

Tafelbild – Bildtafel

Klaus Steinmann

February 9th – March 16th, 2019

At the Margins of Painting – On the Interrelation of Painting and Sculpture in the Work of Klaus Steinmann

Klaus Steinmann is presenting recent works in his first solo-exhibition at Semjon Contemporary. In 2016 he had shown his works in a dialogue exhibition together with Colin Ardley and participated in the gallery's group exhibition *Penetrating Paper: Drilled, Cut, Folded....* in 2017. In the meantime, his works have been on display in several accrochage-exhibitions and solo-hangings. So, Klaus Steinmann is already established in the canon of the gallery's artists and circle of friends.

For about 30 years the artist has been represented by the renowned gallery Walzinger in Saarlois specialized on Concrete Art (among others together with Hartmut Böhme, Leo Erb and Eva Niesrath). Upon the death of the gallerist in 2014 the gallery was closed. In 1981 Klaus Steinmann was given the opportunity to present his work created until then at the arts association Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, followed years later, in 1992 and 1994, by solo-exhibitions in the Wilhelm-Hack-Museum in Ludwigshafen and the Kunstverein Augsburg.

The artist has already moved away from the geometric strictness of earlier, often large-scale works. Concrete Art, which has experienced embittered directive dispute from the 1950ies to the 1980ies and which for the artist has not been unimportant but not the ultimate goal either, had to open up over the last few decades. Following an invitation to the congress *Blick zurück und voraus/Looking Ahead and Back* organized by the Forum for Concrete Art in Erfurt on the necessity of dissolving the boundaries of Concrete Art – for its own sake – back in 2013, I initiated a discussion together with the gallery artists Colin Ardley, Dirk Rathke and Dittmar Krüger, and one could still sense the tension in the audience.* For Klaus Steinmann the American Colorfield Painting and Minimal Art have been equally important.

In recent years the artist has concentrated primarily on smaller formats, which enabled him to deal with the constantly reappearing subjects of geometry, the basic forms of the square, the triangle and the circle on a daily basis in his studio-apartments in Berlin or Walsrode. In doing so, he is caught between his own experience from the high time of Concrete Art and

overcoming the strict rules that govern it. With the wink of the eye, this formal strictness is thwarted in order to grow and explore new possibilities and their limits. This is achieved in a subtle and refreshing manner. The artist sets up little obstacles in order to bypass the smooth and predictable: canvas or coarse cloth is mounted onto a wooden panel, mostly thin birch plywood boards. The texture of the material is evident, reminiscent of canvas, yet through the use of plywood the flat surface becomes sculptural in such a way that, for example, a monochrome square or vertical rectangle, through intentional sawing open of this form from the canvas plane, is tilted forward and its counterpart, the other half, is backgrounded. Thus, an amazing interplay between front and back is created, clearing the path for another gained player on the stage of the artist's painting: the shadow, which can open up the strict geometry of painted forms, subtly modulating these. At the same time, the projecting edges are visually raised when the light falls onto them, because in these places the white colour shines even whiter than the rest of the white background. The entire panel painting is subtly and playfully animated.

By the way, the artist likes the unique texture of the thin birch plywood boards. He is not at all bothered with the fact that these panels tend to warp sometimes. On the contrary: he takes the material behaviour of the wood with a sense of humour and enjoys its individual nature and non-tamability.

Tracing the history of (occidental) panel painting, when originally a wooden panel was painted, and knowing about its contextualization and embeddedness in, for example, the framework of an early Christian altar, fixed with small wooden bolts – Klaus Steinmann's panel paintings receive an additional winking twist. The backsides of his creations are the source of another eye-friendly pleasure, as the backward and forward folded surfaces are fixed by means of small delicate bolts, which, depending on the composition of the painting with its geometric forms, present yet another exciting interplay. Synchronously to the individual altar paintings embedded into the overall structure of an altar, the artist's painted and tilted single shapes may be regarded as altar paintings in the broadest sense. Only when reassembled these parts form an overall picture similar as the individual altar paintings add up to the narrative of salvation.

In his most recent works the artist has taken another piece of liberty, thematizing the tension between the monochrome geometric form and a newly added biomorphic structure. On the worn and cracked, whitened birch plywood surface, this time uncovered, the inherent irregularities on the surface like on a topographical elevation map become a challenge: the strictly geometrical shapes are deconstructed along their edges, parallel to the grain of the wood. Only from certain perspectives the clarity of the austere geometric forms can be

perceived. Viewed from other perspectives, silhouette lines suddenly appear stepped, turning into a humorous artist's comment.

The painter Klaus Steinmann is also a friend of the third dimension. This is confirmed by the small objects or suspended objects created by the artist since the 1970ies, all of which could

Through sporadic interventions like cuts and foldings simple shapes are created, for example a circular or ovoid form is transformed into a complex object that extends in all directions and is revealed through precise and targeted colouring of various shapes and colour shades. One of the artist's most recent objects created for the horizontal niche in the street-side parlour is again astonishing in its balanced use of shape and colour in relation to the irritating because horizontally oriented object, the shape of which is reminiscent of a horizontal, geometrized eight. It is part of an ovoid form folded around its axis, which is contrasted by a cut-out internal surface, and painted in cadmium yellow and warm cadmium red. The folding (which is actually not a proper folding, as the material used is plywood, so the elements have been glued together at an angle to each other) creates an illusion in our brain and the, in fact, simple form is perceived as complex. Here, the artist impressively demonstrates his ability to think three-dimensionally, which is already tangible in his paintings. The artist's humorous character is furthermore revealed in yet another purposefully used property of the object: it is a rocker object!

Klaus Steinmann's vertically aligned objects, sometimes presented on a small wooden base and sometimes designed as suspended objects, are infused with the same spirit of enchanting elegance. The simple form cleverly folded around its axis and equipped with a cut-out negative space, differently painted on each side (even white becomes a colour here!), inhales the history of Constructive sculpture in general, freshly breathing out contemporaneity through its ambivalence. The same can be said about the artist's paintings. For this reason it can be stated that Klaus Steinmann, even though originally not unaffected by Constructive Art, lives fully in the present day, creating his art in a free and refreshing spirit!

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*Unfortunately, the institution has since been closed. Art is even treated shabbily in Erfurt!πππ