

04.11.2011 – 30.01.2012

HERMANN NITSCH STRUCTURES

architectural drawings, scores and
realizations of the »o.m.theater«



Hermann Nitsch, Colour Scale (Detail), 2005
Atelier Hermann Nitsch, Prinzendorf © VBK Vienna, 2011

Hermann Nitsch, Colour Scale, 2005
Atelier Hermann Nitsch, Prinzendorf © VBK Vienna, 2011



HERMANN NITSCH – STRUCTURES: THE DRAWN OEUVRE

The Leopold Museum, in cooperation with the Nitsch Foundation, is presenting the first comprehensive exhibition in Austria within a museum setting of the drawn and graphical oeuvre of Hermann Nitsch (*1938). Inspired by a project first realized in France by Lóránd Hegyi, the Leopold Museum Private Foundation and the Leopold family asked Prof. Hermann Nitsch and Carl Aigner to further develop and elaborate on this original concept in order to be able to present a new version of it in Vienna. The Actionist Hermann Nitsch is one of the most important contemporary Austrian artists. His holistic approach to art, which involves all the senses and merges music with the performing and visual arts, is entirely unique. Approximately 300 objects are showcased in this exhibition, the ideas behind which all converge in Nitsch's o.m. theater (Orgies Mysteries Theater). The presentation's curator, Carl Aigner, who has frequently worked with Prof. Hermann Nitsch in the past, in no way sees the present exhibition at the Museums-Quartier as an art historical presentation. While Nitsch's works are partly shown in a chronological order, the most important aspect of the presentation is the universal character of the o.m. theater, the artist's life's work, which manifests itself in the animated character of his exhibitions: »For Nitsch, every exhibition is in itself an event of the o.m. theater.«

FROM SCRIBBLED DRAWINGS TO THE ASOLO ROOM

The exhibition's main focus is on Hermann Nitsch's architectural designs, but the presentation also comprises early sketches for monumental compositions and informal scribbled drawings. Sketches from various actions, color scales for projections, scores for his »music« as well as printed graphics and the largely identical reconstruction of one of his installations, the legendary »Asolo-Room« (1973), afford further insights into Hermann Nitsch's unique universe. Within his own cosmos, Nitsch attempts to unravel the secrets and mysteries of existence:

»IF IT CAN BE SAID THAT ALL OF CREATION IS MY BODY, IT CAN ALSO BE SAID THAT BEING THAT WHICH PORTRAYS ITSELF IS THEATRE, THE DRAMA OF THE WORLD'S GENESIS AS IT OCCURS, THE CREATION OF BEING. EVEN SO, LIFE BUILT ITSELF ARENAS, CULT SITES, TEMPLES AND CHURCHES, WHERE MASSES OF THE THEATRICAL, OF THE DRAMATIC ARE CELEBRATED. THROUGH THEATRE, BEING SHOULD CARVE ITSELF OUT IN A CONCENTRATED, ESSENTIAL WAY, BRINGING ITSELF INTO THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF HUMAN BEINGS. TRIUMPH OF THEATRE.«

(hermann nitsch: DAS SEIN. zur theorie des orgien mysterien theaters [being], Vol. 2, STYRIA, 2009, p. 634)

THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE ORGIES MYSTERIES THEATER

All his life, Hermann Nitsch has been gripped by the idea of building a temple, a gigantic theater complex, or even an underground city for theatrical happenings in the sense of a Gesamtkunstwerk or total work of art. The artist himself has remarked on this: »I desired to build theatre facilities that did justice to the sensuous magnificence of action theatre. perhaps there also existed the longing to build a temple of the grail for my theatre. the fundamental tendency in my work for the sacralising to combat the secularising has never tired of designing a temple for all the holy acts contained within my type of theatre. even if these occurrences have found their fundamental metaphysical reality in their deepest profane quality of being, detached from the ritual and the cultic.«

(hermann nitsch 2010)

THE HOLISTIC ASPECT OF NITSCH'S OEUVRE: SPLATTER PAINTINGS AS A PRELUDE AND FINALE

The exhibition's curator, Carl Aigner, views Nitsch's holistic approach to art as an essential aspect of his oeuvre. »Nothing can be divided«, as Aigner points out, since all the individual parts constitute reciprocal references and building blocks for his Gesamtkunstwerk. While the exhibition primarily focuses on Nitsch's drawings and printed graphics, some spectacular, large-scale paintings have been hung in the Leopold Museum's lower atrium, both as a prelude and a fervent finale to the exhibition. They are splatter paintings from various phases of the artist's oeuvre and include an enormous, more than 10-meter long, predominantly red painting from 1992 – the color red symbolizing vitality and blood – as well as a six-meter tall floor painting turned mural that was created five years later and whose seemingly neutral black hue appears like an autonomous color. This symphony of contrasts leads to unexpected harmonies. Another splatter painting completed in 2003 marks a special period in Hermann Nitsch's oeuvre with its intense yellow color. Nitsch's constant exposure to paints had started to take a massive toll on the artist's health and he celebrated overcoming this crisis by using bright, strong colors. Equally impressive is his four-meter tall installation of a splatter painting with a painter's shirt and a shrine, completed in 2011.

NITSCH THE THEATER MAKER

Hermann Nitsch, 2011
Photo: Leopold Museum / Spicker



Carl Aigner sees Hermann Nitsch as the most radical Austrian theater maker, unsurpassed even by Bertolt Brecht. Nitsch started to take a keen interest in the theater in the 1950s, his Action paintings already constituting the first step towards his o.m. theater. Spontaneity being a primary objective, these happenings are characterized by a maximum degree of artistic and improvisatory freedom. According to Aigner »authenticity dominates at the moment of realization«. The idea is for all forms of sensory perception to be brought together, with as much scope being given to the Dionysian unpredictable aspect as to the Apollonian rational angle, as the artist believes that existence is determined by these two opposite poles.

EARLY WORKS: LAST SUPPER AND CRUCIFIXION

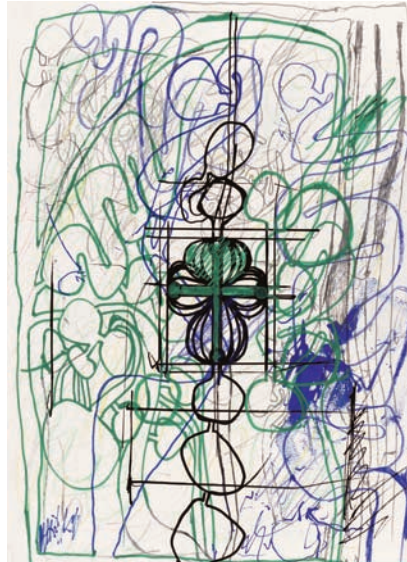
A separate section of the exhibition is dedicated to Nitsch's early works, including a bible cover created by the 20-year-old artist as his diploma project at the Federal Training and Research Institute for Graphic Arts and Media Vienna (1958). The work, rendered in bold colors, depicts Jesus holding the chalice. The rendering's main focus is on the head and hands, whose position is highly reminiscent of the hand gestures found in Egon Schiele's oeuvre. Around a year later, Nitsch started to draw crucifixion scenes, such as the masterful and highly animated drawing based on Rembrandt's etching »The Three Crosses« (1653). Nitsch views Schiele, Oskar Kokoschka and Gustav Klimt as important role models. Although they often might not look it at first sight, he likes his works to be »sweet«, for he is interested in the sensual, Baroque aspect that can be found in many of the rites of the major religions.

Equally interesting are his informal scribbled drawings, which are reactions to Art Informel and might also have been inspired by the early oeuvre of Arnulf Rainer. The paths of these two legendary artists crossed time and again. In the 1970s, Rainer even kept a studio at Hermann Nitsch's Prinzenhof residence for several years.

Carl Aigner believes that Nitsch might have been inspired specifically by Rainer's so-called »blind drawings« created in the early 1950s and by his »scribbled expressions«. Nitsch's works of this kind are about emanations – he wants to draw forth the power from within in order to »get to the substance of painting«.

UNDERGROUND ARCHITECTURE

Hermann Nitsch, Architekturzeichnung, 2010
Privatsammlung. © VBK Wien, 2011



Around the mid-1960s, about the same time Hermann Nitsch developed and strengthened his system of musical scores, he started to create architectural drawings, inspired by his colleagues Walter Pichler, Hans Hollein and Raimund Abraham as well as by his own land art sketches. As he vehemently rejected most of contemporary architecture, he began to harbor the desire to build and expand his architecture underground.

»we dig ourselves into the bowels of the earth.«

»my actions require the most extreme sensuality. turning physical and bodily gives inside-out is the leitmotif of the theatre of orgies and mysteries, bloody and moist internal organs are constantly in view. entrails and intestines are laid bare, and the vegetative-creaturely, incarnate occurrence of our species is constantly demonstrated. In this sense, organic forms repeatedly find their

way into my architectural drawings. the entire thing, all developmental stages of the natural occurrence that is the human being, is to flow into this rampantly proliferating architecture. therefore, repeated structures of intestine, kidney and liver forms, human and plant-derived organic forms. the mannerist expansion of my theatre project makes it conceivable that my actions take place in an architecture in which not only individual organs, but the entire human body is reformed into spaces. the act of starting with rather abstract organic forms led to my present designs for actual architectural forms which literally replicate entire bodies or refer thereto. drawings such as the last supper and the entombment of christ are architectural drawings according to figurative models.«
(hermann nitsch, 2010)

Hermann Nitsch
»Das letzte Abendmahl«, A/P, 1983
Nitsch Foundation, Wien
© VBK Wien, 2011



HUMAN ARCHITECTURE

The exhibition »Structures« also features some exceptional examples of human architecture, including the twofold silkscreen print »The Last Supper« (1983), whose doubling effect causes the scene to become blurred, the work »The Entombment of Christ« (2006-07), which was created in collaboration with Kurt Zein, as well as anatomical renderings, such as »Oedipus Christ« (1987). Following his in-depth study of anatomy, Nitsch conceived an analysis of the bodies of humans and animals, depicting intestines, blood vessels, neural pathways and muscle strands.

The silkscreen print »The Fall of Jerusalem« (2008), based on a 1971 drawing, as well as many other architectural drawings all show a cross, the living heart of the composition, surrounded by a mesh of loops, tubes, vessels and organs, with numbers serving as the composition's framework.

THE SCORES: THE TOTALITY OF ACOUSTICS

Nitsch's musical scores, such as the »Egyptian Score« for his 9th Symphony, all reveal a highly complicated grid. The »totality« of acoustics can be explained by the all-encompassing vision of the o.m. theater. Nitsch developed his own system for noting down his sound creations, with black patches denoting instrumental entries, while the musicians themselves decide upon the dynamics. Here the unpredictable element constitutes a major part of the whole as well. The Gesamtkunstwerk is also expressed in scores which have been printed as etchings onto an Action painting (2004). Visible above the score is a cross, whose arms extend into organic shapes. It is a work that combines music, action, architecture and painting.

Nitsch's main objective is to render subconscious and vegetative-organic elements visible. According to Aigner, Nitsch rejects Sigmund Freud's approach to the subconscious for being too methodical and academic and instead seeks to regain human dimensions unrestrained by rational thought, to relive a vegetative sense of pleasure in the ecstatic state of being, with the creation of rooms and caves underneath the earth conjuring up memories of one's first home, the womb.

Hermann Nitsch, Golden Love, 1967, 159 x 323 cm
Museo MAGI'900 © VBK Wien, 2011



COLOR SCALES – GOLDEN LOVE

With his color scales, which first appeared in his 1967 painting dedicated to his first wife Beate entitled »Golden Love«, Hermann Nitsch has created surprising blocks of color. Thanks to his wife's financial support, Nitsch was able to buy Prinzendorf castle from the Klosterneuburg Monastery in 1971, a castle that Nitsch knew from visiting relatives there during his childhood. The castle not only became the center of Nitsch's life after his return from exile in Germany but also the venue of the o.m. theater. Between the late 1970s and the early 1990s Nitsch made his students at the Frankfurt Academy of Visual Arts draw color scales in order to teach them an »unbiased approach to colors« and an understanding of color tones and flows: »each color is meant to make the others glow and ring«. His recent scales made up of horizontal stripes were created as multimedia collages using oil pastels.

MULTIMEDIA RECORDINGS OF ACTIONS AND O.M. THEATER PERFORMANCES

The photographic documentation of actions from the 1960s, such as the 1965 »Penis Rinsing«, and of sequences from the »Six Day Play« as well as video recordings of his actions and o.m. theater performances afford vivid multimedia insights into how the artist's ideas are implemented. The exhibition also features important written documents, such as Nitsch's instructions on the realization of his late 1960s 2nd »Abreaktionsspiel« [reaction game].

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PICTURES

For press photographs and pictures of the exhibition rooms, please visit the press section of our website: www.leopoldmuseum.org/presse

CATALOGUE ACCOMPANYING THE EXHIBITION



240 pages with numerous illustrations
(some of which have never been published before)
With texts by Hermann Nitsch, Carl Aigner, Frank Gassner,
Lóránd Hegyi, Diethard Leopold, Michael Karrer.

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FRAMEWORK PROGRAM

Free guided tours around the exhibition

Saturdays, 3 pm, 05.11., 19.11., 03.12. and 17.12.2011,
07.01. and 21.01.2012

Guided tours upon request

Guided tours in various languages are available for booking.

Film screening followed by a panel discussion

NITSCH – Requiem, das Hohelied des Lebens [Requiem, the Song of Life] (in German)
ARTvideo by TEAM[:]niel, Thursday, 01.12.2011

Details on the framework program

www.leopoldmuseum.org

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