

Daimler Art Collection

‘Cars and Art. Werke der Daimler Art Collection’

Unimog Museum Gaggenau

13 November 2010 – 13 February 2011

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Introduction for the exhibition ‘Cars and Art. Werke der Daimler Art Collection’
Unimog Museum Gaggenau, 12th November 2010

Esteemed ladies and gentlemen,

The Daimler Art Collection is known in the Stuttgart area, but, at the same time, it is an unknown quantity. Within Stuttgart itself, the collection is present only in the form of the two large sculptures by Max Bill and Heinz Mack that stand in front of the gate of the Untertürkheim engine factory, and through a few artworks that we have integrated into the neighboring Mercedes-Benz Museum. Some of you may perhaps have taken part in a tour of the artworks at the company headquarters in Stuttgart-Möhringen, where we regularly stage temporary exhibitions of artworks from the collection, although this is intended

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primarily for the benefit of employees. The whole spectrum of our collection – from classical modernist art to present-day art – was hosted at ZKM in Karlsruhe in 2003, and a similarly wide spectrum will be on display at the Museum im Prediger in Schwäbisch Gmünd from May onwards.

So, how would one go about putting together a concise profile of our collection and our activities? I would like to say a few words about this before I talk about the artworks that have been selected for the Unimog Museum. The Daimler Art Collection, which was founded in 1977, is one of the most significant corporate art collections in Germany. Commissioned artworks – some of which you can see here in Gaggenau – merely form one part of the Daimler Art Collection, which comprises around 1,800 artworks. The collection began with works by Adolf Hölzel and his students from Stuttgart – Baumeister, Itten, Schlemmer – and with artworks from the context of Bauhaus. Overall, the focus of the collection is on concrete and constructive art, minimal art, concept art and Zero art – on art movements from the 1940s through to the 1970s. To an increasing extent, contemporary art has been taking center stage. In recent years we have built up from scratch artwork groups featuring pictures, photos and video artworks by artists from Japan, Australia, South Africa, the USA and India; the latter will be on display at the Städtische Galerie Sindelfingen from June. Added to this are a whole body of large public sculptures in Stuttgart, Sindelfingen and Berlin. Exhibitions within the company, in Berlin and internationally and prizes that benefit the up-and-coming art scene create the conditions for a broad-based engagement with the collection.

In order to handle the collection successfully – both within the company and in public museums – we plan several years ahead, with attention to the following concepts. Firstly, there is continuity: that is, we develop the fundamentals of the collection for the future. Then, there is quality: we adhere to the museum-

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standard level that we have achieved for the artworks. There is the development of an independent profile: that is, having the courage to build on the collection's distinctive character and to ignore trends and auction records – which also includes having the courage to incorporate forgotten or overlooked artists and very young talents. There is innovation: being open to and supportive of new developments and unconventional artistic directions. Lastly, there is communication: the investment of effort in communicating about and linguistically evaluating the collected art, presenting the artworks inventively. There is the potential of the art to analyze our present-day and to extrapolate the future. It is important to open this up – most especially to people who are not necessarily natural museum-goers.

What are our responsibilities? Very much to the fore is the task of offering cultural education to employees – something that we have been doing for around 30 years. Specifically: we stage temporary company-internal exhibitions within Germany– in Möhringen, Sindelfingen, and Berlin-Marienfelde – and we also offer monthly themed art tours. Since 2000, we have organized around 100 exhibitions outside of the company: in Daimler Contemporary at Potsdamer Platz in Berlin, an exhibition space where we show four exhibitions of artworks taken from the collection annually. The exhibition space is open daily; entrance is free of charge. We also stage exhibitions in museums both within Germany and internationally: in 2003, we embarked on a world tour, taking around 150 artworks from the collection to major museums. We visited Johannesburg, Tokyo, São Paulo, Madrid and Singapore. This world tour is accompanied by a special education program for schoolchildren, in which around 30,000 young people have previously taken part. This world tour naturally also supports the cultural and social commitment of the Mercedes-Benz subsidiaries in other countries. Additionally, our work includes curatorial work in the context of helping to promote many young creative people globally through prizes and

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working scholarships. Of course, we also promote young artists worldwide through acquisitions, exhibitions and publications. The art holdings department, however, also provides advice to colleagues all over the world on questions concerned with art concepts and commissioned works for new buildings, and also on many general art and sponsoring themes.

Ladies and gentlemen: many of the visitors to this exhibition will immediately connect the name of the Daimler Art Collection with the *Cars* series by Andy Warhol. This series was commissioned in 1986, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Mercedes-Benz. Prior to his death in 1987, Warhol completed a total of 35 images on canvas and 12 drawings. In 1988, after receiving its premiere in New York and at the Kunsthalle Tübingen, the *Cars* series went on its world tour. Here in Gaggenau, we have placed five pictures and two drawings on display – in honor of Gottlieb Daimler, we chose pictures that feature the early automobiles. In the early 1990s, a second major commission for a series of pictures relating to the company's products went to another well-known New York artist, Robert Longo, who produced a series of wonderful black and white drawings and a large-scale spray-painting – both of which are represented here at the Kulturforum. In 2001, these were followed by the commission that was given to Stuttgart artist Simone Westerwinter to create a portrait of the company. She created 60 name watercolors – which, unfortunately, we are not able to exhibit here. A further commissioned project on the theme of cars that was thoroughly inspiring for us was completed in 2004, in collaboration with the then 35-year-old artist Vincent Szarek from New York: here in Gaggenau, two of his wall sculptures can be seen. They are created entirely through computer processing of the SLR design.

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However, I will return one more time to the theme of the automobile, which we have concentrated on for this exhibition in Gaggenau. One of the currently best-known internationally active female artists of the middle generation is Sylvie Fleury, who is represented here by two of her early video artworks and by her cryptic Formula One dress. The latter is cut from the original material of Mika Häkkinen's suit, complete with all the logos. It is lined with a fabric printed with the flame motif from the lower-slung US "lowrider" car. In this way, Sylvie Fleury fuses the purely masculine world of Formula One sport with the female world of fashion and the painted fire of the American Hispanics.

A graduate of the Stuttgarter Kunstakademie who today lives in Berlin, Gerold Miller is represented in this exhibition by a large black wall sculpture in a zero or O shape, painted with gleaming black car bodywork paint. Ulrike Flaig, who was born in Esslingen and who also lives in Berlin, also has a wall sculpture featuring in the exhibition. It is a wave shape that shifts between blue and green, constructed from a material that, some years ago, was used when new car bodywork paints were tested. As you can see from this, the subject of 'Cars & Art' also throws up interesting abstract solutions that have less to do with an automobile fetish as such and more to do with design and surface effects.

Ladies and gentlemen: let me conclude by expressing a few thoughts on the role open to a corporate collection today. I believe that our role lies within a zone occupied by few other institutions – the zone that lies between art societies and publicly financed institutions. What we share with the latter kind of institution is an obligation to maintain international standards, to maintain continuity and museum-standard quality. At the same time, we also have an obligation to the places where our company operates; we support up-and-coming regional trends in a targeted and long-term way, assisting them through exhibitions and acquisitions at a point in time when museums are still adopting a wait-and-see

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attitude. In this way, a corporate collection can most definitely provide a kind of laboratory in which young trends can learn to assert themselves in the society of the prominent and the established art. On the other hand, we do not have to reflect the most recent trends, as art societies must do; we are exempt from the pendulum swings of prevailing tastes. Another important function is concerned with the people who we are able to reach: many of the tens of thousands of employees who see our themed temporary presentations at various company locations would normally never enter an art museum. This is where an inventively communicated corporate collection can create bridges between worlds that otherwise rarely come together.

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