

GALERIE TSCHUDI

Absolutely Tschudi

21 December 2019 – 21 March 2020

Absolutely Tschudi is, to borrow the words of Richard Long, a “meandering way” through Ruedi Tschudi’s art world, as manifested in his gallery. Elsbeth Bisig lays bare a system of thought that combines moments of association with crystal clear statements by individual artists, all of whom know the marvellous spaces of the Chesa Madalena down to the last corner from working on their solo exhibitions. Since Elsbeth and Ruedi opened the gallery in Zuoz in 2002, this building has become a powerful shell for the art as well as for the affectionate visitors who populate this, on every level open, house.

The magnificent traditional Engadin house, converted by Hansjörg Ruch, seems to encapsulate some of the qualities of the Tschudi gallery’s own architectural origins: on the one hand the traditional *belle époque* villa, Ruedi’s family home, which he used as a gallery space from 1985; on the other hand the great expanse of the pillar-free hangar, which back in its day set new architectural standards in the international gallery scene. The art works seem to find their perfect place in these spaces, or more precisely: Ruedi and Elsbeth gave this place the ideal spaces for art.

Nowhere does this become clearer than in the permanently installed pieces, which enter into an ever-changing dialogue with each new temporary exhibition. The position of Niele Toroni’s piece on the wall by the entrance provides a sense of scale, as do the spaces themselves. For this exhibition, Toroni created his *Ommagio a Ruedi*: three new works that show the free rhythm of his imprints of the N° 50 paintbrush at a regular interval of 30 centimetres, superimposed on historical information posters representing indigenous Swiss species of snakes and lizards. Toroni’s “empreintes” (French: imprints) are fundamental gestures of the act of painting, which through their power of existential symbolism can be read as standing for the principle of “action” itself. They form an autonomous layer over the animals that Ruedi Tschudi loved the most.

We are now invited to enter Ruedi Tschudi’s world of images, in which intellectual space is assigned to human beings, while a different but equally valid space belongs to animals. However, we can only access this latter space in a limited way – through myths and fairy tales for example, and through our love for animals, however it may express itself. One cannot imagine Ruedi without his love for animals, which confront us as beings without a filter: from a cat’s flattering caress to the motionless, timeless pose of the chameleon as it changes its colours. This thought, very Tschudi, will guide us through the exhibition.

The choreography of a traditional Engadin house is also a symbolic form: from the lower levels of the *Cuort* and the *Stalla* via the *Suler*, the *Stüva*, the *Chadafö* and the *Chambras* to the spacious hay loft, the *Talvo*, and finally the *Crapenda*, the attic on the top floor, large enough to host a reception and used in the past to store the fruits of daily labour. The house is therefore also a representation of the rural lifecycle – and this, too, is a way to read the exhibition.

In the stable forecourt we expect animals, of course. The large-scale black and white photograph by Balthasar Burkhard however, surprises us with the incongruous, massive presence of a rhinoceros. Shot before a neutral background, the great herbivore appears petrified into an archetype, its archaic shape closer to a sculpture than a living being. In a corner piece by Martina Klein, painting is staged as a choreography of monochrome colour, while the composition flows from the spatial installation, thus evoking the expansion of perception intended by the artist. This constellation is followed by a *Mudwork* on a piece of found wood, sporting the impressive imprints of Richard Long’s index finger, remarkable for their sheer size alone. In the former *Stalla* we encounter four new stone sculptures by Julian Charrière, consisting of boulders – of the kind once carried on the backs of glaciers – permeated by core drills. They are reminiscent of the honeycomb habitat of an insect, while the drill cores surrounding them make the process of production tangible. They are interrupted by polished metal rods,

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referring to the questions raised by the extraction of these metals from the ground and the technological processes on an industrial scale required to do so. *Not All Who Wander Are Lost* is one of the artist's characteristic soundings of these depths, convincingly merging ecological questions and artistic form.

One floor up, in the hay loft, there is a new stone circle by Richard Long composed of stones from Marmorera – where the historic village on the route of the Julier Pass was sunk beneath the waters of the reservoir created in 1954 – and from the riverbed of the Rhone. Set within the ideal shape of the circle is a cross akin to those found on wind rose compasses. Using this compelling symbol, Long displaces the walked and experienced landscape into interior space. The fact that the hay loft remains connected to the outside by the ventilation slats makes it the perfect location for Richard Long's work, for here the interface between inside and outside vividly impacts the perception of the viewer. Beyond this form of rural peasant housing, we tend to have limited experience of this exposed kind of interior, which artist Callum Innes also engages with his two *Resonances*. His images, with their subtle layers of paint, are resonance chambers, exploring the possibilities of painting just as the *Talvo* space enacts its relationship to the exterior space of the surrounding landscape.

The Canton of Glarus and the Engadin are the two landscapes in which Ruedi Tschudi lived and worked ever since he attended the Lyceum in Zuoz in his youth. In the complex landscape images of *Chlönthal* and *Bernina* by Balthasar Burkhard both regions appear as illustrative archetypes. The diptych by Dan Walsh emphasises the free layering of colour characteristic of the artist's work, while the two paintings by Martina Klein employ perceptions of colour to playfully circle the idea of duality.

In the *Quersuler* space, Not Vital turns the iconic mountains of his new drawings upside down, while the kitchen continues the exhibition with Toroni's three *Empreintes* on snake posters and Not Vital's stag antlers with their English "four letter word", suggesting the kind of direct connection that characterised the existential relationship between human and animal for Millennia. It was a straightforward case of naked survival. The antlers give an animalistic answer, though the animal no longer lives; it's only remaining function is as a trophy. Not Vital symbolically returns a powerful voice to the once living being.

A more harmonious relationship unfolds in the *Stüva* opposite between a white painting composed of titan white and lamp black and a delicate red collage, both by Callum Innes. Many of us will recall Ruedi Tschudi sitting among dense fumes of smoke on the oven bench. His fading hearing protects him from being too pressingly besieged by guests, while his sympathy for all flows as freely as his proverbial hospitality. The intense conversations about art were and are especially present in this space, and that is perceptible in the subtle dialogue within and between the two works.

The wall painting as well as the four wall texts on painted pieces of wood by Hamish Fulton pick up the theme of inside-outside again, condensed into a text about a 15 day hike in the area of Samedan from 11th – 25th July 2000. It is painted directly on the wall and visually links the up and down movements of visitors in the Chesa Madalena to the local landscape. In the space behind, three panoramic photographs by Petra Wunderlich, shot from the turret of the Chesa Madalena, and a fourth photo showing the outside of the house in Zuoz, its steel door shuttered for winter. The seemingly timeless quality of these images speak to an immutability beyond the superficial appearance of things, while the materiality of the zinc and copper sculpture by Carl Andre in itself suggests continuous change. *Voltaglyph 26* consists of two rows of 13 alternate plates of copper and zinc on a scale of 25 x 25 x 1 cm. Equipped with electrolytes – a medium of electronic conduit – the plates could yield a galvanic element, a battery, named after the Italian chemist Alessandro Volta. The tension in the photographs by Petra Wunderlich results from the temporal distance that seems to exist between the moment of the photograph being taken and the present. The image appears devoid of cars, vehicles through which we can usefully date a photograph but which we also like to erase from our imaginary – as these poetic images prove. Classical photography is based on the chemistry of silver halide and was always somewhat alchemical in nature. But it is only with the rise of digital photography that we have been able to perceive this clearly.

With its unusual shape for a painting, the large light grey *Triangle Painting* by Alan Charlton is also an immediate, iconic sign. It fits perfectly into the diamond shaped wall surface and directs its arrow-shaped form upwards, while the smaller *Triangle Paintings* with their graduated tones of dark grey approach the absolute form of the

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isosceles triangle, which in Leonardo da Vinci's famous drawing encloses the proportions of man in the ideal forms of the circle, the square and the triangle.

The relationship between artistic production and reception of works of art is among the central concerns of contemporary artists. Bethan Huws continuously redefines the content of the art work, its methods, its aesthetics and the relations between them. Sketches for her film script *Zone* give an insight into the detailed work of preparatory drawing that precedes media production. The new works centre on the image of the crouching frog, familiar to us from childhood: the fairy tale of the Frog Prince, only temporarily unbalanced by the grass-green chatterbox Kermit from the American TV series *The Muppets*, which flooded childhood memories even in Europe from 1969 onwards. Bethan Huws has the iconic stuffed toy frog sitting on a luxurious fur cap, as it might be worn to an event like White Turf in St. Moritz. It is placed on a black woodwork wig stand: the fairy tale of the prince that emerges when the frog is kissed seems palpably close here. But Bethan Huws' art can never be approached through anecdote, it always runs counter to it. Perhaps there is a closer association to Meret Oppenheim's seminal icons of Surrealism: the fur cup, *Le déjeuner en fourrure*, 1936 and the later *Squirrel*, 1969, with the handle of a beer jug replaced by the bushy tale of the rodent, as possible precursors to Bethan Huws' thought-objects.

Further on we meet the frog again as a neon object, its two switching positions a reference to the proverbial pose of the frog waiting to catch a flying insect. The remarkable French writer Jean-Pierre Brisset (1837 – 1968), whose concept of language influenced Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) who is also of central importance to Huws artistic approach, observed that: "The sound of the frog's voice and the modulation of his song already have something human about them. His eyes, his gaze resemble our own; and no animal possesses a physical grace from the heel to the neck that is so close to that of the human body; few humans, even the young, are as elegant."¹ This gives us a whole new perspective on the frog in Huws' work.

The visible world of animals is also depicted in the large-format woodcuts by Andrea Büttner, via the traditional iconography of Saint Francis preaching to the birds, as invented by Giotto di Bondone around 1295 in the Basilica of San Francesco in Assisi. Since the limitless expanse of the air was reserved solely for them, and they can escape into it at any time, birds have been a symbol of freedom since antiquity; Roman augurs told the future by interpreting the flight of birds. Andrea Büttner's drawing sketches a reversal of the legend of St. Francis by making the animals preach to the saint. There is no prescribed iconography for this; the artist imagines how the positions of preacher and saint might look for a penguin, a hare, a horse or a pike. Only the scene with the fish has models in St. Francis' equally mythical and poetic sermon to the fish.

A large bronze tree by Su-Mei Tse, as well as a photographs by Su-Mei and Richard Long, return to the dialogue with landscape, while the elemental shape of the square and the energetic material of copper reappear in the cube by Dan Walsh and Alan Charlton's *Triangle Paintings* continue their process of precise condensation in smaller formats.

The exhibition's choreography ends in the attic space at the top of the gallery, with the projection of a digitalized 16 mm film by Kimsooja. *Chapter V*, 2016, is part of her long-term film project *Thread Routes* (since 2010). It is organised into six chapters, each which each is filmed in a different cultural context around the world. From fragmentary observations in a place, the work expands to form a unity of encounters between different places and people, revealing textile traditions in all their compelling beauty while examining their connections to nature, architecture and agriculture. Kimsooja weaves the textile thread of the world and states that "I store my projects in my body, which I use as my studio".

¹ Jean-Pierre Brisset: Die Wissenschaft Gottes, in: Jean-Pierre Brisset. Fürst der Denker: Eine Dokumentation, Berlin: zero sharp, 2014, S. 202. English version based on the German translation from the French.

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Ruedi Tschudi met these individual artists at different times in his life, as demonstrated by the range of generations represented in the exhibition, from Carl Andre (*1935) and Niele Toroni (*1937) to Julian Charrière (*1987): together, they encompass more than 50 years of art history, dynamically linked while forging new paths. They sometimes leave you guessing, and aspects of their work must remain riddles, to be solved only many years later. That is the idea behind this exhibition, to explore with an open mind while following private threads: *Absolutely Tschudi*.

Roland Wäspe