

Claus Havemann

Foreword-

From the 1991 publication- Claus Havemann "Paper, Canvas, Steel."

By Karsten Ohrt M.A.

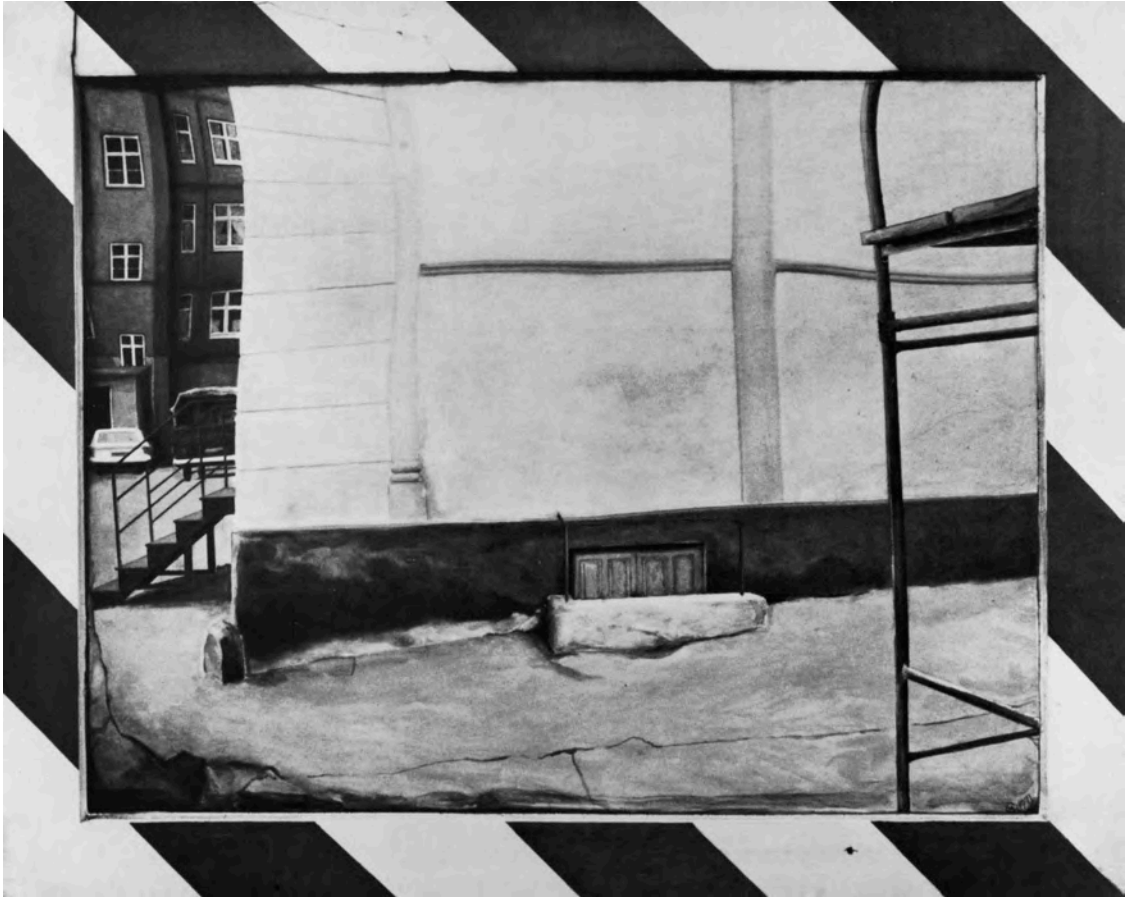
*"Art is not a manifestation of the appearance of reality
as we see it, or of life as we live it, but a manifestation of true
reality and true life – indefinable, but plastically practicable."
(Mondrian, 1937)*



Many people can connect Claus Havemann's name with his New Realistic pictures of the 1970's. The Claus Havemann presented here will be maybe completely unknown and completely unrecognizable.



Where Claus Havemann depicted the immediately visible reality in the surprising and insistent realism of his New Realistic paintings, he depicted another reality in the non-figurative works of the 80's and 90's. Havemann was just as consistent in his non-figurative paintings as in his earlier New Realistic paintings – carrying out abstraction with an astonishing accuracy and exuberance of color. In his own following introduction, Havemann describes beautifully how the landscape inspired his transition from the realistic to the non-figurative at this time.



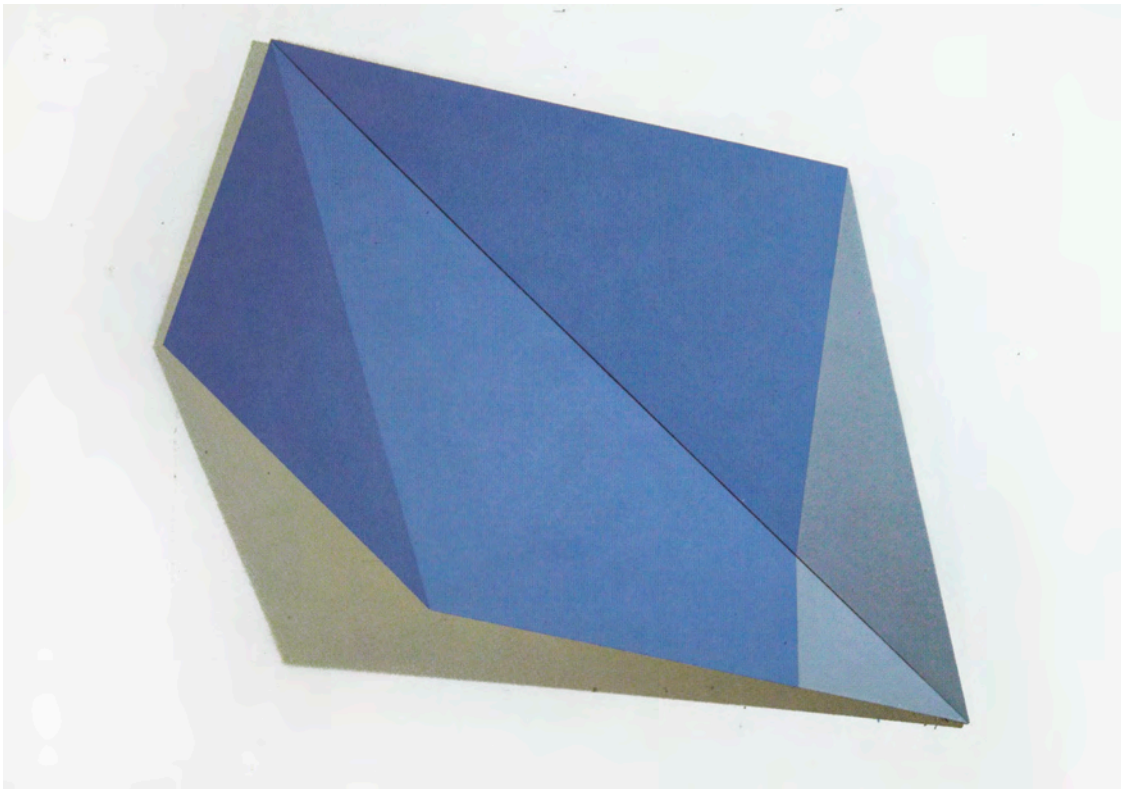
Havemann underwent within a few years the same change which European painting experienced from Monet to Mondrian, where the observation of the landscape also played a major role, as if one had no memory of them, no knowledge, where one regards nature without interest, liberated from conceptions of habit. By doing so, all ideas of comparison, the demands of mimesis, leave the spectator. The picture no longer means anything, has no references-

It just *is* :-by virtue of itself, its size, its colors, shapes, framing edges, contours, structures, the strength of the pigments. Super realism gave way to non-figurative work without any prior announcement.



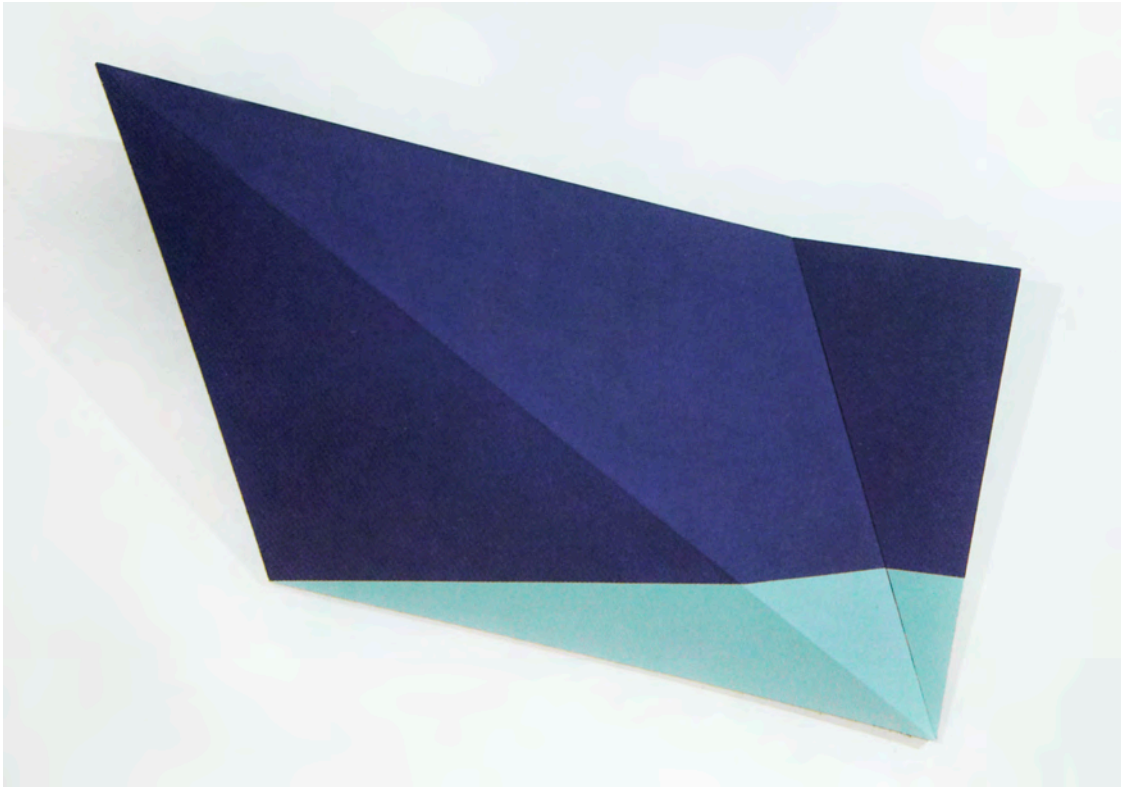
All during this development from realistic to non-figurative painter, Claus Havemann remained a performing musician – jazz musician and folk musician. Perhaps his absorption in music helped him along the way. When non-figurative art

found its first executants at the beginning of this century, comparisons to music were often used to put this nameless, wordless painting into words. One talks about the harmony of color, and the tone of color. Kandinsky said that music and art should be able to “render the finer feelings which as yet have no names.”



Havemann's endeavors then and now to attain a liberated artistic idiom without stories, without names, without comparisons is also maybe like the endeavors of music. But then as Mondrian himself pointed out, perhaps the dream of a pure work of art is not so pure after all saying,

“The definitions figurative and non-figurative are only approximate and relative, and each line represents a figure. No shape is entirely neutral.”



So, hidden within the dream of the pure work of art are some very central problems. Because, what is reality? Is it something in itself, or does it only exist by virtue of our senses?

Should painting reveal reality, or independent of reality create a new reality - a true picture? Seen from this angle, it is perhaps not so far a leap from Claus Havemann's early New Realism paintings to the non-figurative pictures of these later decades.

INTRODUCTION' - by Claus from 'Canvas, paper, steel' 1991

The first one-man show I held was of New Realistic pictures in 1974 at Galleri Arnesen in Copenhagen. Influenced by the Americans Don Eddy and Richard Estes, and especially by the Englishman Malcolm Morley and the Swede Olla Bilgreen, I worked for 3-4 years trying to discover my own expression within the New Realistic idiom. My subject matter was different than the Americans', but even more important were the roots back to my surrealist pictures of the late sixties.

To be sure I painted everyday pictures, but they were full of awe at the 'normal' in the ordinary world, where I often felt like a spectator wandering through a human zoo. This schizophrenic attitude is best expressed in a small self-portrait from 1972 where I divided the face by placing my maulstick right down the middle of the picture. The mirror world of my surrealist period culminated in "gadespejlet" or window mirror....from 1973 (owned by Århus Kunstmuseum). For nine months I had attempted to paint on one -and only one- canvas in the belief that I could work on it forever, with the result that the picture disappeared and became entirely black.

My signal to the world was of rather more literary than painterly content. Color and composition were important, of

course, but it was primarily “the *message*” which meant something. There was great energy in the pictures even when the theme was quiet. The background, often a wall, was what interested me most.

Here I could easily paint and draw as I pleased. They were good pictures until they began to bore me and become repetitions of old thoughts wrapped in new paper. So in 1977 I quit painting altogether, for a year.

IRELAND - I have with few exceptions resided in Ireland since 1967, and it was here, 10 years later, that I discovered *color*.

On Sherkin Island in the south west of County Cork in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, the light and color are different from any other place I have experienced. Constantly changing, soft, bright, gentle, weak, strong and often at a tempo which is difficult to follow. I started all over again here with small naturalistic watercolors of the sea, the fields and the mountains, no longer for detail, but for accuracy in the color of the landscape. After a long day in the mountains with the watercolor pad, I had a very strange experience. All day I had accurately committed the color of the landscape to paper, point by point.



Sherkin Island. Watercolor: 12,5 x 19,5 cm 1976



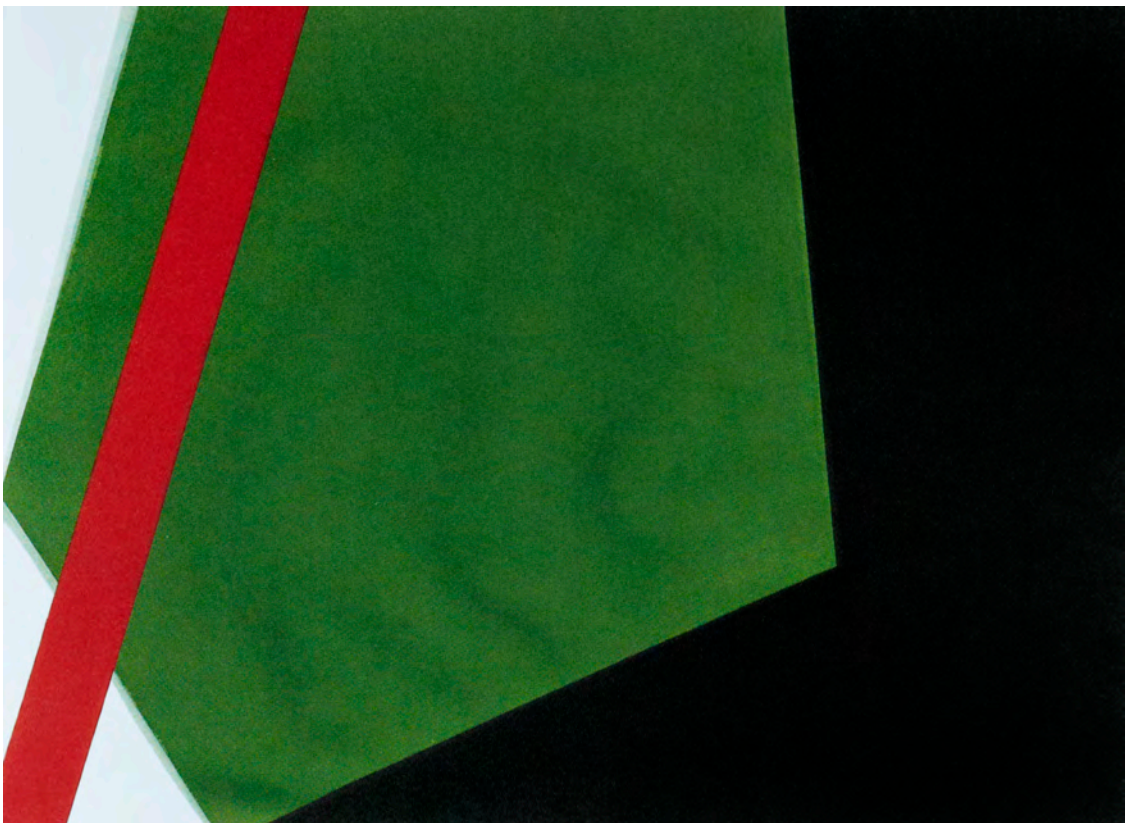
Now I sat staring with wide open eyes, not concentrating on looking at anything, when suddenly a round diffuse but pure color came towards my eyes, after which it dissolved and disappeared. This was followed by a larger sphere in a third color, and so on. For the sake of convenience and because of the transitory nature of the phenomenon, I took down the color as a stripe on my pad.



A wide stripe if the sphere was large, a narrow strip if the sphere was small. In this way I painted hundreds of watercolors, stripe after stripe. Why was it a sphere? Why diffuse? Several years later I saw a short film from the Niels Bohr Institute on experimental nuclear physics and was surprised to see the exact same round form which had appeared to me. Was there a connection?

One thing was certain, color was in the landscape! If, for example there was a little house with a rusty roof, the sphere was a small rust-red color, or if the sphere was large and turquoise, it was the sea between Sherkin Island and Hare

Island. This is how the landscape can be interpreted through my watercolors. I was like a pipe where color flowed through my eyes, out of the paintbrush and onto the paper. It was liberating and simple, as if I were not even there. I used the watercolors best-suited as a starting point for my first large paintings, acrylics on canvas, which I, again, exhibited at Galleri Arnesen.



At the beginning of the eighties I dropped the direct connection to nature and worked with color on canvas, which resulted in a show at Brinkmann's in Amsterdam in 1983. Each painting had its own color, a blue, a red, etc., so that the exhibition became a color complex, like an installation, but

where each painting also represented an independent organism.

During the following 4-5 years I bound the energy on the theory that everything is present even if it cannot be seen. To the jazz music of Coltrane, Rollins and Miles I created an orgy of color and rhythm. It was like a score in reverse which was quieted down and painted over with different coats of white so that only the energy appeared to those that had time to meditate on it. "White" paintings, which eventually loosened up more and more – that is to say more color and less white. I wanted to be tight and accurate and at the same time loose and quick in both stroke and color.

Color *is* nature – the late 80's into the 90's

These paintings were an experience and interpretation of color. Not of color *in* nature as before, but color on the actual canvas. *Color is nature!*

In concrete terms, they consist of two elements. The one extreme is a sensitive, feminine principle and the other is a rigid, masculine principle. Up to fifty very thin layers of color are painted on top of each other, attaining an intense and vibrating satiety which moves from without to within and in reverse. It is an experience of color in depth. To that I add a covering color to the surface which most often takes the shape of a stripe. These two elements on the same canvas create a tension, like for example a feminine and a masculine principle. Or perhaps more like the movement of a particle in a wave, which are apparently two conflicting and incompatible concepts, but which turn out to be different sides of the same reality.

The shape is as important as the color. I regard it more as sections or building blocks in a spacious connection than as geometric figures. It is not the logical language of geometry which I use, but present physical shapes in a

spacious unit. That is why several of the works are in three dimensions, and the transition from the depth of color to pure sculpture is a natural and coherent sequence.



The large sizes and deep surfaces of color create human relations and I think the possibility for the spectator to enter

in a dialogue with the work on 'equal' terms is important. The feeling of being in a 'good' place is of great mental importance and I think helps open the eyes and sharpen the senses.

My personal relationship to painting is of an aesthetic character. I believe in universal values which surround us and which I express in my own language. It is not my ambition to give answers, but to question the way in which the 'seen' is experienced. I work by intuition and never know where a painting ends, but I stop when it is finished. It is irrational work that has succeeded when I least expect it to. I regard it therefore as parallel to music where the craft must be mastered, but only as a foundation to get things 'swinging'.

The best work usually succeeds without trouble and in a sudden flash. There are no intellectual preparations, but concentration on and attention to the work process itself, which often results in an experience with the surroundings, like a unit or a state of mind. Time exists in points, both in layers and in extension. The polarization between the unexpected and the controlled is what is interesting about the process. The uncertainty of the apparently predictable is like moving along an edge. Getting into a painting is not at all the same as painting in the traditional sense of the word, and the experience is 'outside of oneself'. Perhaps this method of work creates a lot of 'waste', but I believe it gives insight.

To paint without sorrow or thought probably seems superficial to many people, but is precisely what I find interesting. To cut away the superfluous and reveal the artistic, therefore leaving it naked and to the point, free of sentimentality and psychological undertones. I regard my work as play, build up, tear down, construct, put together, throw away.



My wish is to be able to express in simple terms something about things which are profoundly complicated because I believe that it would ease understanding and lend the artistic idiom independent life, instead of illusionary imagery. I do not intend to create chaos and confusion or

order and harmony in the ordinary sense of the word, but to comprehend and express artistic contradictions as a whole.

To me the abstract idiom is concrete because the physical presence of my work in a room interferes and changes the 'condition' of the room in a dialogue with the spectator. I do not produce 'pictures' or reflections of present in the room as a table or the spectator him/herself. For a work of art to be present means that it is liberated from associations. The more liberated the work of art, the clearer the idiom.

Recent work - 2007 onwards. (edited by collator.)

The inspiration of nature and color continues to inspire Claus in recent work. It can be said that this recent work is maybe slightly more 'diverse' than earlier periods.

Features of earlier work such as type of brush stroke and approach to the dual nature of color can be seen to progress when viewing these paintings in the context of his output as a whole.

For the first time since his 'New realism' period, direct visual representations are now incorporated in his visual world.

Attention must be drawn to the Velasquez paraphrases as the gateway into this new period.

Having travelled to view the original works Claus took inspiration from them to create a series of five paraphrases beginning from a direct response to a final abstract work. The first and a later example printed here...





The technique of his realism period coupled with personal exploration have resulted in this astounding Velasquez series.

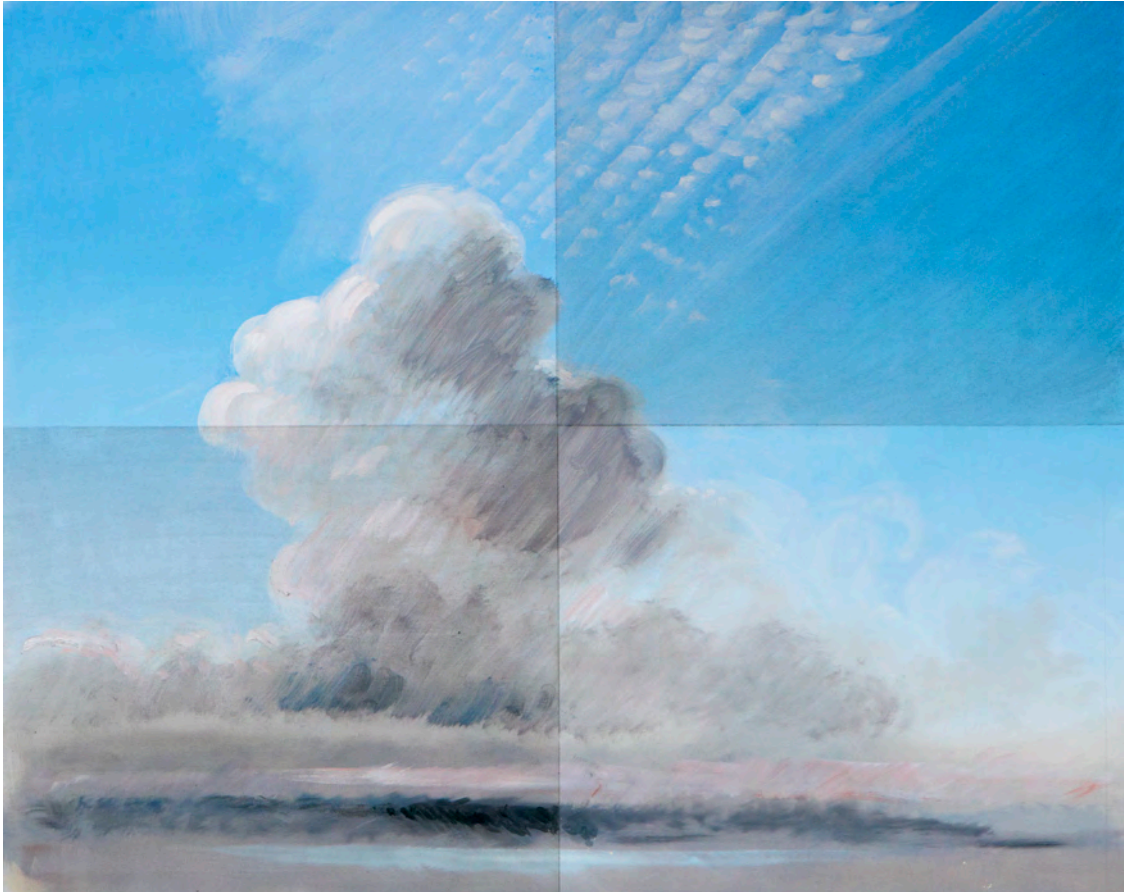
Included also in this 'exercise' if you will, is the portrait of Pope Innocent X displayed here but also treated to further paraphrases, viewable on the website.



It is through these studies that much of the material and styling for this new period of Claus' work has stemmed.

Once again like his move away from realism in the early 70's, it was unannounced.

A series of Sherkin Island landscapes within a 'grid system' examine the relationship between the man made straight line (which does not occur anywhere in nature) and the freeness of natural subjects such as skies, seas, and anatomy see this perspective extended further.



Claus has spent most of his professional life working in what laymen would term 'abstract' art. This use of a grid system and its superimposition onto clear representative images can be viewed as a reconciliation of two extremes... abstraction and realism.

The square is the most common man made shape around us, everything from windows to televisions and mobile phones use its structure....



Claus feels that it consequently represents the most abstract shape possible ie. that created by man. The working of realist imagery within these formats can therefore be taken on face value as a representative image within an abstract context.

This series has also been used as 'frames within a frame' to explore motifs....



Looking back at a career now spanning over fifty years, all the possibles may be seen to have been covered. It is in this latest stage however, that diversity and introspection are flowing together.



Artists changing style is hardly a new phenomenon 'with mastery, one loses mystery,' comes to mind but the intensity of purpose and solidity of objective is remarkable.

For Claus to have travelled from super-realistic paintings in the late 60's, via abstract non-representation in the 80's and 90's to finally arrive in *this* millennium at the vacuum in between is in itself inspirational. It takes an artist of *this* depth and ability to seek this ground.



Further information can be obtained from,

www.claushavemann.com



Claus Havemann in his studio, Sherkin Island 2012.