

Daimler Art Collection

February 2001

New Acquisitions

Daimler Contemporary, Berlin

February 8 – April 1, 2001

Renate Wiehager

Foreword

The Daimler Art Collection, established in 1977, includes about 1000 works and concentrates on concrete-constructive, conceptual or minimalist images. This approach first addressed art as it developed in the first half of the 20th century in the Stuttgart area and South Germany, then expanded rapidly by involving related German, Swiss and European positions relating to non-expressive pictorial art, and ultimately embraced the international contemporary scene.

My predecessor, Hans J. Baumgart, build up this basic idea to a highquality collection with a precisely defined profile. I want the 'February 2001' exhibition's acquisitions by German and international artists to follow these guidelines, and to strike out in some new directions as well. Some of the works chosen relate to a concept developed around 1960, associated with overcoming traditional conventions in painting. Other works show how young artists reflected and refracted this idea within this Modern revolution. An additional shift lies in the fact that the idea behind the collection has been expanded in terms of the media included: photography, video art and multi-media object art will be represented exemplary. As well as this, I intend to incorporate the stand taken by art that is firmly critical of its times.

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Franz Erhard Walther and Joseph Kosuth, the leading exponents of early Concept Art in Europe and America respectively, are represented by key works. Our choice of Gerold Miller and Gerwald Rockenschaub takes up the predominance of the 'idea', of the concept, over material execution that Walther and Kosuth pioneered. Andrea Zittel's work presents a contemporary answer, removing the barriers between original work, furniture and design, to the action-related working concept as laid down in Walther's *1. Werksatz* [1st Work-Set] in about 1960. John M Armlenders assemblage of goods tries once more to say a final farewell to the original, a process that started with Marcel Duchamp's *Urinal* in 1917. Contemporary artist's marked interest in the borders between economics, advertising and aesthetics is reflected in Daniele Buetti's and Sylvie Fleury's photographic work. Our present cult of brands and logos has literally got under the skin of Buetti's model, while Fleury's unemotional gesture reveals the trivial mentality of American 'Lowrider' and 'Muscle Car' drivers. Kirsten Mosher's *Carmen* (read: car-men) videos express a simultaneously ironic, comic and tragic criticism of this world that was actually generated only by advertising, and show how it collides with every-day reality in the world of the car. This outlines the first steps in a move towards changing and expanding the idea behind the collection.

Renate Wiehager

Speech at the opening of the 'February 2001' exhibition, Daimler Contemporary, Thursday 8 February

Ladies and Gentlemen, I've arrived in Berlin. At least I feel I have, after running this first exhibition and all my Berlin activities from Esslingen for several months. In Berlin – that means meeting people, meeting people again that I used to work with on exhibitions in the Villa Merkel, and also meeting a lot of new people in Berlin; but it also means making this wonderful space in Haus Huth into my space, it means getting to know the opportunities afforded by the Potsdamer Platz as a location even better, with its exhibition space, an open-

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air sculpture ensemble and the works of art from the collection in the various buildings in the square, and sharing them with the general public. Anyone who is familiar with my programme for the Villa Merkel in Esslingen over the past ten years will see one thing quite clearly from the 'February 2001' exhibition. I have arrived in Berlin with my previous history, my preferences and people I have been sharing a dialogue with for many years: I have worked on previous exhibitions with almost all the artists who are represented here. As well as this, I was also quite determined to realize my purchasing wishes for this first opening primarily in co-operation with Berlin galleries.

Ladies and gentlemen, perhaps I might say a few words of my own about the selection. The basic thrust of the Daimler Art Collection—Dr. Gentz has already mentioned this—is towards the field of geometrical and abstract pictorial concepts. This can be seen from the five works here in the exhibition. Chronologically, the starting point for the selection is identified by Franz Erhard Walther and Joseph Kosuth as two founder exponents of early Concept Art in Europe and America. Kosuth takes square panes of glass that are usually used to cover and protect paintings as the basis for his pictorial-linguistic work. The double version of the Wittgenstein quotation reflects Kosuth's early theme of self-reference and visually demonstrates the emergence of sense and meaning as a process of repeated reading. Using the title *After Augustine's Confessions*, Kosuth brings two great Western thinkers into conversation with each other, and also initiates a dialogue between American Concept Art and European cultural contexts. F.E. Walther, who developed image and sculpture as action-forms in about 1960, takes geometrical surface elements and brings them together to form large-scale, seemingly architectural three-dimensional images. His works do not justify themselves through the material, but by the interplay of the basic concepts of sculptural quality: space—color—treatment—material process—time—extent—location—body. Walther's image, which can be experienced physically, is juxtaposed with a "virtual" one: the Austrian artist Gerwald Rockenschaub (b. 1952) developed his colored squares at the computer and stamped them out as foils. Harald Fricke writes that in Rockenschaub's work the image "expresses a visual culture that can no longer be shaped independently of electronic communication technologies and the appropriate apparatus." Ugo Rondinone (b. 1963) is a young Swiss multi-media artist. The example of his work we have acquired is from the series of hypnotic, colorfully pulsating circle images he has been producing since 1995; these pictures impressively combine "classical" quotations, from Jasper Johns to Op Art, with the psychedelic element of spray-can art. Gerold Miller's right-angled pictorial bodies—like Franz Erhard Walther's work—are positioned somewhere between painting, wall-related sculpture

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and architecture. The works, as a group on the wall, play with the idea of a "classical" color sequence, but they also confidently draw attention to the technical process that produced them and the industrial perfection of their surfaces. It can be said of all the new acquisitions mentioned so far that idea and concept have priority over the mere material execution of the work.

Ladies and gentlemen, the acquisitions by the Swiss Concept Artist John M Armleder (b. 1948) and the young Californian artist Andrea Zittel (b. 1965) push strikingly beyond the media boundaries usually associated with the Daimler Art Collection. Armleder's *Don't do it!* goods assemblage bids a last farewell to the traditional concept of the original: it brings the 20th century's most famous ready-mades together as new acquisitions, entirely fresh on the market. This work is "didactic" in the best sense: experts and art-lovers can vie with each other in recognizing the art-historical quotations; sceptics can grumble about ideals being sold out and the saleability of every supposedly "unique" artistic design. Andrea Zittel's *Pit Bed* provides a contemporary response to Franz Erhard Walther's action-sculptures, eliminating the boundaries between original work, furniture and design. Zittel's furniture represents projections of personal life-forms that contain "a little kernel of perfection", as Zittel puts it herself. Contemporary artists' marked interest in the border area between economy, advertising and aesthetics is reflected in photographic work by Daniele Buetti (b. 1955) and Sylvie Fleury (b. 1961). While the brand and logo cult of our day has got under the skin of Buetti's model like a tattoo, Fleury's *Car Magazine Covers* are devoted to the terror of the surface. But something that is necessary and correct in product design turns out to show contempt for humanity when applied to the female body used decoratively and to promote sales. Fleury's second major theme, the removal of the distinction between the sexes in fashion and everyday life is present, perfectly crafted and wonderfully ironic, in her *Formel Eins Dress* [Formula One Dress]. Here Mika Häkkinen's victory suit, complemented with a handbag and the flame pattern of the American lowrider, is tailor-made for the female racing star. The *Carmen* videos (car-men, not Bizet) by the New York artist Kirsten Mosher, take yet another thematic line. They deal with the gulf between nature and civilization: the battery-powered toy soldiers, in camouflage gear, with guns levelled and camouflaged again by the silhouette of a car, move in the city and in nature as if they were in enemy territory. And incidentally, the car silhouettes that get broken up are always those produced by the competition.

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Ladies and gentlemen, Concept Art, Minimal Art, geometrical abstraction, new media, contemporary themes—the 'February 2001' exhibition reveals the threads that will be spun further in the next three years. In April this year we will be opening a exhibition called 'New Zero' here in Daimler Contemporary, with examples from the collection and new acquisitions from the international Zero avant-garde circle in about 1960, with works by young artists relating to this, and as a complement to this, an exquisite little special exhibition with 20 works each by Piero Manzoni and John Nixon. This will be followed in summer by a show that will develop the media accent even further. For 2002 we are planning the start of a series of exhibitions that will address familiar and less familiar positions in European Minimal Art systematically and scientifically. What other plans have we got?—a very large number. We would like to build up our connections with other art institutions and art venues around Potsdamer Platz even more intensively, with young art locations and also with venues specializing in classical Modernism—you can already see in this exhibition that we would like to seek out and discuss the subcutaneous links between the two, and we shall continue along these lines. We would like to continue to make the general public aware of the great attractions offered by art and architecture in Potsdamer Platz, reflecting as they do the high profile of Daimler and the high standard reached under Dr. Gentz's management. We would like to contribute substantially here in Potsdamer Platz to making people aware of the singular concentration and quality of the art available between the Nationalgalerie, Kemperplatz, the Gropiusbau and Berlin-Mitte, and to seeing it used even more by Berliners and the international public.

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Daimler Contemporary

Haus Huth Alte Potsdamer Str. 5 10785 Berlin

daily 11 am - 6 pm

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