

Night and Day / Hundrich

Martin Breuninger, 10.2010

Herbert W. H. Hundrich was born in 1951 in Collrunge/Wittmund in East Frisia (Germany). That was the same year in which Theodor W. Adorno made his famous statement that it was a barbarian act to write a poem after Auschwitz. This meant, in a figurative way, the denial of any possibility for any form of art to create something following the Nazi gas chambers. To this, the art student Hundrich replied in 1977: Auschwitz is the most important reason for creating art.

No person, no country, no continent can shed its past as if it were an old garment. We are marked by our history and our culture, which define our perception and our experience and thus our thinking and our doing. Only he who is aware of these indelible influences is able to value them afresh and freely decide if he wishes to keep them, modify them or dispose of them. As such, Hundrich does not declare, "I think, therefore I am", but rather, "I remember, therefore I am". Thoughts and actions geared to the future are based on this, as are the foundations of his art.

The philosopher Peter Sloterdijk once wrote that Hundrich's generation was dragged out of the core of traditions like a survivor from the ruins of a bombed out building. Transmitted culture stopped being trustworthy for having brought death and destruction to the world in magnitudes hitherto unknown. The ruinous debris of tradition left only one path for modern man, aware of history, to follow: he had to create himself and his culture anew.

No culture can consider a new beginning without art. Art is a necessary means to express and shape the present and the future, offering the chance to continuously question and seek answers and solutions.

After World War II and in the face of the ruins of Europe, Konrad Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle placed the first stone of what is today known as the European Union.

Hundrich, who has lived abroad for over 25 years, knows first hand that old national patterns continue to prevent the formation of a European identity. An example of this are the regionalist linguistic policies of Spain and Belgium which not only serve to maintain tradition but also become a deliberate instrument of discrimination and exclusion.

How can patterns of thought and behaviour be transformed and transferred to the present day? Art plays an essential role in this issue. It is well placed to suggest new ideas, develop new ways of expression and, above all, to create and open new spaces. This capacity to create space is a prerequisite for people to find, propose and develop their own identities.

As such, Hundrich works in abstract form. Only in abstraction can he find the spiritual space to break with ancient concepts and definitions and develop new ideas. Here he creates new concepts which he then puts into practice.

An example: At the beginning of the last millennium he created paintings in strips. Colour, form, movement and dynamics, in abstraction and on the canvas, gave way to

parallel and overlapping interactions. Here he developed the principle of inter-culturality, of communication between cultures.

Taking it a step further, we worked with different types of paper and its reaction when in contact with colour. Each type of paper reacted differently. Not better or worse, just different. The conclusion that each person is different and has a right to be, as is the case with inter-culturality, forms the basis of the WoodHouse Project 2006 – an artistic project involving young people from Israel, Palestine and Germany.

Whilst bombs were dropped on Lebanon, the participants in this project built a wooden house. After 14 days one of the young people said: “A house for Christians, Jews and Moslems, Israelis, Palestinians and Germans is the greatest work of art in and of itself”. At the beginning of the project the participants treated each other with distrust. Weeks later, when they had all returned home, Jews and Arabs met in Israel to have an ice cream, all calling their new friends on the West Bank.

Meanwhile, Hundrich searched again in abstraction and distance. To act looking to the future means for him to permanently question your own stance, after having identified and recognised it.

Over a period of around ten years he used all the possibilities offered by his paintings in strips. Now he works with inner and outer skin, needing to destroy old limitations and build new ones. Various and different works in polyester, fibreglass and colour pigments emerged from this. The only thing remaining is Hundrich’s typical hallmark, his unconditional stamp.

His sculptures have the lightness of paintings; paintings that have features of plasticity due to their execution. Hundrich creates open and closed spaces in his works. He deconstructs some figures. He saws off creations reminiscent of earthenware jars and rearranges the pieces in a new relationship with each other and their surroundings.

Hundrich does not exaggerate when he refers to these works as ‘subjects’. For, like subjects, they communicate spontaneously with each other and with their environment. From colour and light provide the contact with the environment. By using sunlight, moonlight and LED light technology as an artistic and plastic element he illuminates and considers inner and outer worlds. The presentation and way in which his works are perceived change as light changes from day to night.

With these works Hundrich has set new standards for himself and for art. His works structure, configure, separate and, at the same time, bring the inner and outer worlds together. There is no contradiction in these works between the form that defines content and the content which defines form. They are impressive for being transparent and open and, at the same time, closed; they surprise with their beauty and lightness, offering the highest resistance and stability. In short, these works establish new levels of experience and open doors to new contemporary concepts.

Likewise, and with regard to world political reality, these works are highly current. The post-war era was taken over by globalisation. Multinationals operate at world and transnational levels. Migrants cross borders- legally or illegally- and in many countries, especially in Europe, we can see how the defenders of regional tradition attempt to

protect themselves against a culture of international consumerism, but also against the cultural input brought with them by the immigrants.

The lack of limits on globalisation clashes with the old national and continental concepts. Once again, usual identification patterns are questioned. Furthermore, the problem of resource distribution and means of production has become ever more important. We therefore cannot avoid opening up to the new and, at the same time, to set our boundaries once again, create and shape new spaces.

In this light and from this perspective, all the aspects of Hundrich's works prove to be stunningly contemporary.

Martin Breuninger