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Daimler Art Collection, Stuttgart/Berlin

The Daimler Art Collection started in 1977 and has since then developed a clear profile that has been built up steadily and systematically. Today the Collection represents an important spectrum of major twentieth century art developments and it extends right up to the present day: Examples of Abstract Art range from the avant-garde tendencies associated with the German Bauhaus movement and classic modernist art, Concrete Art, Constructivism and post-1945 Art Informel, the European Zero movement, Minimalism and Concept Art, Neo Geo, Post-Minimalism and Conceptual tendencies within international contemporary art, car-related art, international Photography, Video Art and public sculptures. The Daimler Art Collection reflects a commitment to art as a full part of Daimler's self-image and cultural profile. Interview with Dr. Renate Wiehager, Head of the Daimler Art Collection, Stuttgart/Berlin, Germany.

Patrizia Sandretto Re Rebaudengo To what do you attribute the passion for art that led Daimler to become a renowned collector and promoter of contemporary art in Berlin through the Daimler Art Collection?

Renate Wiehager One has to distinguish between the contentual and curatorial goals of the collection and its goals in terms of communication and education. In contentual and curatorial terms, we try to give the collection a clear and recognizable orientation in art history terms without imposing too many stylistic restrictions. Our collection comprises about 3,000 works by 800 international artists and focuses on twentieth-century Abstract Avant-garde Art right up to the art of the present day: from artists of the early era who were students of Adolf Hölzel in Stuttgart circa 1910 (such as Willi Baumeister and Oskar Schlemmer) to the Bauhaus, Constructive and Concrete tendencies, European post-war Abstract Art and the Zero avant-garde movement, Minimalist/Concept Art and Neo Geo and their predecessors, right up to the present day. Besides, we are constantly building up collection areas around international Photography and Video Art, commissioned artworks, car-related art as well as public sculptures. With regard to communication and educational goals, we have been consistently expanding the formats of the exhibitions that we present since 2001: three themed exhibitions are staged every year at our Berlin public exhibition space, Daimler Contemporary, accompanied by shows with the collection in German and international public museums, from Buenos Aires to Singapur,

from Capetown to Vienna. Our temporary themed exhibitions with guided tours for company employees at the Stuttgart-Möhringen venue per year have been supplemented by temporary visits by the collection to other Daimler venues or also at the Mercedes-Benz Car Museum. For some time now, we also have been staging themed exhibitions at the public museums in the Stuttgart region. All company employees and their children are invited to visit all of these exhibitions, and this means that we are reaching an audience both within the company and among the wider public.

PSRR When did Daimler start collecting and why?

RW The Daimler Art Collection was founded in 1977. Until 2000 it was curated by Hans J. Baumgart, whereas since then it has been headed by me. The main goal of the collection from the beginning is communicating and offering cultural knowledge via implementing twentieth century and contemporary international art in areas of daily work and life.

PSRR Who is the legal owner of the Daimler Art Collection?

RW The art collection is part of the company's holdings, as is the Daimler Art Department a regular part of the Daimler structure.

PSRR How is the collection curated? Does it have its own staff? How many full-time employees does the Daimler Art Collection have?

RW We are a team of myself as curatorial expert and four organizational assistants. Next to that, and related to our exhibition program, there are external art historians working part-time for the collection and we also have art history students as part-time interns at the Berlin exhibition space Daimler Contemporary who support us.

PSRR Do you research before acquiring art?

RW The collection's substantial acquisition activities require long-term planning. So yes, I do a lot of research before acquiring art. I always try to be up to date about the contemporary art scene, I travel a lot, visit exhibitions, galleries, art museums and meet artists in their studios. We observe the artists and their development for some time before acquiring their artworks for our collection. For specific themed exhibition series, e. g. 'Minimalism in Germany' and 'Conceptual

Tendencies 1960 to today'—and, in particular, for the acquisition of art from a different cultural context—we undertake a lengthy period of preparation, involving intensive academic research, studio visits etc. (in China's case, this took 10 years).

PSRR Do you usually buy or prefer commissioning?

RW Most of the artworks in the collection are acquisitions, but our collection concept also includes a small number of commissioned artworks. Some relate to the company's product and some are part of other collection areas such as sculpture, wall paintings and media. One indicator of the future in this respect—and also an indicator of the early international direction taken by the art collection—was the commissioning of a series of artworks from Andy Warhol in 1986 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the then Daimler-Benz AG. Since the 1980s, commissions to design and location-specific artworks have gone to Max Bill, Heinz Mack, Francois Morellet, Walter De Maria, Ben Willikens, Sylvie Fleury, Gerold Miller, Natalia Stachon, Pietro Sanguineti, Patricia London, Franz Erhard Walther, Jan van der Ploeg, Michael Sailstorfer, Hartmut Böhm or Heimo Zobernig. We also support younger contemporary artists. For example, for the 'Conceptual & Applied' exhibition series and recent exhibitions at Daimler Contemporary Berlin since 2014, we asked Martin Boyce, Leonor Antunes, Luca Trevisani, Nic Hess and Bethan Huws for a space-related commissioned work.

PSRR Some say a collection is a portrait of the collector and express his personality. Do you agree?

RW I have curatorial oversight of all acquisitions and exhibitions; including the details of the artworks' hanging—one reason for this is that the Daimler's art collection also suits my preferences as a curator. So I would agree partly, but the main decisions regarding acquisitions and exhibitions are rooted in the nearly 40 years of the history and main tasks of the Daimler Art Collection. And moreover, I'm also working with a young team that brings in ideas as well.

PSRR When can a corporate collection be defined as successful?

RW Of course, it is most important, to be visible in the art scene, which means to reach people, who are interested in art and to have substantial numbers of visitors, but also to make a contribution to the scientific research in art history. In addition to the continuous expansion of the collection through purchases, we publish a lot. The Daimler Art Collection has a clear art

scientific profile that has been built up steadily and systematically, which is almost unique in the context of corporate collections. The Daimler Art Collection's surefire "recipe for success" was to put trust in an independent, distinctive mixture of works by internationally well-known artists and more peripheral works, whilst bringing younger, less well-established approaches into a dialogue with internationally discussed contemporary artists. This was combined with a strategy of offering support to art activities that previously had a low profile in the art system. This provides an opportunity for exciting contrasts—something that is not always possible in museums, which are required to rather present an established "canon".

PSRR How do you assess the potential success of an exhibition?

RW Due to the fact that we don't really advertise our exhibition space in Berlin, we are dependent on the fact that our visitors 'promote' our exhibitions by recommending them to colleagues and friends. So the number of visitors is a quite good indicator regarding the success of our exhibitions. As the Daimler Art Collection is a corporate collection, a second main focus is to attract the curiosity of colleagues internally at the company and to cause them to look beyond the horizons of their working environments. Feedback from leading representatives of the international art world and press and internet reviews is equally important for us.

PSRR How many exhibitions does Daimler Art Collection organize each year?

RW The number is variable. At Daimler Contemporary in Berlin, we are organizing 2–3 exhibitions per year. Additionally, we organize one or two themed exhibitions with guided tours for company employees and external groups at the Stuttgart-Möhringen venue per year. Besides that, we have also been staging themed exhibitions in public museums in the Stuttgart region and in German museums. In 2003, I started the Daimler Art Collection's world tour, which began with a preliminary overview at the Museum für Neue Kunst/ZKM Karlsruhe, followed by major exhibitions in Detroit, Singapore, Tokyo, South Africa, South America and Vienna. So on average you could say six to eight exhibitions take place every year.

PSRR What was the total number of visitors in 2017?

RW The total number of visitors at Daimler Contemporary Berlin was approximately 30,000. Moreover, around 10,000 employees, guests and partners visited our thematic exhibitions internally in Stuttgart and in German museums. In other years in total, including internal/

external exhibitions and the world tour of the collection, the number of visitors might go up to approximately 250,000.