

IS-projects

Und Jetzt – A Gathering in Leiden Billy Gruner



“And now”, in English, is the title for a joint show to be held at the opening of IS Artist Run Initiative and Le Petit Port Gallery in Leiden, December 2007. Looking at it closely, the title suggests a way to open a discourse on a known tradition. But also, speaking plainly as an artist, it allows a discussion on a confluence of new styles, debates, and stylistic inferences that have exceeded indigenous geographic borders over recent decades. More presently, however, it provides some access to a neat footprint that has appeared, possibly for a new and defining model worldwide.

My idea here is possibly better expressed as an understanding, one that exists beyond knowingness, conventionality – and a now subsuming ‘contemporary art’ en-framing - as some may see it. For these reasons, Formalist, even Purist, styles of art making after the 20th century are far easily able to be discussed appropriately, that is, as a fascinating and resilient idiom. This is because it is a genre of practices growing in significance for a wide array of like-minded artists around the globe. Generally speaking, it is of import to note that this involves artists not so interested in being called minimalists or, abstract painters, as another example.

It is exhibitions like this that are iconic of a change in mood. Specifically, they are indicative of the existence within contemporary art circles of a redefining of a genre once loosely termed non-objective. Inclusively, of an alternate modern art history of precursors and, a complex internationally based story line that currently pertains to at least as many other hard-core abstractionist practices emergent after the 1990s or, a process that began shifting ground during the supposed high-modernist and later post-modernist closures associated with the field. Und Jetzt is a term that speaks firmly in such terms, and readily within a subsequently fashioned language system offering a divergence of critical scope after the many tensions pronounced in the winding up of that same theoretical and issue bound swampland of the late 20th century. Further, Und Jetzt conjures notions of faith more than doubt in my opinion, while it speaks to a much wider spectrum of similarly devised shows held in recent decades. Many of these related events have attempted to underscore the expression of ever more considered possibilities after the 20th century - just as these linked events are representative of an important alternate nexus - a place of difference overall - from what a conventionalism now readily associated with known contemporary art systems is able to impute any longer, in the strictly negative.

IS is a new space and untested as such. But its sudden appearance as a rather unknown entity is also an indicator of an equally considered placement. It is intended to occupy a specific location on the global map. And because of its links and design, I am equally sure it will become known as a place that a range of focused and highly formalised art makers may collaboratively engage. They are likely to do this because travel is easier and faster than ever. And importantly, because it is quite necessary today in order to find inspiration from others similarly interested in the development of important critical concerns. In short, Und Jetzt, like Und held at Chiellerie in Amsterdam and NOT in Toowoomba Queensland in 2006, is the latest of a series shows that are, in a sense, one big show - an evolving event that provides a unique convergence for those interested. Und Jetzt, when simply put, is one other opportunity for various artists to continue their participation within a group of activities falling under the banner of Presentational Art (US), Super Formalism or Minimal Pop (EU) or, as it is sometimes defined in more distant places like Australia, Post Formalism - as just three examples of fresher terminology already in wide use.

The list of artists participating in this particular show is by no means comprehensive or, representational. Nor is it a surveying event – that is not possible. Nevertheless, they form one group that has come together from other spaces and sets of associated connections. Curiously, this is an established network that has no name or structure per se or, any managerial style or leadership to speak of. Yet, it is a self-regulating artists association regardless. In my opinion, this symbolism is very interesting as artists connect almost effortlessly out of recommendation and through working with each other. This is perhaps an almost secessionist aspect or, stepping away from an established order. An uncompromising process that is uncommon in global or local contemporary art production. And perhaps for this same reason it will remain something that others may consider difficult, hard to imitate, or immediately assume relations.

I am unsure how I became involved but I am glad I did as I continue to find the unique social aspect one of the most rewarding and sometimes demanding aspects of my practice. In this manner, it is the social that determines nearly everything I do as an artist, just as it assists language used. And, it is a process I actually respect that meters all of this. Questions of style or modes or practice are understood or rejected collectively within a knowledgeable, internationally based, milieu.

Personally, I find this a stunning attribute rarely found, and a significant opportunity in the contemporary art world were regionalism, factionalism, and an incomprehensible system of social stratifications that are utterly unjustified, yet still abound after the modernist and, post-modern eras. Probably what is more interesting about this unsolicited network overall is a stringent ability to develop, expand, and engage traction with other interested artists, gallerists, collectors and the like. This has been achieved with next-to-no curatorial input at all. Well, virtually not from any source other than the artists involved themselves. Again, another uniquely defining and challenging area of activity I would associate with new approaches to the genre. In more anthropologic terminology, it is the clear and defining characteristics of demarcation that intrigue. It is the transitional form the latter needs to uncover. It's the oftentimes- incremental marker that allows a far more precise reading of norms, mores, and conventions to be made more rational.

The influence of artists such as Tilman and director Petra Bungert from CCNOA and Jan and Karen van der Ploeg from PS in Amsterdam, Daniel Gottin and Gerda Maise from Hebel 121 in Basel like that of the long standing support provided by John Nixon from AC4CA and SNO in Australia, and Matthew Deleget and Rossana Martinez from Minus Space in New York are just a few examples that come to mind, and they should not be underestimated. It is their efforts amongst many others running back many decades that have led to the greater development of credibility for what remains a still vastly misunderstood genre today. Perhaps little has changed concerning perceptions on the purely abstract since Delaney and Van Doesburg first questioned Mondriaan's rather static relations or reliance on a fundamentally realist practice within the vastly greater currency the De Stijl movement had on offer - and still does. However, and importantly, the growing acceptance of Concrete art worldwide as a significant art of its time for instance, is just one other related example of ongoing artistic optimism after the 20th-century artists are seeking to engage. But that topical matter is of less concern here. This discourse is more generally about a kind of alternate movement historically speaking, one that has in overall terms remained relatively unconcerned by overt critiques just as it is driven by newer generational groups of artists and fans of this finding their own way into current activity. And that is easily done today as well, especially if the work and attitudes suit what's going on.

The set of artists showing in the 'Und Jetzt' show that opens Guido Winkler's and Iemke van Dijk's IS space are likewise diverse, and very interested in each other's work. They come from various countries and locations, but their presence undoubtedly represents all that I claim is going on and more so. Each will provide new work in their own terms while using commonly understood language - developed from personal experience. For myself, it is that aspect (personal differentiation) above all else that sets out new terms and conditions to consider. And it is that last topic concerning a differentiation made between appropriate homage and a failing reliance upon appropriation or redirected, rhetorical ironic narrations that will need much greater scrutiny in time to come. Current work is current work in those specific terms, just as it is normal for this genre to be easily misread at first glance within a 'contemporary art' en-framing. But finding the broader language that can be effectively utilised to define specific historical developments is always the task that surrounds any art's true phenomenological state. As an artist I sometimes write about these things, probably because I have come to know where numbers of interested artists are congregating, and why. But I have no idea where effective writers, who can properly define a currency for them, have gone?

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