

**Colin Ardley – *Spatial Strategies***

February 9<sup>th</sup> – March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2019

*Taking Root in the Mind/Nistplatz im Gedächtnis –*

*Extending into Time and Space/Ausdehnung in Zeit und Raum*

Taking root in the mind, this is one way to describe the impression made by Colin Ardley's wall objects that have kept expanding into space since the 1970ies.

His canvas started to unfold first in 1976, leaving behind the flat square, sacrificing itself with the loss of the fourth corner (*Unfolding* von 1976) in order to radically break with its tectonic frame and expand into a still plane, wall-accompanying lath construction that only partly supported the blank canvas, parts of which were fastened or spanning between at least two laths (*I-1978* and *II-1979*). The painter Colin Ardley, who has left the canvas behind, while using it as working material, suddenly started to paint with wood and canvas. Now, the wall surface has become his 'flat square'. The inherent colours of the materials in combination with their shadows form an image of (de-)constuctive beauty, still appealing coarse and rough, archaic yet already testifying to the great power of ponderation.

Ardley's work is distinguished by its idiosyncratic and confident composition, balancing and correlating of volumes, colours and shapes, and ponderation is the all-comprising term to describe his art.

The materials have become more refined. The rough surface of the lath wood has been replaced by planed square timbers of all profile thicknesses; the canvas material is exchanged by cardboard, partly covered with coloured paper. The sum of all the parts has become larger. Now, it takes months, for larger works even years, for the artist to find the perfect middle with the means of ponderation. Colin Ardley has a plan and is able to envision his work before his inner eye, but the process of making requires continuous correction. The smallest coloured or even not coloured space used as a creative element demands a response. Since the brush has been replaced by a cutting knife and/or a saw, each single step takes time. Quick dabbing with the brush, whether to create contrasting, complementary or disturbing effects, is no longer his means of choice. His work needs to grow – slowly – one piece docking on to another, expanding into space and becoming a parable of time. How much time did the artist invest in his work? This question keeps coming up when the viewer is standing overwhelmed in front of these creations.

This unfolding into space happens slowly, initially still nestled to the rear wall, which shows also in the shelters constructed for these formations that still provide a large air space within their function as framework. This matches well with the airy structure of the wall objects and

invites the eye to wander as if travelling across a map. From the 1990ies onwards, especially in the new decade and also recently, the wall objects have become more compact, forming a corpus. Accordingly, the shelter has been replaced by a completely transparent protective case, taking account of the object's depth and thus allowing viewing the object also from the side. The acrylic cover rouses desires, even enhances the appetite, as the wish to touch the haptically tempting, complex formations is not satisfied. It is superfluous to raise the question of protection for the larger wall objects. The issue arises again, however, when the piece is passed to private or museum collections, and is not even discussed for the large-scale sculptures that connect buildings with each other.

It happens only rarely that Ardley's works leave their usual places on the wall, partially at least, and, for example, touch the ground or use it as an additional base (cf. *Corned/Annunciation* from 1993–1994 or *Shaft/Grounded* from 1999/2000), and the reason is quite profound: the artist still sees himself as a painter.

For the time being, there are no stand-alone indoor sculptures, apart from *Marking Time and Territory*, the impressive manorial ramp sculpture guiding the way into Schinkel's church of St. Elisabeth in Berlin-Mitte that has been in the process of restoration in 2003, opening up, measuring and confidently contrasting the interior of the church and its heights that cannot be experienced otherwise (together with the architect Herrmann Scheidt).

The thought of large-scale sculptures is not alien to the artist; on the contrary: drafts for large-scale sculptures accompanying and contrasting or shaping (urban) landscapes bear witness to a tendency to extend the three-dimensionality of his wall paintings into the exterior space. Here, the surroundings or the architecture itself is turned into a canvas on which the artist's painting takes place (cf. *Untitled – Turmplastik* from 1996, or *Overground/Wagtail*, and *Tracking/Fast Line*, as well as *Overground/White Light*, all from 1999). Only in 2011 his vision has eventually materialized: Colin Ardley has been requested to artistically connect the historical ensemble of the Deutschen Werkstätten Hellerau with their new building. *Genius Loci*, made of coloured steel and aluminium and measuring ca. 9 x 12 x 11 m, playfully creates a bridge between old and new, changing its appearance in accordance with the position of the viewer. When standing below the large-scale sculpture, which is mounted in airy heights, its basic form appears to be a ring framed by a triangle which carries the entire sculpture, at the same time bracketing both buildings. The profiles of both basic forms are accompanied and opened up and therewith dynamised by aluminium surfaces of various sizes and colours extending in all directions. Viewed from a distance all components again form an entity known from Ardley's wall objects.

So, it should no longer surprise us that an artist like Colin Ardley is a painter, sculptor and architect in one person, respected by numerous colleagues, no confidential tip anymore but

an appreciated and admired authority. Many of his collectors and fans are architects! How many of them he has inspired? We do not know.

In his recent solo-exhibition *Spatial Strategies* Colin Ardley will present his latest wall objects, created in his new studio he has just moved into in 2018 in the historical ensemble of the Deutsche Werkstätten Hellerau.\* It will be a compilation showing the entire variety of his work from the last years: monochrome wall objects, white or black (cf. the artist's first solo-exhibition *Levels & Slopes* in 2011 at Semjon Contemporary) are combined with polychrome works, which apart from black leave some space for a few intense colour accents.

In the garden parlour a model of an extensive large-scale sculpture will be shown, which the artist realized a few years ago on private ground in South Germany as a result of a commission. In the garden parlour of the gallery he will re-encounter the paintings of Klaus Steinmann, together with whom he had a dialogue exhibition in 2016 (*Encounter – Colin Ardley : Klaus Steinmann*).

In the solo-exhibition *Tafelbild – Bildtafel* paintings of Klaus Steinmann will be presented both in the garden parlour and in the small cabinet.

Colin Ardley's wall objects penetrate deeply into our memories, leaving behind unresolved parables of stability and fragility, fascinating through the strength of piled, interlocked and interlaced, individually created parts. At the same time, the artist's works have a soothing effect, appearing as an entity through the sum of all their well balanced and pondered parts. On a smaller as well as on a larger scale: they keep conquering space – *Spatial Strategies*.

Semjon H. N. Semjon, January 2019

\*Colin Ardley and the Deutschen Werkstätten Hellerau have become inseparably interrelated since the art workshops re-establishment. Shortly after his move from Manchester to Dresden Colin Ardley got to know the new founder of the present Deutschen Werkstätten Hellerau (DWH), Fritz Straub, and moved into his first studio in the historical ensemble. Since then Colin Ardley has been working as a curator responsible for the DWH exhibitions. The renowned gallery in the workshops is his achievement and that of the visionary Fritz Straub, who has given thought to the core idea of Deutsche Werkstätten Hellerau to join objects of everyday life with high-quality design, and today additionally also with art. Since the construction of the new building site opposite the historical ensemble, separated only by the Moritzburger Weg, in the midst of a large capacity hall for the planning and development of private residences, yachts, boardrooms and luxury hotels by interior designers and DWH engineers an oasis of calm has been created, with flexible and solid wall modules providing a new layout and an idiosyncratic appearance for the exhibitions at the DWH. This year the workshops celebrate their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and also their exhibition anniversary. The artist is responsible for the entrance area of the new building, which is an interpretation of a piece of furniture with one drawer pulled out. Colin Ardley skilfully brings the exterior inside by the use of a wooden Makassar wall, which has been built in the DWH workshops, lacquered in several layers and ready to withstand extreme weather conditions.