

Daimler Art Collection

'minimal funktional'

Sammlung Ruppert at the Kulturspeicher Würzburg

12 July – 21 September 2008

Renate Wiehager

For the opening of the exhibition 'minimal funktional'

Sammlung Ruppert at the Kulturspeicher Würzburg, 11 July 2008

Mr. Mayor, esteemed Herr Ruppert, Frau Ruppert, ladies and gentlemen,

So, what brings the Daimler Art Collection – a collection that has its home in Stuttgart and Berlin – to Würzburg? Not the *Würzburger Residenz*, not the beautiful Main or the fortress, but another attraction that is well known in the cultural world: the Sammlung Ruppert, a collection of European concrete and constructive art. I came here and saw the collection for the first time two years ago, and I was overwhelmed by the quality of the artworks and by how wide-ranging they were – and, of course, by this fabulously appointed institution, the Kulturspeicher. Not least, I was enthused by the inventive managing and communicating of the art in this institution by Frau Reese and Frau Lauter. Last year, Herr Ruppert came to see our exhibition 'Minimalism and Applied' in

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Berlin. Both sides were spontaneously enthusiastic about the idea of a joint project – and so the artworks previously shown in Berlin are now rearranged afresh to create an inspiring dialogue, under the charming title ‘minimal und nützlich’ (‘minimal and useful’).

I would like to talk briefly about three different aspects. Firstly: what is the ‘Daimler Art Collection?’ Secondly: how do we present our collection internally – to the company at large and externally to the wider public? And, finally: what are our modus operandi in expanding the collection into the field of contemporary art? The Daimler Art Collection is one of the oldest German corporate collections; it was founded in Stuttgart in 1977. With their interest in art, the company executives – who, at the time, were headed by Edzard Reuter – originally decided to concentrate on collecting the highlights of southwest German modernism: names such as Adolf Hölzel – one of the founders of abstract art – and his subsequently famous students Oskar Schlemmer, Willi Baumeister, Johannes Itten, Camille Graeser et al. By the 1980s, however, this remit was expanding to include European trends in abstract art and constructive/concrete art – an area in which there are plenty of connections with the Sammlung Ruppert. In 1986, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the invention of the automobile, Andy Warhol was commissioned to create the so-called *Cars* series of pictures – this provided the impetus to include American art in the collection.

Since I took over the running of the collection in 2001, we have consistently internationalized the collection, incorporating artwork groups by artists from Asia, Australia, India, South Africa and South America. This is in line with the global nature of the company’s activities. The collection currently comprises around 1,800 museum-standard artworks by around 600 artists. Around 70% to 80% of these artworks are permanently exhibited.

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So: how do we tell people about the items in our collection? Firstly, we stage themed temporary exhibitions within the company itself – in public locations – and invite employees to take part in tours. This activity is founded on a coherent educational concept – the idea is to allow employees to get to know significant features of 20th-century art from a variety of different perspectives, with publications, artist talks etc. A further important mainstay is provided by our exhibition space at Potsdamer Platz in Berlin: the ‘Daimler Contemporary’ located in the historic ‘Weinhaus Huth’ building is open 7 days a week, admission free. There, we present temporary exhibitions of new acquisitions and of older works from the collection to the Berlin public – and, of course, also to an international public. A third aspect of our outreach activities is provided by the collection’s world tour: since 2003, around 150 artworks from the collection have made guest appearances in major museums in Detroit, Pretoria and Cape Town, Tokyo, Madrid and São Paulo. This world tour is accompanied by educational programs for students and schoolchildren. We inform the schools and universities of the cities that we are to visit about the content and special features of our collection well in advance and provide advanced training for young art historians who can then offer tour programs. Additionally, Daimler buses are provided to take children to the museums. Each child is given a small book with questions and pictures relating to the collection as a gift.

To come to the last aspect: the planning of new acquisitions for the collection – in other words, the expansion of the collection – has always been in the hands of the curator. To put it another way, we do not engage an external consulting company or art advisers. Instead, it is my responsibility to create a long-term plan in terms of what we might wish to integrate into our collection in the future. We go about this in three different ways: firstly, we acquire significant and characteristic artworks and groups of artworks relating to international art post-1950 that are missing from our collection’s spectrum of emphasis – from the spectrum of 20th-century abstract art movements. In past years, for instance, we have closed gaps in the areas of abstract art from the USA, from Japan and from Australia in the 1950s/1960s, British 1960s abstract art and the context

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of the European Zero movement. Secondly, I endeavor to keep track of developments in abstract and reduced art trends in the young art scene. Thirdly, we encourage – through prizes and scholarships and through acquisitions – up-and-coming photography, object art and video art in countries where Daimler has important factories or subsidiaries.

Ladies and gentlemen: the show that we have put together from the artworks in our collection here in Würzburg under the title ‘minimal und nützlich’ – from Josef Albers’s colored table set of 1928 to young Swiss artist Nic Hess and his Rietveld Chair – represents an especially intriguing and originally revolutionary aspect of 20th-century art: these artworks show the concepts and objects with which artists attempted to tear down the rigid boundary between art and life. Art for *use* – whether actually or notionally – is an impulse that has been taken up by young artists, who have reformulated it for our age. What can art contribute to aesthetic education today? How can art challenge, shape and chart new possibilities for our aspirations towards quality and functional beauty in the world of objects? This is where these artworks have something to say: playfully or with formal earnestness, roughly or elegantly, seductively or provocatively.

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