

Daimler Art Collection

Private/Corporate V

Works from the Lafrenz Collection, Hamburg and the Daimler Art Collection, Stuttgart/Berlin

Daimler Contemporary, Berlin

June 20 – September 21, 2008

Renate Wiehager

Foreword

The Daimler Art Collection launched its 'Private/Corporate' exhibition series in 2002. In retrospect, the series turns out to have initiated and reflected a development process: we have both characterized and deepened the bases of our collection and also pushed forward with redirecting and expanding the idea behind the collection. These confrontations and pairings, controversies and alliances, the anti-hierarchic interplay of question and answer, education and insight staged by the works in the collections we have 'paired off' to create a dialogue have bound the recent history of the Daimler Art Collection into a network of contemporary creative aesthetic initiatives and helped to shape it to a considerable extent.

It could perhaps be said that we have used the framework of the 'Private/Corporate' series, the inevitably alternating discourses and differences, in the spirit of Foucault to place theory and empiricism in a processual relationship of tension that does not conform to any prescribed horizon of meaning, but cancels out the sense of being tied into space and time

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implied by the traditional thought patterns of styles and isms, winners and losers in art. To continue thinking along with Foucault, we wanted to juxtapose a certain number of the elements of art—knowledge of the artists and the works, knowledge about the collector's passions, imposing some order on the vast diversity of art, knowledge about objective economic facts and subjective interpretations—and then to combine these elements with the aesthetic discourse of our day.

Our co-operations since 2002 have always gone hand in hand with a sense of focus that is typical of each private collector invited to participate and for the development of the Daimler Art Collection. The dialogue with Paul Maenz, Berlin 2002, which centered around conceptual tendencies and international positions in reduced art, shifted the public perception of our collection as 'constructive/concrete' in the direction of an extended notion of Minimalism. This took on form, and has driven our new acquisition concept ever since, in our 'Minimalism and After' exhibition series, which started in 2002. So it was logical that Minimal and Postminimal Art should be the focus of the dialogue with the Ileana Sonnabend Collection, New York, in summer 2003. Then in 2005, the dialogue with the Dusseldorf collector Heliod Spiekermann showed that new developments in a reduced image and object language can also still impinge on peripheral areas of Abstraction, Figuration and Minimalism. Probably the greatest challenge for the Daimler Art Collection lay in the invitation to Anupam Poddar, one of India's most important young collectors, to be the dialogue partner for 'Private/Corporate IV'. Anupam Poddar's collecting activities, and this applies to the majority of private collections in India, has concentrated so far exclusively on the art of India itself, which is characteristically narrative and figurative. Insight into the specific 'language' of Indian art revealed new aspects of the Daimler Art Collection, and gave us the courage to try out possible juxtapositions of narration and reduction.

The Lafrenz Collection concentrates on aspects of Minimal and Concept Art, Post Painterly Abstraction, Land Art and Arte Povera. It was established in the 1970s by Dr. Klaus and Rosemarie Lafrenz, and its works lay behind the foundation of the Neues Museum Weserburg Bremen, which is seen as the prototype of the collector's museum. At the same time, part of the Lafrenz Collection is on permanent loan to the Kunsthalle in Hamburg, and has also been shown in various national and international exhibition contexts. As the oldest of the four children, Björn Lafrenz took over continuing and presenting the collection as a private

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commitment, after his father's early death. So among other things he is still pursuing the original idea of not concentrating on work series, but on placing individual works by different artists, from the 1960s to the present day—for example Judd, Ryman, Serra, LeWitt, Marden, Mangold, Novros—in new dialogue situations. His background is architecture, so he is especially interested in spatial interplay. In the mean time, work by contemporary artists, represented here by Johannes Esper, Frank Gerritz and Liam Gillick, have joined what are mainly American classics—but also German work such as that of Albers, Erben, Palermo and Ruthenbeck.

The idea of varying dialogue exhibitions lay behind presentations of the Lafrenz Collection in Museum Weserburg Bremen in 2002 and 2004, both joint concepts with the collectors' friend Rik Reinking. The 'Skulptur und Farbe' ('Sculpture and Color') exhibition at the Hamburger Kunsthalle followed in 2004. Taking up the interest in museum architecture, part of the collection will be shown at Hendrik Berlag's Gemeente Museum in The Hague in late 2008.

As described above, the challenge within the Poddar, New Delhi and Daimler dialogues lay in the differences between the emphases in the two collections and the cultural background, but in the dialogue with the Lafrenz Collection precisely the opposite extreme has to be taken into account and addressed creatively: that of the extreme closeness of the character of the two collections, the convergences and resonances with reference to focusing on minimalist tendencies in Germany and the USA. During the two years or so we spent preparing the exhibition we were also strongly aware of how close the two collections are in the way they deal with concepts, works and artists: both parties, Lafrenz and Daimler—consciously distancing themselves from the art world turbulences and of art market evaluations and media acceptance—operate with almost philosophical seriousness, thoughtfully reassessing the 'physiognomy' of the collection in each case, its development and the presentation and communication forms adopted.

So anyone visiting the exhibition in Haus Huth should first of all have the impression of being presented with a coherent image of one collection. The different weightings do not start to show up until after the first glance, but then add a further charge to the arc of tension holding together the overtures, sometimes antagonistic, being made by Judd to Sachs, by Palermo to Walther, by McCracken to Strunz.

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For our 'Private/Corporate V' exhibition, Björn Lafrenz has looked at the range of his parents' collection and shifted the classical American protagonists of Minimal Art into the center of attention—Judd, LeWitt, Marden, Novros, Ryman, McCracken—and added an extra dimension, both stringently, but systematically and homogeneously, by juxtaposing them with positions like those of Palermo, Gerritz and Esper. Against this background, the approach of the Daimler Art Collection takes on a much clearer outline: 1. Taking a new look at Minimal Art from the perspective of stubborn peripheral positions—Posenenske and Schene stand for this, but even Darboven and Walther have been observed only to a limited extent in monographic Minimal Art presentations—and 2. examining Minimalism from the point of view of destruction, of refractions and 'pollutions'—Monk, Sachs, Strunz—to assess its substance and load-bearing capabilities.

The idea for the current 'Private/Corporate' exhibition was born in a flash, as it were, at a relaxed lunch in Hamburg in summer 2007—after each of the partners had taken a thorough look at the other's collection. We deliberately chose work by some artists—Gillick, LeWitt, Novros—from both collections. Our show starts with a conversation between the 'fathers' of Minimal Art—Judd, Ryman, Novros—with the younger artists Gerritz and Gillick. Here analytical reduction and tuning the palette down to black, grey and metallic shades face up to the intensely glowing red of Judd's wall sculpture. The criteria used for describing Minimalism—objectively identifiable structures and proportions, elemental form and serial accumulation, the use of industrial materials and production forms—are present here in classical density.

In the main gallery in Haus Huth, works by Franz Erhard Walther, Palermo and McCracken—backed by an 'all-over' of Minimalist drawings—lay Minimal Art's analytical relation with space open to physical experience. The relationship between body, material and space plays a crucial role for classical Minimal Art, as it developed in New York in the early 1960s. This can be expressed by sculptural forms bursting the space wide open and literally forcing the human body out of the exhibition gallery, or, as a counter-argument, making the human body into part of the sculptural situation. *Five Spaces*, 1972, by Franz Erhard Walther links both elements as the architectural 'space form' and the human dimension of the individual elements come together. Palermo makes the picture-object itself into a three-dimensional

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body, while McCracken's stele, beveled off at the top and gleaming with paint, is an abstract body-form that reflects the space around it on all sides.

I would like to thank Astrid and Björn Lafrenz very sincerely—preparing for the exhibition ran in the best spirit of 'relaxed intensification', and in fact in such a way that the dialogue between the two collections meant that each of the partners were able both to view and examine the intentionality and characteristics of their own collections.

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Daimler Contemporary

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