

Heiko Zahlmann

The artistic oeuvre of the Hamburg based artist Heiko Zahlmann needs to be understood as a process that originated in graffiti in 1989.

His personal artistic expression, which in his active phase in urban space was characterized by the pictorial elaboration of three-dimensional typography and effects, made Heiko Zahlmann a pioneer of German style writing.

In the middle of the nineties, Zahlmann turned his attention to divergent means of expression without neglecting the source of his artistic work so far - the letter. Quite the contrary, the letter became a fertile inspiration and the foundation of a very distinct language of form.

Without any official artistic education, Heiko Zahlmann got inquired since 1993 by highly renowned architects, such as Rem Koolhaas, and in collaboration with various architects' offices, implemented a number of creative projects

in the international arena. In the course of this, the Hamburg artist was able to develop and perfect techniques of plastic work. In 2002 and 2003, during his first museum and gallery exhibitions, Zahlmann's awareness grew that the

mere transfer of his graffiti onto easily transportable, interchangeable canvases was not sufficient to meet the formal and substantive development of his work within the new interior space context. To prevent his works from the feared

impression of arbitrary decoration he chose concrete as ground to paint on, which seemed to him the most consistent measure. New in the context of exhibitions the concrete panels achieved to preserve a bit of authenticity and

that could maintain the uncomfortable character of his public artworks. After the parallel running development of the successive reduction of color diversity to monochromatic surfaces, Zahlmann completely extinguished the color:

Now, the interest was focused exclusively on shape, however, continued to result from the outline of letters. Having never been interested in the fame connected to spraying his name all over the streets, for Zahlmann the characters

lost their semantic function, were faced with deconstruction and almost accidentally puzzled together again. Circular shapes gave way for angular forms and linear structures, colorants were used solely to produce relief-like effects.

With that Zahlmann broke out of the graffiti scene's rules and developed from the blustering writing a meditatively reticently use of forms, which probably discloses itself to only a few people, as it appears to be even more cryptic as

many graffiti writings to outsiders. This outlined process points out the gradual becoming of his earned artistic latitude and upholds by the emancipation from the mere picturesque: Where once three-dimensional effects simulated

spatiality, now, having become objects, his works jut out three-dimensionally indeed and create via the play of light and shadow those effects, which formerly were imitated by elaborate colour gradients.

Over the term of this development from being sprayer to become sculptor, the graffiti origin has not been lost at least in two ways: The favoured material of Zahlmann's work remained to be concrete, which now is not primarily used

to spray upon, but to trowel, carve and shape. Furthermore, the eyes trained on the street in regard of architectonic correlation happen to be helpful for creating site-specific reliefs and sculptures in public and private spaces, where

they inevitably establish a dialogue with their surrounding.

Even if Zahlmann steps back on the street with public projects like the sculpture "20357" made of 100 tons of concrete in Hamburg, it would not be quite right to argue that the circle once begun with graffiti is now completed here; it

is rather a circulation around the question of spatial correlations and architectonic composition, that in a processual understanding can be described as an upward spiral.

Katharina Gallade, Galerie Droste, Wuppertal, 2016