

RAUMBILDER — WANDBILDER 1991-94

ATTILIO ZANETTI RIGHI

Der Kreis zur Elipse

was
gezeigt
werden
kann
kann
nicht
gesagt
werden

Ludwig Wittgenstein

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Ins Englische übertragen von
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Der italienische Text wurde
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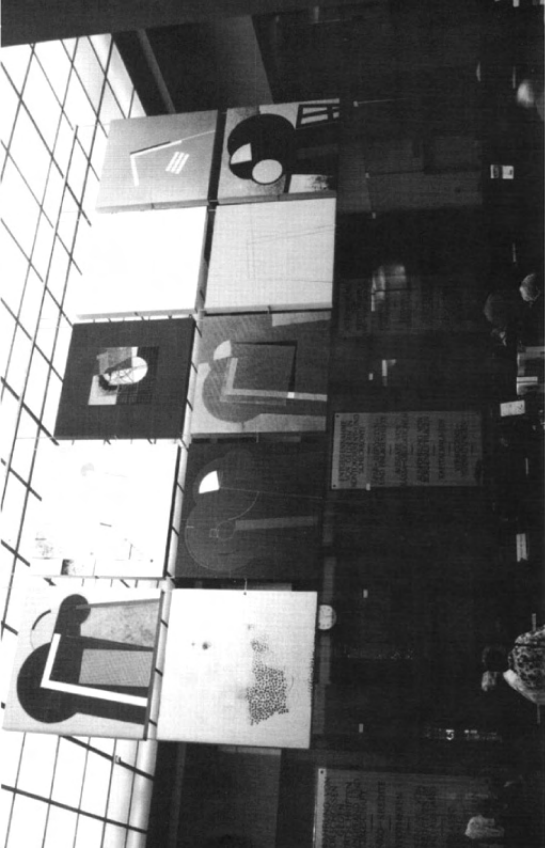
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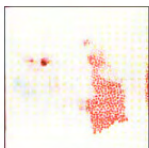
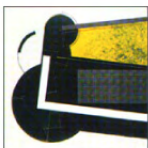
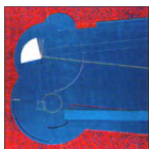
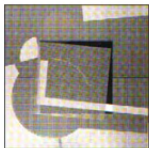
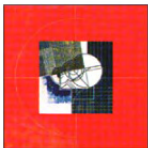
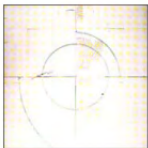
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Zehn Tafeln – 120 x 120 x 10 cm
Freihängendes Raumbild, Installation in der
Schalterhalle der Schweizerischen Volksbank,
Hauptsitz, Bahnhofstrasse 53 in Zürich
1993 – 1994

Fotos: 1-2/4-12/14-21 Speich, 3/13/22-25 De Meo



**Zwei Raumgestaltungen
in der Eingangshalle des
Kunden- und Verwaltungszentrums
der Schweizerischen Volksbank
"Galleria", Opfikon - Glattbrugg
Zürich 1991 – 1993**

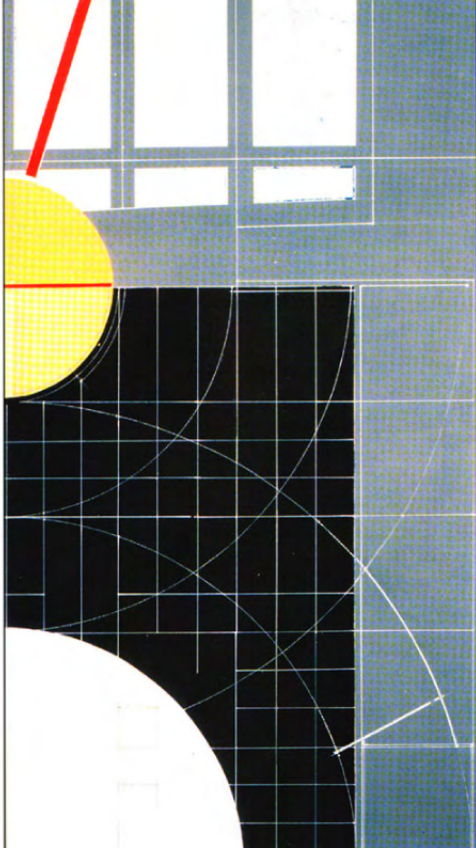
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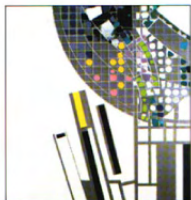
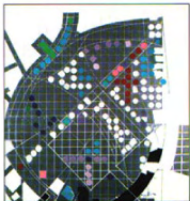


I
Eingangshalle
Horizontale Wand 780 x 230 x 18 cm

Fotos 28-29: Speich







Circling the painting like a billard player

On Attilio Zanetti's installation *Ten Panels*

Volker Schunck

Approach

"When I begin painting, I don't set off from an idea, rather more from a sort of sensation of temperature. I think that every colour emits its own temperature. However the idea of creating a 'cool' or a 'warm' piece may only be a pretext for beginning." We are standing in front of one of his earlier paintings, which depicts an ape-like primeval man next to two human silhouettes on a sandy ground (around 1970)¹. The orange coloured ground refers to the 'mezzogiorno', to the light, the climate of the 'ferragosto', to the place and time of year in which the work originated. We turn to a 'cool' counterpart, a light, large-format landscape; a deserted white space, which has wiped clear or covered up all figurative references. As one steps closer, one becomes aware of structures made up of small pieces, which have been pressed into the surface of the painting, like tracks in snow, or which emerge as a relief, like raised letters of a forgotten writing.

Hohlstrasse 86b, Zürich, at the end of August 1994. The author is visiting Attilio Zanetti, together with Isolde Schaad. Bent over table and drafts, we are discussing the conception of a catalogue. "I can do without a glossy self-portrayal, what is important for me here is the work not the person". The two visitors vote for a portrait of the artist with the intention of providing a minimum of information. Zanetti takes a likeness of himself, which shows him in winter coat, cuts the head from the body, and pushes it sideways over to us. And, while laughing, asking, "Maybe like this?".

A storm comes up. The terrace door stands open, rain drums on the lawn in the courtyard. Walls, façades, a church, a cross in the contre-jour of the evening sky like a Mediterranean silhouette. Pages in one of his dossiers, a ring binder with reproductions of his paintings and works on paper created in Rome in the last few years. Floating contours of roofs, columns, arches. White on white, a swab of gold, a dark-violet. Fragments of the eternal city like bleached mosaics, which evade the glance more than entrust. The transformation of the barely visible in the topography of the imagination. Some of these works from Rome are like fragments of an archaeology of the memory. Paint and layers like ripped wallpaper, which bring lower layers to light. Painting as a process of overlaying up and uncovering, of evocation and silencing.

Grid patterns like exposed tiles on a stone floor. A head in profile, anthropomorphous with connecting constructive contours. The magic of lost antiquity in the age of mechanisation. The past and the present as a transparency of discovered and imagined. Heads in profile with fan shaped auras around the forehead and facial areas appear like aureole in medieval icons. In reference to a heritage of his ancestors, he comments on the conspicuous tendency towards silver and gold tones, towards decorative sensuality as "flashes of the Byzantine".

Why does he prefer solid painting surfaces to canvases, we would like to know. "I rarely work on the wall. I work impulsively and very quickly with all kinds of tools, such as brushes, rollers, putty knives. I find it easier, if, when applying greater hand pressure, the panels lie horizontally on the table. My father was a passionate billiards player. And sometimes it seems to me as though, while working, I move in a similar way. Circling around the painting from all sides, zoning in on it. Using the brush, the painting tools, whatever it is, like a billiard cue. And acting according to each constellation, concentrated and quick. At least this idea amuses me."

Past History

The commission for an installation in the banking hall in the Swiss Volksbank in the renowned Bahnhofstrasse in Zürich was offered to Zanetti in 1993. A year earlier he had already realised a group of pieces for the foyer in the newly built administration centre of the Swiss Volksbank in Opfikon, an exemplary piece of contemporary architecture² on the northern city limit of Zürich. The multi-pieced ensemble has been installed on three walls of the foyer, a circular space with arcades and a positioned central cube. It is visible on first glance that the number, dimension and placement of the work is the result of concrete confrontation with the perceptual conditions of the context, the architectural conditions such as height of the room, wall surfaces, lighting, interior furnishings. Geometric drawings of grid patterns and segments of circles connote technical diagrams, architectural plans of buildings, structures of mental and visual logic. The subsequent commission in Bahnhofstrasse was offered to the same artist as well in order to emphasize, using visual aesthetics, the connection and affiliation of the administration building in Opfikon with the Zürich headquarters.³ The almost overwhelming, monumental ambience of the large banking hall, a neo-classical building of the 20's⁴ with sky-light, reddish brown ceramic friezes and yellow-black marble floor, was, in the thoughts of the commissioning client, to be "made more attractive and more contemporary without fashionable trendiness" through an artistic intervention.⁵ Also, in view of a possible later renovation of the banking hall, the pieces by Attilio Zanetti were to be removable, if feasible, in order to allow them to be presented in another place should the situation arise.

"I had to find a connection and a counterplay in order to give the rather protecting, enclosing hall a newer, lighter face and to bridge a historical time span of almost 70 years", commented Zanetti in a short text. "As there was to be no definite redesigning of the banking hall, I avoided a single large-format composition and created a piece made up of ten related panels, which becomes a totality through colour and the choice of content – floating, rotating movements in imaginary spaces."

One of the main concerns was, through the paintings, to provide the banking hall with a strong light, which radiated outwards in spite of the cramped entrance. "The paintings work from inside out, onto the street – mirroring in the glass at the counters and through reflections forming a large colour-flooded forum."

How do the paintings look?

Each of the panels stands on its own, could be removed and seen independently, and nevertheless refers to a cyclical order. Central elements of form appear in repetitive paraphrasing and set the individual icon in a comprehensive context, in the same way a period would in a many-lined composition. This "musical score" of signs, forms and colours takes on a rhythm according to the tension of the weight, the weightlessness, the fullness, the emptiness, the lightness, the darkness, the quiet and movement. Circular surfaces, segments of circles, angular forms in dynamic, floating composition. In particular the intersecting double circles figure as the thematic formulation of the group of paintings. The first panel in the upper row (seen from left to right) with its circular figures on a trapeze-like carrier already proves to be the key painting in the series. This complexity of forms transforms itself four times as a play of similarity and difference (panels 1,7,8,10).

Signs and drawings of rotation with references to technical civilisation, to mechanics, to circular developments of a dynamic view of the world. The silver-grey colouring of three panels and surfaces with perforated metal grids refer to industrial technology, to gleaming light metals, the materials of airplanes and speed. As well, the "dry" drawing associates the precise line work of construction elevations or blueprints of machines, hydraulic lifts or geared mechanisms. Through the eyes of art history they are reminiscent of the early avantgarde, of the Futurists' discovery of forms, as well as the Russian Constructivists, the pioneers of an abstract-kinetic vocabulary.

If figurative or psychological content is also almost completely faded out, the double circle therefore refers in the further context of Zanetti's iconography to originally anthropomorphic formulations. In a series of previous paintings and works on paper he moves still human-like constellations of

pairs, particularly heads with fan-shaped aureole, to the centre of his imagery. This 'constructive' transformation of a figuratively characterised theme in the "Ten Panels" is motivated on the one hand by the increasing objectivity of his means of expression in the pieces of the previous years and on the other hand by the architectonic and functional environment of a banking hall.

The power and unity of the tangible volumes are balanced out by light, almost floating fields, as for example in the atmospheric sixth panel (first panel, second row) with its 'tachistic' red swabs against the cloudy white. This painting appears singular not only because of its fluffy, sensual style of painting, but rather also because of the openness of the space, different from the constructive concept of space in the other panels. Formulations in the Ten Panels also include tilted, 'rotating' angular forms in both of the upper left panels, which, together with their counterparts in the upper right of the picture plane, centre the complete sequence as open 'brackets', like fragments of a frame.

The dialectic of similarity and difference also organises the colour rhythms of the "Ten Panels": heavy, dark-toned sections, black and grey surfaces, earthy red changes with light, glowing passages such as white, yellow, silver and ultramarine. These light and colour intensive, almost monochromatic surfaces determine the chromatic impression of the painting order, whose 'placative' appeal directs one to a middle to further viewing distance.

The painting surfaces of the tableaux are closed cases, a hand's breadth in depth and faced with aluminium panels on the back. The case-like form guarantees a unwarpable stability of the painting surface; moreover there are aesthetic motives at play. This is because, similarly to a sculpture, the series of paintings can and should be perceived from all sides, due to its placement towards the back area of the banking hall; not on the wall, but hanging freely in space.

The backs of the cases, which occupy the employees' field of vision at the furthestmost counter area, therefore had to be included in the expressive process. Structured according to the laws of simple symmetry, the cool aluminium sheeting is livened up by the colourful lateral edges of the cases. Their unpretentious, imageless form proves a contrapuntal pause and empty space in relation to the architecture, as well as to the front side of the tableaux with their intensely colourful formulations.

It might appear that certain peripheral limitations of the installation (such as number of panels, format, arrangement and suspension from steel bars on the ceiling) are motivated by adapting to specific givens or conditions in the banking hall (visibility, operations installations, interior architecture, 'atmosphere', etc). However, the paintings, their essential message, assert themselves less in harmony with the conditions of perception in the architecture, but rather gain their energy and their ethos much more in resistance and in contestation of the contextual conditions. This distinguishes them from decoration. The aesthetic discourse of scientific or technical functionality does not communicate the limiting of disruptive factors, but much more the indication of the heterogenic as elements of freedom and contradiction.

The ten-part series, stricter in the formal organisation and at the same time freer in the use of paraphrasing of the 'international modern', presents itself as a synthesis of his many years of work in the combining of emotions, artistic refinement and Mediterranean sensualism.

The eye of the observer

In the double rowed order of the "Ten Panels", the linear process of reading overlaps with the simultaneous perception of seeing. It is the freedom of the observer to play this part or to evade it. The paintings require in any case a more conscious than intuitive eye in order to come into being a second time in a process of active perception.

The paintings are silent. Their energy, their expressive content evade verbal conclusion. We are aware of this insight when we talk or write about paintings, when we pull paintings into the realm of language through interpretation. The labyrinth of words resist them with its own being. And if the paintings are mentioned here, then with the knowledge that this discourse is temporary and open, without the arrogance of a rash usurpation. The word, the consciousness oscillates between visual and verbal experience. The one requires the other in order to illuminate itself in the reflection of difference.

1) "Metamorphosis" - The painting is in the collection of Ursula and Theodor Waibel - equally the works published in this book "Eis-Blut-Rot" and "Blaue Räume"

2) The large construction complex in red brick with central glass roof above an expansive central courtyard, completed in 1992, was conceived by the architectural group: Daniel Gerber and Xavier Nauer - Burkhardt Partner AG - Honnegger & Glus

3) Rudolf Hochreutener, in an interview with V.S.

4) Erected in 1922-25 by the architectural offices of Honnegger & Moser

5) Rudolf Hochreutener in an interview with V.S.

6) Attilio Zanetti, Zürich-Rome, September 9th, 1994