

Foreword

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The exhibition 'Serielle Formationen' [Serial Formations], jointly curated by Peter Roehr and Paul Maenz for the Frankfurt University's Studio Galerie [Studio Gallery] in 1967, can be seen as the first thematic exhibition on Minimalist trends in Germany. 'Serielle Formationen' was an outstanding exhibition that brought together the contemporary trends of the period. In particular, it showed artwork by artists from Germany and elsewhere side by side. A total of 62 artworks by 48 were selected because they were dealing with pictures and objects with 'serial order' as a visual feature—although the concepts behind them were highly diverse and sometimes downright contradictory. The exhibition was accompanied by an ambitious catalogue containing six original graphical works, artwork documentation and artist statements. "The ambition of 'Serielle Formationen' was to inform and to identify the differences between seemingly similar art phenomena." (Maenz)¹

In the context of its exhibition series 'Minimalism in Germany,' which started in 2005, the Daimler Art Collection is making a first attempt to re-stage the historical presentation. The exhibition presents works from the Daimler Art Collection as well as loans from German and international collections.

Structure, Constellations, Serial Formations

Many post-war artists living in Germany felt that they were inheriting a ravaged artistic landscape. Circa 1960, the center of current art developments shifted to New York. In the mid-1960s, Hanne Darboven, Günther Uecker, Charlotte Posenenske, Blinky Palermo, Heinz Mack, Ulrich Rückriem and Franz Erhard Walther travelled to New York to exhibit their artwork there and to get into contact with other artists—from this point onwards, Minimalism in Germany was based on an interplay between European and American movements and debates of the period.

Grids, structures, combinations and serial formations are significant concepts in German Minimalism. As Peter Roehr put it, the grid's formal severity, clarity and simplicity doesn't create "a composition"—it creates a structure that he describes as "a regular fabric with identical objects." Artists saw grid-shaped structures and serial sequences as aesthetic models for anti-hierarchical and antiauthoritarian systems—as the antithesis of composed, hierarchically organized works.

Examining the critical factors that unite Minimalist tendencies in art and design in the 1960s we can find the following: system, series, variability, new materials, elementarization of form, functionality and democratization. The concept of 'the system' in regard to design comprises the systematic analysis of the specific context (historic precursors / function / production / marketing) and also issues relating to technical implementation and practical use. 'Serielle Formationen' was a key phrase in art during this period, which emanated from

the new technological conditions and the ideological implications of capitalist serial production. It related to the demand of buyers and consumers for items to be made more easily and cheaply available by producing them in large quantities, and for items to be 'variable' in the sense of being stackable, detachable etc. This was necessarily coupled with the utilization of new materials such as metal, cork, cardboard, plastic, foam etc. The geometricalization and elementarization of items in terms of their shapes signified the union of an anti-expressive, neutral attitude with a technological exactitude. 'Democratic' design models went hand in hand with this, democratization was a key sociopolitical drive of the period. This was given its tangible form in the fine arts by the emergence of 'multiples' and 'editions,' of new and often impermanent materials and of participative action concepts.

'Serielle Formationen' and 'Dies alles Herzchen wird einmal Dir gehören'

Beside 'Serielle Formationen', Paul Maenz and Peter Roehr curated a performative group show titled 'Dies alles Herzchen wird einmal Dir gehören' ['All This Darling Will Once Belong To You'] (Galerie Dorothea Loehr, Frankfurt, September 9, 1967) and lasting only one evening. Invited to create 'artworks of a transient character,' eight young artists, still unknown at the time, created an evening with processually conceived artworks. The artists who took part were Jan Dibbets, Barry Flanagan, Bernhard Höke, John Johnson, Richard Long, Konrad Lueg, Charlotte Posenenske and Peter Roehr. (Gilbert & George, who were equally unknown at the time, were invited but were unable to take part.) Taken together these events formed the pioneering exhibitions of the period. The 'Herzchen' evening can be seen as the forerunner of the legendary exhibition 'When Attitudes Become Form' (Curator Harald Szeemann, Bern 1969).

Other thematically related exhibitions from this period that one could name include: 'Minimal Art USA. Neue Monumente Deutschland', René Block Gallery, Berlin 1968; 'Sammlung 1968: Karl Ströher,' Berlin 1969; 'Primary Structure, Minimal Art, Antiform,' Ricke Gallery, Kassel 1968; 'Prospect 68,' Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf 1968; 'Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form: Works-Concepts-Processes-Situations-Information,' Kunsthalle Bern, Museum Haus Lange and Museum Haus Esthers, Krefeld, ICA London 1969; 'Konzeption—Conception. Dokumentation einer heutigen Kunstrichtung,' Städtisches Museum Schloss Morsbroich, Leverkusen 1969.

Concerning 'Serielle Formationen' the explicitly political dimension of 'seriality' as an artistic process can merely be pointed out, as stated in the introductory texts contained in the catalogue. The director of the Studio Galerie, Siegfried Bartels, begins by stressing the featured art's affinity to the contemporary movement of 'serial music'—although, unlike the music, the artworks do not represent a united front. Instead, Bartels' argument as to the context of the exhibition emphasizes the connection with serial production in an industrial society. "Serial manufacture permits an increase in the productivity of the workforce, which can lead to a so-called economic miracle. However, it makes a mockery of the development

of the individual. Art endeavors to counteract this effect. The mass-production process itself is our theme here. It is a theme that, in the most extreme way possible, calls one of the most important defining characteristics of art—originality—into question. The exhibited artworks are not content with simply denigrating serial items that appear in oppressive quantities. Instead, they make use of them—the only way to produce a successful immanent criticism”.² Bartels emphasizes the high informational value of the exhibition for students, and how their active engagement helped to make the project possible. He invokes Frankfurt’s moribund cultural landscape and the “tabula rasa of the consciousness of modern art,” and states that: “In expanding their intellectual horizons in ways that existing authority structures perceive as unnecessary, students fulfill a duty to the democratic social order that we are striving for. This means that they must take on an autonomous role within the university and independently influence the social consciousness. This gives their activities in other spheres—particularly the political sphere—greater credibility.”³

Paul Maenz and Peter Roehr begin their brief comments on the exhibition with the words: “Almost everything that is produced in large quantities today is produced through serial production. The fabric of our economy is based on the manufacture and consumption of mass-produced goods.”⁴ They juxtapose “the imaginary value of individual goods” with the ubiquitous phenomenon of mass-production—the dominant force in the contemporary consciousness. Since the late 1950s, the modern art of the Western industrial nations has responded to this phenomenon with “serial formations of the picture elements.” According to Maenz/Roehr, the coming together of artistic tendencies from Europe and the USA occasioned by the ‘Serielle Formationen’ exhibition serves to “make the differences clear by giving people the opportunity to compare. [...] What the exhibited works have in common is their appearance rather than their context.”⁵

Peter Roehr, who never visited the USA himself, initially came into contact with developments in New York through art magazines from 1964 onwards. From 1965 onwards, he was also kept informed by his friend Paul Maenz in New York. Maenz also sent Roehr a copy of a much-discussed essay by Barbara Rose that appeared in *Art in America* in October 1965 entitled ‘ABC Art.’⁶ Therein, Rose describes the recent developments in art as characterized by “empty, repetitive, non-modulated artworks” created from “conventional, mass-produced objects” and “interchangeable standard units,” and by the devaluing of art based on invention, virtuosity and technique in favor of a conceptual foundation, anti-hierarchical structures, simple sequences and “a new absence of content”—all labels that Roehr could apply directly to his own efforts. Through Paul Maenz, Roehr experienced the breakthrough of Minimal Art in 1966. Maenz gave him an enthusiastic description of his visits to the exhibition ‘Primary Structures’ in the Jewish Museum New York and the group exhibition ‘Ten’ at the Dwan Gallery (which included artworks by Carl Andre, Jo Baer, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Agnes Martin, Robert Morris, Ad Reinhardt, Michael Steiner and Robert Smithson). Some of these artists later featured in the exhibition ‘Serielle

Formationen' in Frankfurt. On a visit to Sol LeWitt's studio, Maenz acquired the black wood model *First Modular Structure*, LeWitt's first modular construction.

The total of 62 picture and object artworks by 48 artists were chosen for 'Serielle Formationen' because they featured 'serial arrangement' as a visual characteristic. Beyond this, however, the concepts behind them were entirely different. The European Zero movement was represented by the artists Piero Manzoni, Günther Uecker, Hermann Goepfert, Adolf Luther, Henk Peeters, Jan Schoonhoven, Herman de Vries, Jan Henderikse and Hans Haacke. Branches of Nouveau Réalisme, Pop and Op Art were represented by Arman, Christo, Andy Warhol, Frank Stella, Konrad Lueg, Bridget Riley, Almir da Silva Mavignier and Victor Vasarely. American Minimal and Conceptual Art was discussed by e.g. Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Agnes Martin and Sol LeWitt, whose work had not been exhibited before in Germany. The Frankfurt art scene was represented by Peter Roehr, Charlotte Posenenske and Thomas Bayrle, Hermann Goepfert, and is extended by the Dutch artists Jan Dibbets, moreover Ewerdt Hilgemann, gruppe x, Wolfgang Schmidt and Eberhard Fiebig.⁷

Concept and catalogue of the 2017 exhibition

The selection of the works for the exhibition 'Serielle Formationen' in Berlin in 2017, was from the outset not aimed at gathering the historic objects themselves, but to delve into the discourse and atmosphere, as well as the diversity and heterogeneity of the exhibition, while focusing on the integral aspects of seriality. Works of the exhibition in 1967 (important works by Andre, Bayrle, gruppe x, LeWitt, Manzoni, Roehr, Staudt, Warhol amongst others) are shown with comparable works of the Daimler Art Collection and of private collections. Therefore, at this point I want to express my gratitude to the generous supporters of this exhibition.

The concept of the 2017 exhibition illustrates the essential aspects of the original concept via four themed rooms. The prelude focuses on the above mentioned befriended artists related to Frankfurt around Roehr, Posenenske, Bayrle. The second area connects the contemporary tendencies of Op Art, Pop Art, Nouveau Réalisme and Neodada (Mavignier, Riley, Warhol, Christo, Henderikse, Kusama, Kolář) with a fascinating diversity of materials, mediums and artistic concepts. The following area is dominated Zero esthetic and minimalistic rigor: black and white, cubes and modules, serial grids, light and space. A further part of the tour aims to illustrate the spectrum of the individual approaches via the usage of sculptures, books, wall reliefs, drawings, collages and graphic editions. The final part of the space design presents approximately 25 works of the Daimler Art Collection from the period between 1960 and 1975 in accordance to the thematic curation of the 'Serielle Formationen' exhibition.

The accompanying catalogue to the exhibition offers the results of new research and historic gems: the original catalogue from the Frankfurt exhibition in 1967 has been added within the new edition and for the first time the introductory essays by Bartels, Maenz, Roehr as well as several artists' statements are published in English. The contemporary controversial discussion is illustrated by Paul Maenz's 'Letters from New York,' 1966, as well as by the published newspaper critics of the original exhibition (Beaucamp, Seide, Riese). Michaela Filla-Raquin has written an essay about the Studio Galerie Frankfurt for this catalogue, which discusses the controversial and infamous venue. Frederik Schikowski contributes an essay about present day and hardly known artists such as Hal Busse, Marie-Luise Heller (who were both not presented in the historic exhibition, even if their work can be seen as representative in the context of 1960s seriality), gruppe x and Wolfgang Schmidt. Meredith North writes about the artistic and personal proximity of the Frankfurt protagonists such as Roehr, Bayrle and Posenenske and the Frankfurt culture scene of the time. Nadine Heinrich refers in her essay to Bernhard Höke, who was intervened with the scene of the time via his multimedia activities and Daniel Lippitsch summarizes in his collected historic chronology the most significant artistic and cultural occurrences surrounding the 'Serielle Formationen' exhibition of 1967.

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¹ Paul Maenz, "Serielle Formationen" and "Dies alles Herzchen wird einmal Dir gehören," in: *Minimalism in Germany*, exh. cat. Daimler Contemporary Berlin, Renate Wiehager (ed.), Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2012, p. 107.

² Paul Maenz and Peter Roehr, "Zu dieser Ausstellung," in *Serielle Formationen*, ed. by Studio Galerie der Universität Frankfurt, Peter Roehr and Paul Maenz (eds.), exh. cat. Galerie der Studentenschaft der Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität, Stiftung Studienhaus, Frankfurt a. M., 1967, no page.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Barbara Rose, "ABC Art," in: *Art in America* 53, 5, October/November 1965, pp. 57–69.

⁷ See for detailed analysis: Gerda Wendermann, "'Inhalt und Form sind deckungsgleich:' Peter Roehr in der Sammlung Paul Maenz," in: *Sammlung Paul Maenz*, vol. 2: *Peter Roehr 1944–1968*, ed. by Kunstsammlungen zu Weimar, Gerda Wendermann (ed.), Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2000, p. 60f.