

THE JOURNEY IS ITS OWN REWARD

Interview by Martha Bösch

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Fritz Rupprechter's plates consist of countless fragments of permanent new settings. His work is an open process transferring the discipline of archery to a visual level. Practising Kyudo disciplines eyes and hands, the bow is drawn all out. The swiftly cutting through the air must be followed by letting go of the tension. Only through years of daily practise of the same and yet always different procedure, one can approximate mastership. In his artistic discipline Rupprechter cuts coloured cardboard into narrow stripes of different length and pastes them onto hardboard. He adds one stripe to the other leaving a space between the cuts on the longitudinal axes so they turn incisions. The contrast between the calm extending surface of soft and vague colouring and the sharply cut diagonal and horizontal gaps creates a peculiar tension which adds power to the meditative effect.

On the wall I see two wonderful bows with corresponding arrows... When I looked at your pictures I associated them with flying arrows cutting through a room. You are a master or at least an advanced practitioner of Japanese Kyudo (Way of the Bow). What brought you to archery?

In the seventies and eighties I made also music and was very interested in John Cage. He was a disciple of the Zen master and philosopher Daisetz T. Suzuki who was one of the first who came from Japan to the West, taught in California and brought the ideas of Zen to the United States. In 1986, when my brother went to Japan to teach German at the University, I visited him and took the opportunity to practise Zen. A friend of my brother made it possible to stay for ten days in a Zen monastery in Kanasawa where I lived together with 16 monks. One of them practised Kyudo in his scarce spare time and I was fascinated right from the start. He showed me the basics. Back in Tokyo I bought a bow right away. Admittedly, it took six more years until I could participate in a seminar of the Japanese Kyudo teacher and master bowmaker Shibata in Vienna . Since then – that is 12 years ago – I am practising this discipline. Of course it will at least take 20 more years to become a master.

Aleatoric played an important role in the work of John Cage. How randomly are the arrangements of your works?

There are different procedures. A random generator for example results from the work process itself. I cut the stripes lengthwise and transversely and put them on a pile. Then I paste them one after another as they come, most times on hardboard, and I don't modify anything, that means, I don't arrange anything once I decided how the system should be. But it is not that I always consequently stick to a system by all means. Mistakes happen, a lack of concentration or the material doesn't do what I want I also struggle with my inconstance, distracting me and leading me to other places. But on the other hand, these "distractions" also create the possibility that the process develops towards a different and new direction. Otherwise the system would become too rigid.

A subjective element I see in your work is the "near-natural" colouring. If you are coming from a characteristic landscape there is a certain colouring, which leaves its imprint.

The specific colouring has to do with the fact that I mostly use the material as it is. Only recently I began to add colour. Above all tones of light blue and green applied as watercolour. Before I used mostly very attenuated colours: from ivory and yellow to grey, whereas the colours reveal only in the course of the process because the surfaces are being soaked with wax at the end. But of course there is also a strong visual conditioning. When I was a child I loved the snow and its many tones of white, especially when everything was covered with a lot of snow. But also the broken grey of the rocks, the restrained green. But the impression that had the strongest impact on me is the foggy and gloomy landscape of Eastern Tyrol during late autumn. Maybe my preference of attenuated, muted colours goes back to this.

In your work I sense a great stillness and calmness. A somehow relaxed concentration. It makes me think of the dim light of Japanese apartments, of the different disciplines of Zen. You have been to Japan a number of times. But thinking of Japan I rather imagine density and noise or sudden changes as in the movie of Chris Markers Film „Sans Soleil“...

In the big cities it is in fact extremely vivid and loud and hectically. But even there you can suddenly encounter, only two blocks away, silence in an old temple without perceiving this as a contradiction. Maybe these contrasts make one of the differences between Japan and Europe . On the surface everything seems westernised but once in a while you come up against some invisible border, a differentness. In Japan individuality is not being as encouraged as it is here. Japanese say: "A nail which sticks out must be knocked in again". This philosophy is very deeply rooted and nurtures collective thinking and acting. In spite of the market economy this has still great importance in the Japanese way of life.

Did this philosophy influence you personally? For example in your daily life?

Yes, I think it did. The culture of Zen, especially as it can be found in the temples and gardens of Kyoto , directly next to the buzz of the city, impressed me very much and had probably also some influence on me. For example the concept of "Wabi-Sabi, which is of high precision but always leaves a gap in it. My contribution to the exhibition "Lichtwege" 2003 in Graz (Austria) was titled "The precision of inexactitude". Wabi-Sabi is an extensive aesthetical system. It describes a kind of beauty being characterised by simplicity and abstaining from external splendour.

During the years of musical experiments you rather had an actionistic approach. Now you are working since years very traditionally in your studio. Is this simply a question of age or is it the result of a maturing process?

I think that artistic work is nearly always a lonesome work. Even if you perform actions they represent only a fraction of the artistic art and reflection. Even the "Wiener Aktionisten" (translator's note: Vienna based group of performance art founded in 1962) did not so often perform in public, as it may seem in retrospection. It is only through the review of art history that it looks so intense and voluminous. I decided to take a way which requires, as does Kyudo, much patience and consequence.

One could accuse you of being a one-sided artist because since many years you concentrate on just one technique. In contrast to that today's artists seem to be virtually forced to use the diversity of media.

After my university studies I experimented a lot. It was the time of the „new wild painting". At that time, for me there was no possibility to paint so I started to experiment with video. With one of my video productions I was invited to the Museum of the 20 th Century to the exhibition Video made in Austria 1980". In 2000 this video work has been documented in the catalogue of the Generali Foundation to the exhibition "RE-PLAY". I used four video cameras that moved along four tracks of text, like swings, so that the characters blurred. When the cameras finally came to a standstill the text said: VIDEO POEM.

In Ferdinand Schmatz' contribution to your catalogue he mentioned the connection to language respectively the dissolving of your system in his phenomenological poems. But you did not continue to work with the medium film?

No, I did not want to make films in a narrative sense, on the other hand, video, as material was already kind of exhausted. This was the motivation for me to concentrate more on music, which I thought to be the best way to escape the predetermined codes.

In the early eighties I founded, together with other artists, the music group „Laut Vereinbarung". Our pieces were all improvisational, there was no composition but we rehearsed regularly. The highlights of my musical phase were obviously the 50-hours concert at the gallery REM in Vienna as well as the concert on the occasion of the exhibition of Maria Lassnig at the "20er Haus". Only by dealing with music I again found a way to continue with my sculptural work. For me all the works I did during the last years have to do with musical scores – the video work can also be seen as language score – maybe that is the common aspect of the individual phases of my work. In the last years I used my pictures several times as a score, for example in 1995 when I applied a work with a length of 12 meters at a performance at the "Wittgenstein Haus" together with ROVA, a sax quartet from San Francisco . And in 1999 at the performance „4 rooms 4 pieces 4 paintings" with Steve Lacy.

These days you are showing an exhibition together with Barbara Höller in the ÖBV gallery. This gallery does not seem to have a programmatic style agenda, as far as I can see. Nevertheless, there is one thing that called my attention: music does play a role and time and again there are artists in this gallery who deal with music.

I don't know much about that but also in our exhibition there is music. The Hans Hauf quartet will play at the Midissage. I know Boris Hauf for a long time now, from the music scene. He inaugurated one of my exhibitions at the gallery Atrium et Arte five years ago. Instead of an inaugural address I wanted to have a soprano sax solo. This also initiated the current exhibition.

Your recent works partly show a more sculptural character or they refer to architectural situations.

Together with the architect Walter Zschokke I temporarily designed five rooms of the

Documentation Centre for Modern Art in St. Pölten , Austria . And at my exhibition in April 2004 in the German town of Weiblingen I will also make reference to architecture. Since my works are not only surfaces but also somehow sculptural, the connection to architecture is likely. I see myself in the tradition of the artists of Bauhaus, Josef Albers for example. For him the fine arts strongly live with and comprise the space.