

An Autobiographical Fragment by Gerard Wagner From The Painter's Notes, in *The Art of Colour*

In the year 1928 I was admitted by Henni Geck into her painting school. The classes, at that time, were held in Rudolf Steiner's lofty studio in the Schreinerei, where the great wax and plastiline model for the Group Statue of the Representative of Man stood. On the walls hung the originals of the Training Sketches and Motif Sketches—a new art of painting, a new art of sculpture. The teacher's presence and atmosphere still lived here, as did the earnestness of his mode of working.

Henni Geck had been present when each of the sketches was done. Following an indication of Rudolf Steiner, we were directed to paint the motifs given in pastel, in watercolour. In so doing we had to pay utmost attention to the forms and how they mutually balanced each other, down to the smallest detail. Henni Geck always gave us the sequence of colours. After nine months, due to tragic circumstances, the teaching in this form came to an end. Later, the sketches were housed in the Goetheanum, where they were accessible to students and others interested in them. But that short learning period has been of lasting value for all subsequent years.

I had painted only the first three motifs: "Sunrise", "Sunset", and "Shining Moon". Through careful observation and feeling for the colours, lines, and forms of these prototypes, something came over one – a tremendous interest was awakened which could be expressed more or less in the words "Why, these are organisms! They are exact, as though without accident or arbitrariness in their formation. They do not depict any object of nature, but the details of their form and movement so support and determine each other, as only the members of a living organism do in which every part is necessarily related to the whole. They do not portray, they *live*". This was a constant feeling that only gradually became more conscious in the decades that followed.

The instruction had left me with a great riddle. Rudolf Steiner always said that form should arise out of colour, as the work of colour. One can assume that this happened in his pictures. We had started the first three motifs by painting vermilion red—following the indication of the sketches; the first, in the form of a rising sun, the second a setting sun and the third three crescent moons. And a question arose in me: if we began three different motifs with the same colour (as a first step on white paper) then how can this be reconciled with the fact that form should come out of colour? I began to look for answers. I asked myself: if I was to change one colour slightly in the build-up of the motif how would the form change? In this I followed a suggestion of Rudolf Steiner's to paint on coloured backgrounds, or, before painting, to imagine the paper as toned with a colour.

Of particular help in eliminating subjective arbitrariness is an exercise of Rudolf Steiner's which points to "qualitative measuring." The measuring of

colour qualities is most important, because it allows the painter to develop wakefulness and direction in his searching, while at the same time letting the colour experience “fall asleep” completely in the activity of creating. His striving while painting is to surrender all experience to *doing*, holding back nothing in his own feeling. This feeling must become pure, controlled will activity.

Whoever attempts to follow this path can come to the certainty that the indications which Steiner gave, are able to lead those who deepen themselves sufficiently in them, to grasp the formative forces of colour and to create out of this life element, without offending against it. By giving us such pictures created out of the life of colour Rudolf Steiner set goals for the far future of painting.

Having the artistic works of Rudolf Steiner always present was a prerequisite for following this path, as was the intensive experience of the spiritual life in Dornach: the eurythmy and stage art, the activities of personalities such as Marie Steiner, Albert Steffen, and the many others who set their stamp on Dornach life. The merely personal lost all significance in this context.