

Daimler Art Collection

June 2001

New Acquisitions. Photography, Video, Mixed Media

Daimler Contemporary, Berlin

June 16 – October 7, 2001

October 2001

New Acquisitions. Geometrical Affairs

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October 13, 2001 – February 3, 2002

Renate Wiehager

Foreword

The Daimler Art Collection was started in 1977, and grew by engaging with the picture as a classical format, and the major trends in abstract-geometrical art in the 20th century. This

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approach was taken partly because the early initiators of the collection wanted to build up a cultural identity with the characteristic ideas and personalities of south-west German painting in particular, and of post-war European art in general. But the collection was also restricted to pictures because of the conditions and demands imposed by a company collection: the works were intended to be shown, both on a permanent basis and in changing selections, in spaces that were not museums; this is a maxim that still drives the concept behind the collection to a large extent.

But even in the 1990s, careful attention started to be paid to the radically changing forms in which contemporary art was presented, and the new media that it was using. Light, video, photography and multi-media wall-mounted objects found their way into the collection. This cautious expansion, based on the profile that the collection had defined for itself, was linked with names like François Morellet, Nam June Paik, Christian Megert, Pietro Sanguineti, Walter Giers, Michael Wesely and Kay Hassan, winner of the Mercedes-Benz Award for South African Art, first presented in 1999.

The 'June 2001' exhibition picks up at this point with new acquisitions from the fields of photography, video and mixed media, and attempts to pursue some lines, but to redefine and justify others. We link up with 1990s acquisitions with works by Morellet, Locher and Goers, and also with Pietro Sanguineti's light-mirror-object *showtime*. His group of works already in the Daimler Art Collection was augmented once more by an early textual work, new examples of his light-boxes and some videos, so that all stages of his output are more fully represented. The Daimler Art Collection intends to pursue this approach in future as well: we will continue to concern ourselves with subsequent work by individual artists whose positions formulate and illustrate, representatively and at a high level, the questions raised and trends followed by contemporary art.

Following John Armleder, Sylvie Fleury, Daniele Buetti and Ugo Rondinone, two more Swiss artists are represented by video works in the 'June 2001' exhibition, Roman Signer and Ian Anüll; both have made an important contribution to justifying the medium of video as a three-dimensional pictorial form on the borders of a conceptually grounded view of sculpture, drawing and performance. The photographic and video works of Doug Aitken and Isabell Heimerdinger also belong in this context. The powerful presence of the cinema film, which makes us accept so much. Permeating our consciousness and our physical gestures, is the subject of all Heimerdinger's work. In the case of Doug Aitken the characteristic we would

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like to identify is the stream of virtual, electrifying energy that pulls the elements of his photographic and video works together,—bodies as well as cities and thoughts—, and makes them into flaring, flickering ornaments.

The three catalogues produced in 2001 also show some focal points—alongside the principle of continuing the abstract and conceptual tendencies (Zero, Minimal Art, the Constructivist tradition)—that apply to the biographical and artistic origins of the artists involved. There are just under forty names in all, including six young artists whose biographies are closely linked with Stuttgart and Berlin, Daimler's two important locations in Germany (Heimerdinger, Miller, Reiner, Sanguineti, Westerwinter, Winter). The Daimler Art Collection's early and typical link with the 'Zurich Concrete' group is continued by the contemporary Swiss artist mentioned above. Finally, names like Aitken, Dera, Hastings, Kosuth, Rockenschaub, Walther, Zittel and Zobernig, along with the other artists named, represent the Daimler Art Collection's openness to developments in international contemporary art.

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Renate Wiehager

Speech at the opening of the "June 2001. Photography, Video, Mixed Media" exhibition at Daimler Contemporary on June 15, 2001

Ladies and gentlemen, as you walk through the exhibition rooms here, the first thing that catches your eye will be three multi-partite photographic works. Cor Dera, who lives in Haarlem, works with photographs of flora and fauna from commercial picture-books. But his further work on them is done on the basis of purely artistic and formal criteria: he selects and arranges according to decisions in principle about composition, color sequence and color accents, about the relationship between the overall form and the individual image. Cor Dera's work addresses the qualitatively new concept of nature that is associated with the genetic revolution, in other words the concept of cloning. "The end of evolution," says Cor Dera, "the end of natural selection both has a real influence on visible nature (on the flora and fauna, to start with them) and also on its content. In reality it means the end of nature (autonomous nature that is independent of us no longer exists), and flora and fauna will also disappear because of problems with their environment. New nature will first come into being through photographs of 'old' nature, for example, or in films of it, or in new zoos or landscape parks with animals and plants that are part of 'old' nature." Cor Dera recently told me that there are about 300 works that he still has to create and then his artistic concept of totality and beauty would be fulfilled—nature would be translated into the art system as a unit made of individual units of being.

The Stuttgart artist Eva-Maria Reiner's work circles around scientifically and socially dismembered human physicality. She puts parts of everyday garments together as tableaux that convey an image of a necessarily unsuccessful experience of physical and psychological wholeness. But they do this without being cynical or insisting on making a superficial effect, in fact their language is more inclined to be poetical and analytical. The multipartite fabric relief that we have acquired for the collection is based on the proportions of the human body, from the tips of the toes to the circumference of the head. Eva-Maria Reiner's images are entire body landscapes in their own right, exploring and revealing the internal qualities of the external. The exchangeability of realities in cinematography, the uninterrupted "putting oneself on the spot" of an (experienced, hoped-for, narrated) reality and of many possible

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other (written, filmed, understood, remembered etc.) realities are a central theme of Isabell Heimerdinger's work. Things we have seen in the cinema shape our daily thought and actions, right down to our gestures and ways of speaking. The photographic series "Interiors" forms part of Heimerdinger's analytical researches in the border territory between film and photography, and you can see two examples from it here. The protagonists from sequences in some familiar films from the 1950s to the 1980s are removed by the use of special effect techniques, which robs the scenes of their narrative content. To be more precise, here she is working on scenes from a film by Yasuhiro Ozu, the most famous Japanese film-maker of the 20th century. In this way, Heimerdinger simulates film stills that display the constructed atmosphere of the rooms without people in them. And so we have to fill the film sequences that we have already seen once or several times with our own projections and figures.

Georg Winter, who has been working on his "Ukiyo Camera Systems" for ten years now from Stuttgart and Budapest, translates the concept "Ukiyo", which comes from the Japanese, with the sentence "attention paid to the moment overcomes sadness about the passage of time". Ukiyo Camera Systems developed a wide range of instruments in the 1990s—different kinds of still cameras as well as video, film and TV devices. In use, they extend the conventional media concept to include fundamental orientation questions—treated spatially and intellectually. His sculpture acquired for the Daimler Art Collection is called *Mitsubishi Monogatari*. "Monogatari" is the Japanese equivalent of "story"; as is well known, the Japanese car manufacturer Mitsubishi is part of Daimler AG. The work relates to the Japanese film-maker Yasuhiro Ozu, whose work Isabell Heimerdinger has also used. Georg Winter's Mitsubishi sculpture, which he calls a "practice unit", introduces a tool into the Daimler company that is intended to encourage the employees, who are used to concepts like mobility and speed, to experiment actively with withdrawal and de-potentialization strategies. Anyone who lies or sits on the tatami and uses the camera as a means of actively experiencing and reflecting on his own actions and locations within the space is an active part of the sculpture.

Pietro Sanguineti's work examines the claims, resources and statements of early Concept Art, but radicalizes them again by being able to reveal visually how they have failed when confronted with the disparate phenomena of our mediatized present. He operates on various planes and includes a wide range of different presentation forms and media. His work is based on his digital films, which consist of 3D computer animations and found footage (artificial images from the world of cinema and television).

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His techniques are “remix” and “tuning”. Concepts, quotations and signs are detached from their original contexts, reassembled and “high-tuned” aesthetically. Thus the artist examines the various planes upon which the media intrude to shape our world. Language, a medium in its own right, is itself subject to mediatization by print, TV and the internet. Pietro Sanguineti’s montages of computer animations, ready-mades and sculptural displays reflect this, and with their fragmented units of meaning they are able to create meaning only from negatives. Viewers are not offered a “meaningful” context, but fields of associations that they can click on or off like pop-up menus; an open field of possible links and conclusions. New contexts filled with meaning appear only briefly and then implode back into their media quality.

Roman Signer and Ian Anüll are two important contemporary Swiss artists in our exhibition who work on the fringes of various media. The key to Roman Signer's work is its radical quality and anarchic independence of mind, linked with three crucial elements: firstly music, which Signer learned about from his father, who was director of music in his home town of Appenzell, but also from the sounds of nature as a crucial childhood experience that permeates the structure of all his work. Music as an artistic mode of composition, as a stock of motifs and material, as a way of including rhythm, tone and sound. Secondly, and corresponding with this, silence. This, like the time factor, becomes the actual working material. Thirdly, emerging from both the above, imagination: we have to complete Signer’s sculptures and video sculptures in our own imagination by adding what came before and after them in terms of time, by being aware of the fact that they can possibly change, if we are to understand them completely. Ian Anüll's 1995/99 video sculpture *Out of the box* consists of a monitor in a cardboard removal box that has clearly been used before. The video shows children in an urban environment that has seen better days, a slum quarter in eastern Asia, playing with just the same sort of cardboard box as the one in the video sculpture. Loud street noises from the video fill the exhibition space. Viewers see a small boy who, entirely obliviously, is trying out the cardboard box, which is much too bulky for him, as a toy, a house and a hiding-place. Viewers of the video, who are suddenly turned into passers-by themselves by the completely ‘inartistic’ directness of the scene, are captivated by it, torn to and from by the pity they feel, but also by sympathy and amazement about the fact that this child seems to have made himself completely at home in his world. It is only when the viewers take a second look that the scene acquires a rather more dramatic point—there is also an infant on the newspapers that are spread around in the street.

The cardboard box in the *Out of the box* video also acts as the “carrier” of a merely cultural

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interest in the museum context—there is the “same” material in the video as in the exhibition gallery, but it is only when it is doubled up like this that it makes us painfully aware of the irremovable barrier, the gulf between the worlds. We can certainly touch this “other” world, but never really understand it.

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Daimler Contemporary

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daily 11 am - 6 pm

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