



From left to right: Cornelia Wittman/Udine Goldberg, *Künstlerportraits*, 1993. Julia Mangold, *Untitled*, 1994. Cornelia Wittman, *Vergrößerungen*, 1994.

Aperto: Munich Projections

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"Aperto" is a Flash Art "virtual" exhibition, curated to highlight the art currently being shown in a particular city or region. It will soon be available for viewing on Flash Art's upcoming new Web site.

Since 1995 the Bavarian metropolis has had a new "emblem" signalling artistic revival: Jonathan Borofsky's 17-meter-high *Walking Man*, a highly stylized giant figure made of white plastic in front of the main building of the Munich Re-Insurance Company, striding through the old poplar trees along Leopoldstrasse, preparing to cross Munich's liveliest boulevard with a great lunging stride. The positive energy emanated by this monumental sculpture seems symptomatic of the city of Munich as a whole — even fifteen years ago the city's art scene was thought to be trapped in a traditional and provincial time-warp. Unlike Cologne or Berlin, Munich seemed to be resting on the laurels of a more fruitful past. The atmosphere of the city was not especially stimulating for young artists. But in the meantime Munich seems to have awoken refreshed, like *Sleeping Beauty*, from its artistic slumbers.

Following are thoughts on a few exponents of a generation of young artists, born between 1956 and 1969. They all share a pronounced individuality and a strong artistic obstinacy, which does not, despite their many affinities, justify their being lumped together in a "group." As a meta-theme we might identify the cross-media idea of "projection," in terms of both form and content. My symptomatic observations are primarily con-

centrated on the fields of sculpture, spatial installation, and conceptual photography.

Julia Mangold (1966) works almost exclusively with alloyed steel, whose surfaces she treats with acid. Through this unusual process of patination, the artist draws colors and structures from the brittle material, creating almost painterly effects at random. A final sealing of the surface with a functional layer of wax has the ennobling effect of lending the hardness and the angular weight of the steel a sensually soft, almost sumptuous aura, a certain undefined spaciousness. With her limited repertoire of cubic forms, the artist restricts herself absolutely to right-angles and strict rhythms. The consistent reduction of her sculptures evokes minimalist archetypes, making the viewer think initially of Judd and Serra, but Julia Mangold goes a way that is very much her own. One special case is the steel panels in a square format, which the artist describes as biographically motivated "devotional pictures." The "steel pictures" possess a mysterious and energetic radiance, and embody an intensive artistic dialogue, but they also prompt thoughtful projections on the part of the viewer. Although an enormous amount of strength is required for the treatment of the tough steel, and the material itself implies robust durability, one important point for the artist is the avoidance of

heroic proportions and exaggerated drama. With the human scale she has chosen, Mangold establishes a deliberate counterpoint to possible macho demonstrations of power.

Albert Weis (1969) creates spatial interventions connected to the idea of projection, both formally and in the content of his work. In an installation shown recently in the Munich gallery Köstring/Maier (a former sculptors' studio), Weis had projected the tall workshop windows to scale in mirrored glass on to the opposite wall of the space. In the context of this "new opening" in the wall, the outside world was introduced into the internal space and the viewer was brought "into the picture." Internal and external were compressed in the traditional theme of the mirror: a number of levels were superimposed, and the theme of projection of the window on the wall was lent added potency by the reflecting material. The "mirror principle" had a dual function, being both a working material and a metaphor for reflection.

In the installation *Transformer*, which was shown last year in Munich's Egyptian Collection, eight similar — but not identical — radiators were given an alienated appearance with the application of a semi-transparent coat of paraffin, and set up in a line. The coating, with its twofold meaning — as seal and protection — established a correspondence,

both visually and in terms of the content of the work, with sarcophagi. The silent phalanx of the radiators ironically conjured up an Egyptian atmosphere. The coating of wax meant that variations in the details of the radiators — such as traces of wear, age, manufacture — were strategically erased. Oscillating between object and abstraction, structural superimpositions were presented in sculptural form.

Brigitte Schwacke (1956) has been working as a sculptor with thin iron wire for ten years. From this tough yet fragile material she creates fascinatingly airy volumes that are barely representational, and which are not rooted sculpturally to the floor. The weightless constructions resemble the spatial projection of lines, "three-dimensional drawings," whose calligraphically rhythmic outlines pull in the surrounding space. In their transparency and balanced lightness, the wire forms, with their emphatic structures, express both vulnerability and a certain tense energy. Themes often formulated in the works include architectural fragments and "anatomical set pieces" as graceful essences of form. Adopting a more content-related approach are the group of works entitled *DIN A4* consisting of a number of crocheted "wire pictures" in a standard DIN A4 format. The conceptual nucleus of this highly diverse theme with its variations is Team Work, since



the woven metal pieces are "ordered" from friends and acquaintances of the artist, who are given precise instructions about needles and lengths of thread. She herself retreats to the role of "employer" and curator of her subtle project. Fundamentally, the poetical experimental arrangement of the composite work also represents a multi-layered reflection on the definition of authorship. The delicate textures of the crochet-work are startlingly different in their individual "signatures." They have the substitute character of coded portraits.

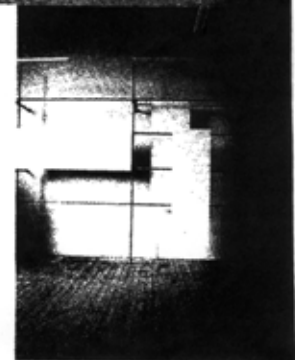
Munich-based, Dutch artist Nol Hennissen (1964) created the intellectually complex installation *Raum 258 (Room 258)* which consisted of white painted rectangles on two facing walls — mounted parallel on steel bars — that surprisingly acted as hidden "sources of color." On the wall and the places where the wooden panels were held apart from one another, mysterious colored patches appeared as ephemeral "light-pictures," glowing immaterially in a very strange way. The solution to the riddle lay in the fact that the wooden panels on the side facing away from the viewer were painted monochrome with acrylic paint, and radiated distinct "colour shadows" on the projection-surface of the surroundings. The spatial anchoring in the orthogonal framing system of a scaffolding gave the plain and ascetic environment the be-

nevolently brittle radiance of an unpretentious aesthetic experience. In his spatial interest in abstract harmony, Hennissen distinctly sees himself as a sculptor. Although they work intensively with model and depiction in their own way, his reduced objects are not essentially derived from painting; so their intention is not to create autonomous color fields, but radiant bodies, presenting color as a frailly formulated emanation of light.

Georg Trenz (1962) installs "light graphics" in given spaces. In the context of a group show at the Galerie der Künstler Trenz projected white "light-words" using 12 slide projectors in the high-arched, dark space. Glimmering fragments of sentences covered the walls and were reflected in the smooth stone floor. Connected into long chains they produced a wallpaper of words which ended in a blurry mist as the ceiling got higher. The interlinking of the breathless garlands of words made it difficult in places to decipher fragments of meaning from the texture of the web of light. The words, serially employed, assumed a strange autonomy. But in a specific way, Trenz managed to produce a link between language and space, establishing a topology of words. All four arched corners of the space were accentuated with identical, capital-letter strips of writing. With the programmatic line:

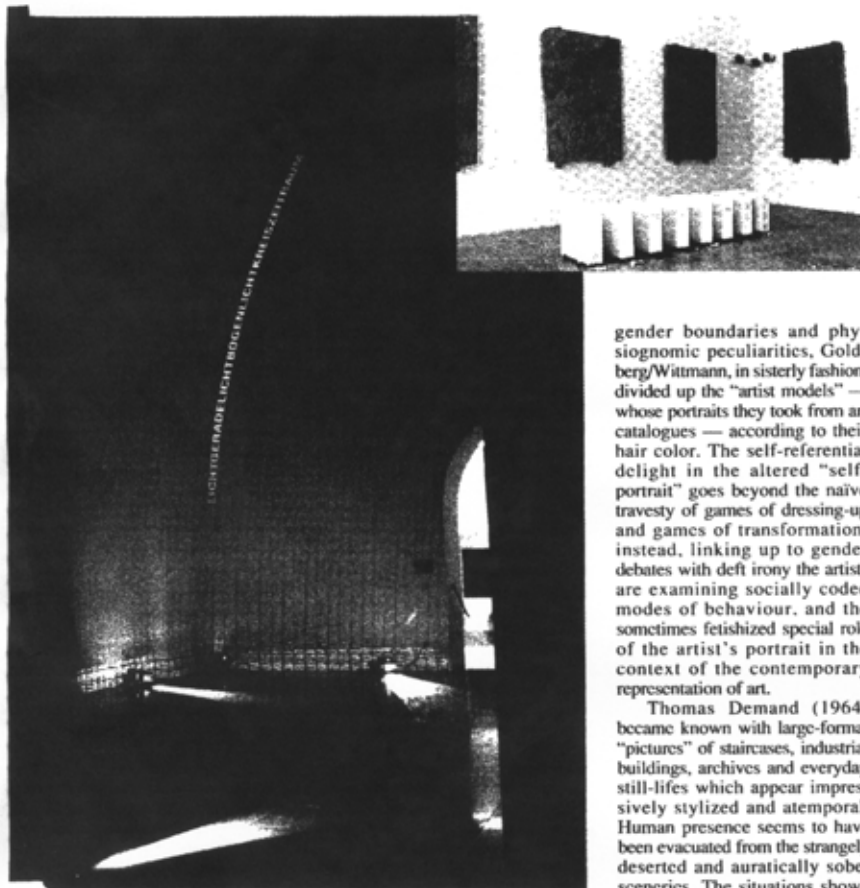
"LICHTGERADELICHTBOGE LICHTKREISZEITRAUM" (LIGHTSTRAIGHTLIGHTBENT LIGHTCIRCLETIMESPACE), Trenz self-referentially reflected the particular "supplements" of his installation; projected light as a shaping medium in space and time. These pictorial experiments with language, used here in a playfully ascetic way as a space-layout, are a little like the word-plays of concrete poetry, with the difference that Trenz transposes his perspectival "visual poetry material" into space.

The artists Andreas Stetka and Helmut Hinterseer (both 1961), who have been working together since 1992, are not fixated on a particular medium, but always work in a place-related way. All the works share a distinct preference for the ironic use of "place-markers" from the real objective world, for mimetic projections: photographs, casts or portraits of objects from junk-mail advertisements, based freely on the motto "alienation through illustration." Slightly distorted everyday situations often form the thematic framework. Scenarios of apparently well-known objects are illuminated, with irritating elements built into them that make amusing reinterpretations a possibility. A prototypical example of this is the large-format work *Rotes Bild (Red Picture)*, conceived for a collector's living room. The painting, done in acrylic and at first apparently monochrome red, proves, on



closer inspection, to be bafflingly bichromatic. Out of the lighter cadmium red of the background, in the darker cadmium red there glows an average household interior, whose source is a furniture catalogue. The hidden picture-within-a-picture acts as the vision of the installation of a room which — freed from its original context — hides chameleon-like in an apparently autonomous color-field. Oscillating between abstract and representational, the disembodied version of the "living-room within a living-room" thus becomes the subtle parody of the notion of tasteful interior decoration.

Cornelia Wittmann (1964) works chiefly with conceptual photography. In her works she engages with phenomena of perception and the staging of social events. In the central work *Vergrößerungen (Enlargements)*



From left to right: Michael Wesely, Sabbiadoro, Lignano, 1996. Nol Hennissen, Room 258, 1996. George Trezn, Lichtgrafik, 1997. Albert Weis, Transformer, 1995.

— consisting of two series' of 40 slides — shimmering green out-of-focus snapshots of people are projected on the wall, clearly enlarged from a larger context or zoomed in on from a great distance. The widespread pleasure of penetrating other people's private sphere is presented, but the quest leads nowhere but to banality. Wittmann's source material are old-fashioned postcards of various spas and holiday resorts, from which she — using a monochrome video monitor — enlarges pseudo-detective individual characters, who appear as random "epi-phenomena" beside tourist sites. The enlargements show what the naked eye can barely see. In this way the artist turns anonymous supernumeraries into protagonists, holding them up to the curious eye of the viewer of art. The artist illuminates the medium

with self-reflexive irony, her anti-portraits questioning both the general ability of the camera to do justice to reality, and the selective role of photography as a "truth-telling medium."

Since 1993 Cornelia Wittmann has frequently worked with Undine Goldberg (1962). The most successful results of their collaborations includes the series *Künstlerportraits (Artists' portraits)* each consisting of thirty-six black and white photographs in the formats 9 x 13 and 18 x 24 inches. In the wider sense these too are projections, because the series constructed in a "dialogue" between the two artists represents the startlingly successful attempt by the two to copy famous contemporary fellow-artists (such as Fischli/Weiss, Bruce Nauman, Gerhard Richter, and Rosemarie Trockel) in their facial expressions and gestures. Boldly ignoring

gender boundaries and physiognomic peculiarities, Goldberg/Wittmann, in sisterly fashion, divided up the "artist models" — whose portraits they took from art catalogues — according to their hair color. The self-referential delight in the altered "self-portrait" goes beyond the naïve travesty of games of dressing-up and games of transformation; instead, linking up to gender debates with deft irony the artists are examining socially coded modes of behaviour, and the sometimes fetishized special role of the artist's portrait in the context of the contemporary representation of art.

Thomas Demand (1964) became known with large-format "pictures" of staircases, industrial buildings, archives and everyday still-lives which appear impressively stylized and atemporal. Human presence seems to have been evacuated from the strangely deserted and aurally sober sceneries. The situations shown are not, in fact, photographed reality, but merely substitutes for details of banal reality, "pictures" built specially for the photograph. One crucial detail within the working-process consists in the fact that after taking the photograph the artist thoroughly destroys the almost life-sized spatial models, made of brightly colored cardboard. The viewer's experience of reality is gently unhinged by the irritating confrontation with the simulated reality of this stage-set world. With a sly artistic delight in deception, a cheerfully manipulative trick is played on naïve perception. On the intellectual basis of the principle of similarity, in the wake of Magritte, Demand is playing a refined and tautological game with the various levels of reality, and making the reflection of presentation and representation his actual theme.

The self-termed pure photographic researcher, Michael

Wesely (1963), has for the past few years been working chiefly on the thorough investigation of his own medium, whose boundaries he tries to probe according to the rules of conceptual art. Above all, he programmatically casts doubt on the traditional documentary function of photography, whose technical possibilities are constantly examined on a self-referential meta-level. Unlike Demand, who constructs the "real" model of his staged photography, Wesely manipulates the modes of recording a pre-existing reality.

In large formats he depicts, in offensively bright colors, vertical stripes of various widths, that startlingly recall abstract painting. Brought together under the heading "New York 1995 Vertical," the cryptic-looking photographs each bear the title of the concretely localizing names of fast food restaurants. At first, it is unclear what the multicolored stripe pattern might have in common, apart from its colorful appearance, with the precise titles *Best Chinese Grill* or *Pizza Heroes*. Behind this is the idea of an extraordinary experiment with manipulated camera exposure: the picture is taken with a camera fitted with a slit aperture rather than the usual pinhole. Normal reception patterns are consequently avoided, as all the horizontal components of the chosen motif are filtered out by the slit, so that of the neon writing of the fast-food restaurant all that is recorded is vertical strips of light. Consequently, reality is re-coded according to the instructions of the altered camera optics, and the actual motif is kept out of sight. The astonishingly spatial-looking result of this mode of perception, which works contrary to the human eye, are "pure records of light" from the object, which, in their alternative coherence, present photography as an autonomous medium.

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