes. In doing so, he eminently creates not only the illusion of a round-shaped window, in which one can find the illusion of a factual spatiality, but also a flat spatiality illustrating the illusion of spatiality. It is very much like a diorama with a background glued onto the inside of the box and various elements in the wings, only now with the addition of factual spatial elements.

This complexity in image making grants him the intricately fascinating position of image maker, and makes him deserving of the generous respect for his success in drawing this play to ever new grounds. It becomes Stefan Peters that, in addition to pursuing this image-technical difficulty, he has a good painter's hand. However, it is his play in spatiality which makes him truly exceptional.

text by Niek Hendrix (www.lost-painters.nl)