

- 1) Vgl. Oskar Bätschmann, Ausstellungskünstler. Kult und Karriere im modernen Kunstsystem, DuMont, Köln, 1997
- 2) Dominik Stauch, in: «Gesehene Worte». Kunst und Literatur, Katalog der Ausstellung im Kunsthaus Langenthal, Langenthal, 2005, S. 5.
- 3) z.B. in: «Über die Formfrage», Der Blaue Reiter, München, 1912, S. 82.
- 4) Dominik Stauch, wie Anm. 2.
- 5) Synästhesie ist eine Form von vernetzter Wahrnehmung im Gehirn. Es ist die Verknüpfung verschiedener Sinneswahrnehmungen, bei der z.B. akustische Signale im Gehirn mit visuellen Wahrnehmungen gekoppelt werden können. Der Synästhetiker ist demnach imstande, Geräusche oder Musik nicht nur akustisch wahrzunehmen, sondern sie auch bildlich dargestellt erleben zu können. Im Zentrum steht also eine Visualisierung von Sinneseindrücken.
- 6) Für Kasimir Malewitsch (bei Kiev 1879 –1935 Leningrad) nimmt sein berühmtes Bild Schwarzes Quadrat auf weissem Grund, 1913, die Verbindung des grossen Realen mit dem grossen Ungegenständlichen auf.
- 7) El Lissitzky (Polschinok 1890 –1941 Moskau) beginnt 1919 mit der Arbeit an seinen PROUN-Projekten (PROUN = Projekt zur Verwirklichung des Neuen in der Kunst), welche die Umgestaltung des gesamten Lebensraums zum Ziel haben.
- 8) Bei dem interaktiven Netzprojekt Colour it Beautiful, das Dominik Stauch in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Museum Liner Appenzell produziert hat und das am 12. November 2005 für eine limitierte Zeitspanne aufgeschaltet worden ist (www.colouritbeautiful.net) können die Besucher aus den 216 «websicheren» Farben, die auf allen Farbmonitoren darstellbar sind, Dreierkombinationen von quadratischen Farbfeldern zusammenstellen und sich per mail-order als individuell gestaltete Kunstwerke ausdrucken lassen.
- 9) Die Fibonacci-Zahlenreihe definiert ein festes wiederkehrendes Muster, das in allen Bereichen des Lebens zu finden ist. Sie ist entstanden aus der Addition der jeweils vorangehenden Zahlen der mit 0 bzw. 1 einsetzenden Zahlenfolge: (0), 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, usw. In der Bildenden Kunst ist sie vor allem durch den italienisch/schweizerischen Arte-Povera-Künstler Mario Merz (1925 –2003) bekannt geworden, der mit den zeichenhaft verwendeten Zahlen natürliche Wachstumsprozesse symbolisiert hat. Entdeckt wurde die Zahlenfolge von dem italienischen Mathematiker Leonardo da Pisa (1170 –1250), genannt Fibonacci (Filius Bonacci), in einer Zeit, als die Mathematik noch als Kunstform verstanden worden ist.
- 10) Der amerikanische Musiker, Dichter, bildende Künstler, Zen-Philosoph und Pilzkundler John Cage (1912 –1992), Nestor der Neuen Musik und der Akustischen Kunst, übte mit seinem Schaffen einen nachhaltigen Einfluss auf die amerikanische und internationale Kunstszene aus.
- 11) Aus John Cages vorbildhafter Arbeit mit Zufallsverfahren, basierend auf dem altchinesischen Orakelbuch I-Ging, entstanden sowohl Schlüsselwerke der Musik, der Akustischen Kunst, der Lautpoesie wie auch der Bildenden Kunst.
- 12) Z.B. Requiem # 1 (Caught in a Cage), 2005, 03:15
- 13) Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk war der Titel einer Ausstellung über Europäische Utopien seit 1800, die von Harald Szeemann (unter Mitarbeit von Toni Stooss) für das Kunsthaus Zürich konzipiert, 1983 daselbst eingerichtet und danach in Düsseldorf und Wien gezeigt worden ist. Vgl. dazu das Katalogbuch Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk. Europäische Utopien seit 1800, Verlag Sauerländer, Aarau und Frankfurt am Main, 1983.
- 14) Elisabeth Gerber, «go Johnny go. Dominik Stauch zwischen cooler Bildästhetik und heissen Rock-Klängen», in: Kunst-Bulletin 3, 2003, S. 43.
- 15) Vgl. dazu den Textauszug und die Quellenangabe zu Burroughs' Words of Advice auf dem Frontispiz der vorliegenden Publikation, S. 4. Was für Stauch an den «Ratschlägen» Burroughs', mit dem er sich seit den 1980er Jahren beschäftigt hat, in diesem Zusammenhang zählt, ist dass es sich bei Ein paar Ratschläge, 1994, um ein Kunstprojekt (einer Münchner Galerie) handelte.
- 16) Der amerikanische Schriftsteller William Seward Burroughs (1914 –1997) ist neben dem befreundeten Allen Ginsberg und Jack Kerouac der wichtigste Vertreter der amerikanischen so genannten Beat-Generation. Sein bekanntestes Werk, mit dem er internationales Aufsehen erregen sollte, ist Naked Lunch, das im Juli 1959 bei Olympia Press in Frankreich erscheint. Das Buch sorgte für Wirbel in der Literaturwelt und sollte noch einige Prozesse zu überstehen haben.
- 17) Dominik Stauch, wie Anm. 2.

TONI STOOSS

## PLUNGE WHEN YOU WIN

The glass paintings, sculptures, wall drawings, video projections, prepared furniture, rugs, language and audio pieces and computer-generated works by Dominik Stauch are best grasped in all their complexity when they complement and enhance one another within the context of an exhibition. The works created individually and in series since the 1990s, formally based on the tradition of Concrete/Constructivist art – and as a counterpoint to it – reveal most when they are woven like threads into a tapestry of visual narrative as spatial interventions within an architectonic framework. Although Stauch's works have always been conceived as individual pieces or as variations on a theme, his creative activity could justifiably be described as that of an “exhibition artist”<sup>1</sup> if, by that, we mean an artist whose work can be fully grasped only in the context of an exhibition or is, in fact, specifically designed for public presentation. In collaboration with the Museum Liner, Stauch has now created a rhythmically orchestrated presentation in all ten rooms of the museum, integrating older works, completing ongoing projects and creating new site-specific objects and audio-visual works.

In his multi-media work, Stauch transforms reflections on one particular dilemma of postmodernist disillusionment – the sense of indifference to artistic expression with an aftertaste of ‘anything goes’ in the wake of modernism – into something positive. What interests him, what he pursues and seeks to convey in his use of image, text and sound is – as Dominik Stauch himself laconically summarises this complex matter – “the interaction between colours, side by side or layered, and the architectural exploration of the space”. What appears at first glance to be the very simple formal-aesthetic result of a one-dimensional conceptual finding is actually based on a subtly perceived associative intellectual construct rooted in older art, especially those forms of classical modernism, pop music and beat literature that represent specific intentions and experiences. “One aspect of particular importance in my work involves drawing upon histories or atmospheres, linking up attitudes, occurrences and individuals, and distilling them into a concept. In this way, autobiographical elements can be blended with literature, or aspects of art and cultural history can be brought into the present time and read from a new viewpoint.”<sup>2</sup>

Stauch is not in search of pure form or “concretion” as opposed to the “Great Abstraction” described by Wassily Kandinsky.<sup>3</sup> Instead, he is looking to express condensed meanings, often by way of radically reduced media. This means drawing upon the language of geometry, stereometry and polar opposites, upon the language of the natural and the organic. The contrast between the expressive power of artificially produced objects and found objects provides him with raw material, as do parallel forms of expression in literature and music. “I perceive similar attitudes in musicians and writers. So it is only logical to seek inspiration for my own work

in literature and music.”<sup>4</sup> Stauch’s affinities with avant-garde art on the one hand, and with rock, pop culture and the myths of the beat generation on the other, lend his artistic vocabulary a broad palette of hues and tonalities, so that his forms of expression oscillate between original formulations and quotations.

This approach allows him to exploit contradictory artistic positions with a self-assurance that would confound any historian. His formal and theoretical references lie primarily in the “neoplasticism” of the De Stijl movement, with the work of such artists as Piet Mondrian or Theo van Doesburg, and in the experiments of such Concrete artists as Max Bill or Richard Paul Lohse, but without taking on board their ideological and social-utopian cargo. The link between art and life, debated since the earliest days of modernism, and so paradigmatically championed by Marcel Duchamp, nevertheless remains viable for him, albeit more in the sense of an internalised creative discourse than in an idealistic, let alone a sociopolitical sense. Stauch expands the strategy of the constructive and the concrete into the realm of synaesthesia,<sup>5</sup> into the simultaneous perception of different sensual impressions and their representation as multimedia art.

Stauch is as sensitive to affinities in the interactivity of past image/text/audio works as he is to the achievements of cutting-edge digital technology and his complex artistic vocabulary syntagmatically links their respective potential. In terms of their historical implications, the ‘warped’ perspective of the rectangles of the Russian Suprematists Kasimir Malevich<sup>6</sup> and El Lissitzky,<sup>7</sup> or Piet Mondrian’s late versions of his New York Boogie Woogie, are as relevant as, say, the palette of seemingly infinite colour combinations in an interactive internet project.<sup>8</sup> Stauch’s handling of colour is as much a reflection of the theory and practice of Classical Modernists like Kandinsky, Kupka, Malevich or Mondrian as it is of the standardised shades of cyan, magenta and yellow used in printing technology, not to mention the countless variations of contemporary electronic colour generation. A geometric progression such as the Fibonacci numbers<sup>9</sup> may influence his work as much as the aleatory musical compositions of John Cage<sup>10</sup> that fly in the face of conventional rules. For instance, Stauch assigns certain tones to digitally generated geometric colour fields and their movements on the monitor. He has often used the flick of a coin – in other words, the principle of chance – to determine colours, positions, tonalities and pauses.<sup>11</sup> The colours and shapes floating across the monitor generate matching tonal sequences, resulting in the correlation of a many-layered and constantly changing colour/sound composition – which the artist calls a “requiem for abstract art”.<sup>12</sup>

What the individual works or groups of works by Stauch express is not first and foremost the “inclination towards a total work of art”<sup>13</sup> that shaped synaesthetically motivated artists from Romanticism to Modernism. That inclination is, however, strengthened and underpinned by the deliberate inclusion of individual works and cycles of work within an exhibition context, within the visual, textual and acoustic collage that is presented to the spectator as a precisely orchestrated sequence of space-specific installations. “Stauch makes rational concepts of painting interact extremely precisely with pop music and heroic epics. Tongue in cheek and with a keenly analytical mind, he explores their artistic potential in a new way that goes beyond the bounds of any ideological premise and, in doing so, he puts us in a state of ‘enlightened Romanticism’.”<sup>14</sup>

“Winning and losing come in streaks. Plunge when you are winning. Fold when you are losing.” This piece of advice<sup>15</sup> from beat author William S. Burroughs,<sup>16</sup> often cited by Stauch, is the source of the exhibition title. It becomes the driving force behind the exhibition artist’s form of presentation, which evokes both acceleration and deceleration. The 40-something artist uses cutting-edge electronic technology to explore the visual aesthetic of First and Second Modernism, the neologisms of the beat generation and the sounds and rhythms of rock and pop. Stauch’s agenda does not preclude a quiet melancholy any more than it eschews the self-irony that is inherent in so many of his works. In his art we are as likely to find Franz Marc’s Blauer Reiter alongside screen hero John Wayne, as we are to find Fibonacci’s numbers alongside a racing team named after him.

The movement of visitors through the exhibition evokes the movement of images and objects on a plane, in space and in time – even when extremely reduced and seemingly static works appear to freeze the spatial shifts of colour and form. The integral sound of certain works is generated by their visual elements and seems, in turn, to underscore them acoustically. This opens up realms of associative imaginings in which the movers and shakers of the artistic avant-garde seem to operate as freely as the positive/negative heroes of the beat generation, pop music and Hollywood films, evoked by such titles as *Waiting for the Blue Rider* (in allusion to both the art movement and cowboys), *Requiem (Caught in a Cage)*, *Studies for a Naked City* and *Big Boogie*.

And so the exhibition can be read, from the first room to the last, as a single grand narrative that tells as much of acceleration and hesitation, of speed and stasis, of winning and losing, glamour and decay, of autobiographical yearnings and disappointments, as it does of the beauty and ambiguity of colours, the dynamics and structure of forms, the sense and nonsense of words, or the harmony and disharmony of tones. The works take on their own distinctive note within the context of the exhibition. As Dominik Stauch puts it, “I am interested in the way simple systems create poetic effects, in the way clear outlines become blurred, in the way words make sense, generate sound and take on colour.”<sup>17</sup>

1) See Oskar Bätschmann, *The Artist in the Modern World. The Conflict between Market and Self-Expression*, transl. by Eileen Martin, Cologne 1997.

2) Dominik Stauch, in *Gesehene Worte. Kunst und Literatur*, exhib. cat. Kunsthaus Langenthal, Langenthal, 2005, p. 5.

3) See Wassily Kandinsky, “On the Question of Form”, appended to *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, transl. by M.T.H. Sadler, 1912.

4) Dominik Stauch (note 2).

5) Synaestheticism is a form of combined perception within the brain that allows, for instance, acoustic signals to be linked with visual perceptions. A synaesthetic individual is able to perceive music not only as sounds, but also as colours. In other words, synaestheticism is primarily a visualisation of sensual impressions.

6) Kasimir Malevich’s (1879 – 1935) famous painting *Black Square on White Field* of 1913 addresses the link between the “Great Realism” and the “Great Abstraction”. See Kandinsky (note 3).

7) El Lissitzky (1890 – 1941) began work in 1919 on his PROUN project aimed at restructuring all aspects of life (PROUN = Project for the Realisation of the New in Art).

8) In the interactive internet project *Colour it Beautiful*, produced by Dominik Stauch in collaboration with the Museum Liner Appenzell and posted online for a limited time ([www.colouritbeautiful.net](http://www.colouritbeautiful.net)), visitors to the web can put together combinations of three square colour fields in any of the 216 shades that are reproducible on every colour monitor and can mail-order print-outs of these individually composed art works.

9) The Fibonacci numbers form a fixed pattern that recurs throughout nature. The sequence is created by adding the preceding two numbers to get the next number in the progression: (0), 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, etc. In visual art, it has been applied most famously by the Italo-Swiss *Arte Povera* artist Mario Merz (1925 – 2003), who used the numbers to symbolise natural growth processes. The sequence was discovered by the Italian mathematician Leonardo da Pisa (1170 – 1250), known as Fibonacci (Filius Bonacci), in an age when mathematics was still regarded as an art form.

10) Composer, poet, artist, Zen philosopher and mushroom expert John Cage (1912 – 1992) was a leading figure in New Music and acoustic art whose work has had a profound and lasting influence on the American and international art scene.

11) John Cage's seminal work with aleatory principles based on the ancient Chinese I-Ching influenced key works of music, acoustic art, onomatopoeic poetry and the visual arts.

12) e.g. *Requiem # 1 (Caught in a Cage)*, 3'15", 2005.

13) *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk* (inclination towards a total work of art) was the title of an exhibition of European Utopias Since 1800 curated by Harald Szeemann (with Toni Stooss) for the Kunsthau Zürich in 1983 and subsequently shown in Düsseldorf and Vienna. See the exhib. cat. *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk. Europäische Utopien seit 1800*, Verlag Sauerländer, Aarau/Frankfurt am Main, 1983.

14) Elisabeth Gerber, "Go Johnny go". Dominik Stauch zwischen cooler Bildästhetik und heissen Rock-Klängen", in *Kunst-Bulletin* 3, 2003, p. 43.

15) See the excerpt and bibliographical data of Burroughs' *Words of Advice* in the frontispiece of this publication, p. 4. Stauch has been interested in Burroughs' 'advice' since the 1980s. In this context, however, it is of particular importance that the 'advice' took the form of an art project at a Munich gallery in 1994.

16) William Seward Burroughs (1914 – 1997), together with Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, is one of the leading figures of America's beat generation. His best-known work is *Naked Lunch*, first published in July 1959 by Olympia Press in France. The book was a succès de scandale and the subject of several lawsuits.

17) Dominik Stauch (note 2).

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