

Hajo Schiff about Heiko Zahlmann (2009)

A cement structure out of tonnes of the same abrasive material that he once used to spray his graffiti on, is on the verge of being built. In the concrete jungle he learned how to keep a watchful eye and in swift works practised his lettering on urban wall spaces. Today he brings rudimentary pieces of graffiti into the open desert of the emirates. Is Heiko Zahlmann celebrating a radical farewell with these gestures, to all that was once important to him? His exhibitions are now more frequently hosted in galleries and museums but can he only triumph when he puts an end to being a sprayer.

No - Heiko Zahlmann cannot deny his past. Street art here, gallery art there and art in open public spaces: His present time cross-border works of art would not be possible without his sprayer background. Dousing cement cubes in colour and the sprayers wrist-joint movements that produce free gestural lines on canvas all dates back to his sprayer days. However, where do the monochrome black, grey and white pieces derive from? If looked at closely, even these panel works, relief sculptures and free standing columns have a structure on their surfaces which is more precisely written than drawn. They are, if anything, monuments of theoretic possibilities that bring unfamiliar scriptures to life. Additionally, they give the outstanding cultural invention of script a new form. Heiko Zahlmann, himself, says that he creates "graffiti without graffiti" or characterises his field of work as "graffiti 3.0". In the further development of his art, he analyses the past and future of his genre; If his formerly engraved scrawls on black base coat exist in the old tradition of personalized sgraffitos, then Heiko Zahlmann cooperates with architects in order to launch his expressive forms in a large-scale format into the cityscape.

Slowly but surely the long struggled for graffiti works are recognised, nonetheless, Heiko Zahlmann's art, on the contrary, is met with dissatisfaction especially in the ritualised sprayer scene. Why should someone who has been engaged in working with script for the past 20 years not continue to develop his work rather than let it be used for publicity purposes? Paradoxically, he may have to deal with his graffiti inspired work being sprayed over by younger sprayers in open public spaces for the dynamic reshaping of urban structures carries on. In his sci-fi classic "planet of the apes" inspired desert piece, Heiko Zahlmann defined graffiti as the founding key medium in an apparent archaeological retrospective. Maybe some day in the far future his works will be the hieroglyphics to rebuilding our long forgotten ways of life.

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