

Luca Frei

**Hermann Scherchen:
alles hörbar machen II**

I. Dezember 2015 – 30. Januar 2016

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Hermann Scherchen: alles hörbar machen II

Opening: Saturday, November 28, 4 – 8 pm

December 1, 2015 – January 30, 2016

Scherchen was one of the few people that naturally lived in the new; in a necessary novelty for the expansion of his vitality at the expense of his overflow of energy. He never denied his reputation; I can describe him as a cautious proselyte, a solemn instigator, a spirit that was as adventurous as patriarchal. Can we apply, like Gide did for Claudel, this somewhat cruel yet powerful image of a "solidified cyclone"? (1)

In the portraits, assembled by Maurice Fleuret for *Le Nouvel Observateur* right after Hermann Scherchen's death, Pierre Boulez borrows a relevant oxymoron to render the complex and unstable character of the German musician and conductor. In the term "cyclone", we find the idea of a formidable chaos circling a calm center. Indeed, Scherchen's biography (1891 - 1966) suggests an intense and troubled period, inhabited by a farandole of significant figures, searching to comprehend the history of music in a very broad spectrum (for instance, music under specific political ideologies, modern and experimental music, music and the technologies of recording and sound transmission, etc.).

With the exhibition *Hermann Scherchen: alles hörbar machen II* the Swiss artist Luca Frei (based in Malmö) dedicates his second solo show at Galerie Barbara Wien to Hermann Scherchen and his late musical research in Gravesano, Switzerland.

We find Frei juggling several hats in this project: visual artist, researcher, archivist, and grandson of Hermann Scherchen. In a sculptural installation he reacts to the architectural interventions of Hermann Scherchen and his acoustic experiments, whilst a photo edition titled *Gravesano Album* and numerous archival material provide an insight into the social and musical events that took place around the house in Gravesano.

The first chapter of Frei's Scherchen-project was an exhibition in Studio Dabbeni in Lugano (2), located 8km from Gravesano, the village where Scherchen spent the end of his life. Berlin, as the setting of the second chapter, is also a highly symbolic location. Indeed, the conductor was born in the German capital, where he began his career as a violinist; he played in several orchestras, including the Berlin Philharmonic, until 1933, when he left in protest against the Nazi regime.

At a young age, he recognized that he would never be a virtuoso musician and decided to become a conductor. His overwhelming intense creative life would begin in 1914. Here is an attempted overview: he conducted amongst others, orchestras in Riga, Frankfurt am Main, Leipzig and Winterthur. He founded the journal *Melos* in 1920, publishing a seminal essay on conducting (compiled in *Lehrbuch des Dirigierens*, 1929), and later created his own music publishing house *Ars Viva*, in 1950. In 1919, he constituted the *Neue Musikgesellschaft*; he put on the orchestra *Musica Viva* in 1936 in Vienna, organized workshops and conferences on modern music throughout Europe from 1933 onwards, and led the Studio Orchestra at the Swiss radio until 1950.

1950 was a crucial, if somewhat disastrous year for Scherchen in understanding the ultimate and most significant of his projects : the Gravesano Electro-Acoustic Studio. Scherchen conducted at the international music festival *Prague Spring* of this year. Following this performance, he was accused of supporting the Communist ideology and regime. Throughout his career, music was for Scherchen a tool to educate and open minds, one that moved beyond political attitudes and alliances. Despite his declarations, a veritable scandal surrounded him. He was fired from his role at the Swiss radio, as well as losing his position as a conductor in Winterthur and Zurich. Also in 1950, his wife, Xiao Shuxian left him and went back to China with their children. The same year Scherchen's mother died.

In 1954, Scherchen and his new wife Pia Andronescu, found themselves a 12-room property, in Gravesano, a village of only 200 inhabitants. Almost four years after such dramatic events, the house appeared to be an ideal refuge. Here, the concept of "neutrality" reigned on multiple levels: politically (supported by UNESCO, the site was beyond any nationality), artistically (outside of any ancient/modern, electronic/concrete music quarrels) and even acoustically.

Indeed, the conductor used his home to reach an architectural ideal for sound play, recording and transmission. He wrote, "I would like to have a space that I can deactivate." (3). Thus, Scherchen surrounded himself with architect Hoeschle to conceive three studios with as many different architectures and functions. For Scherchen, the studio constituted an ideal: a highly malleable space, compared to the rigid orchestral stage. It is a technological tool, which frees music from its accessories: "through the microphone, music is for the first time presented as itself" (4). In this capsule, emptied of disturbances, everything can be heard and made audible.

Gravesano studio was also a residency for musicians, sound engineers and many different kinds of practitioners. International and interdisciplinary symposiums were organized there, making it a rite of passage for sound experimenters. Xenakis portrayed it as a "fertile garden where it felt good to blossom" (5). The journal *Gravesaner Blätter* reported on this effervescence until 1966, including cross-disciplinary writings by authors such as Theodor W. Adorno, Pierre Schaeffer and even Le Corbusier.

The studios were dismantled soon after their founder's death in 1966. How to present or make present a space and its context that no longer exists? Frei, opting out of dioramas, rather tackles the exhibition space by mixing his own work with accurate archival documentation. In one of the gallery spaces, Frei offers an installation that reproduces the main studio floor plan in form of a sculptural platform. The different units are movable in numerous combinations, mimicking the malleability of the studio.

For the second exhibit of this project, the dialogue between Frei's own work and the archive is more vivid. Here, the artist takes up a delicate position as "artist-archivist", at once a true archive producer, and developing aesthetic forms using his own vocabulary fed by this research.

This association allows Frei to escape from storytelling strategies, which would have, in a way, fed the mythical character. Indeed, Frei speaks through the collections he produced and assembled himself, constituting his own work through the archive of another. These different voices can freely co-exist in the artist's production. Displacing research on Gravesano in a visual art exhibition is perhaps the optimum way to express the vigorous eclecticism that existed in this micro-cosmos of a late polymath.

Text by Gauthier Lesturgie

(1) Pierre Boulez, Maurice Fleuret, "Scherchen: un cyclone figé", *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 22 June 1966.

(2) "Hermann Scherchen : alles hörbar machen I", Studio Dabbeni, Lugano, 19.09. - 07.11.2015.

(3) Hermann Scherchen: Aus meinem Leben Rußland in jenen Jahren. Erinnerungen, Berlin 1984, S.62.

(4) "Durch das Mikrophon ist die Musik zum Erstenmal auf sich selbst gestellt." Hermann Scherchen, "Bekenntnis zum Radio", unpublished manuscript, Bern 9 August 1944 (HSCHA 17/74/692). Cited in Dennis C. Hutchison, "Performance, Technology, and Politics : Hermann Scherchen's Aesthetics of Modern Music", Dissertation, The Florida State University School of Music, 2003.

(5) Iannis Xenakis, Maurice Fleuret, *op. cit.*

Luca Frei, born 1976 in Lugano, Switzerland, studied in Lugano, Edinburgh, New Haven and Malmö. He lives and works in Malmö, Sweden.

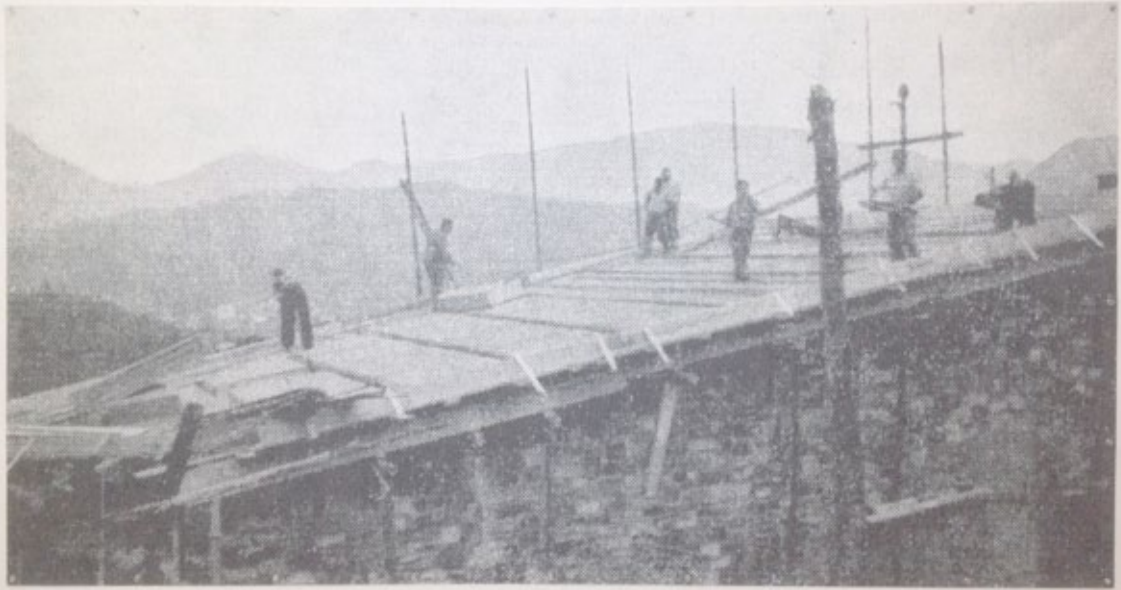
Alongside solo exhibitions at the Kunsthauus Glarus, Bonner Kunstverein and Lunds Konsthall, Frei has also participated in numerous Biennials (31st Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts; 6th Momentum Biennale, Moss, Norway; 12th Cairo Biennial; 3rd Prague Biennial; 9th Istanbul Biennial). Furthermore, his work has been presented in group shows at venues such as the Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Moderna Museet Stockholm; Van Abbe Museum Eindhoven and Kunsthalle Zürich to name a few. For different projects (i.a. about Lygia Clark), Frei also developed exhibition displays (i.a. for the Tate Liverpool and Malmö Konsthall) in collaboration with other artists (such as Falke Pisano and Will Holder).



(in the foreground / im Vordergrund)
Gravesano Studio I (scale 1:5)
 2015
 Painted iron, lacquered plywood
 Bemaltes Eisen, lackiertes Sperrholz
 345 x 210 x 12



Details
Gravesano Studio I (scale 1:5)
2015



Workers on the Roof

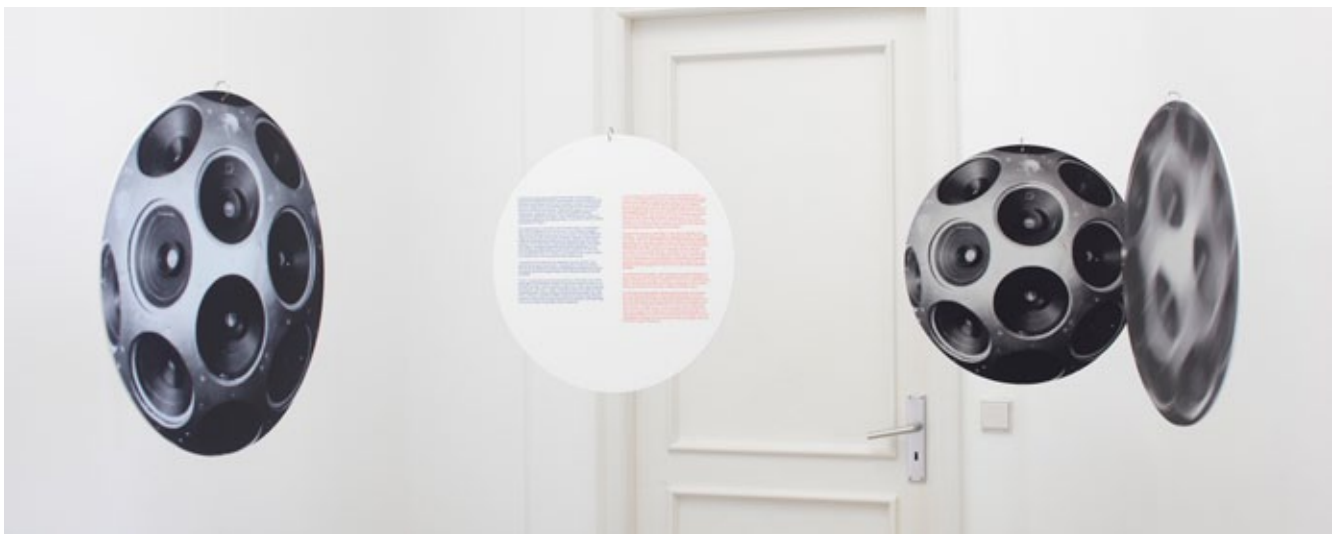
2015

Banner (digital print on polyester fabric)

Banner (digitaler Druck auf Polyesterstoff)

220 x 400 cm

Edition / Auflage 3 / 1 a.p.



Scherchen Circles

2015

Digital print on Forex, 4 circles, printed on both sides

Inkjetprint auf Forex, 4 kreisförmige Platten, doppelseitig bedruckt

ø 50 cm

Edition / Auflage 3 / 1 a.p.



Details
Scherchen Circles
2015



Exhibition views / Ausstellungsansichten *Hermann Scherchen: alles hörbar machen II*, Galerie Barbara Wien, Berlin 2015



Gravesano Album

2015

Giclée prints (Photo edition) / Giclée-Drucke (Fotoedition)

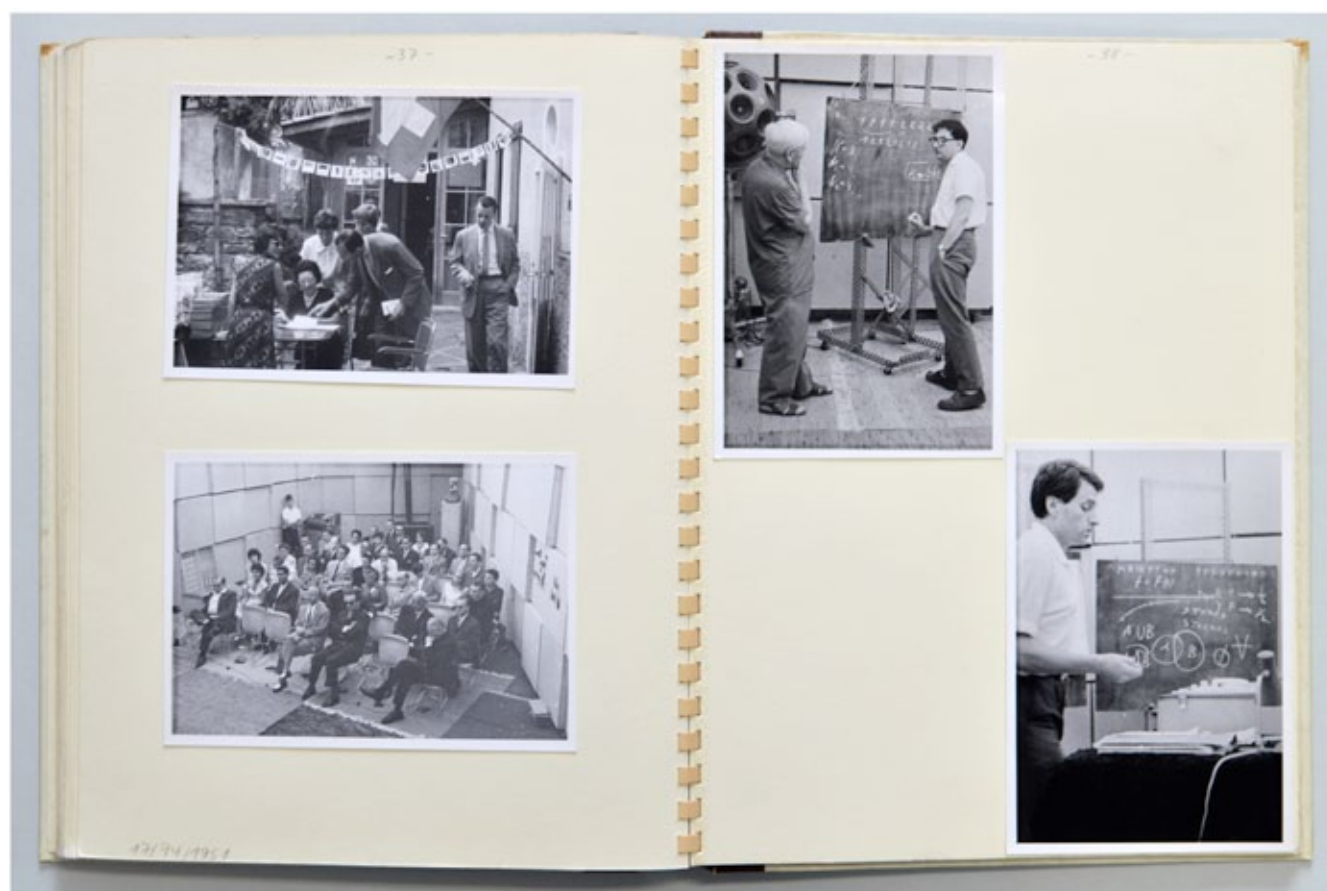
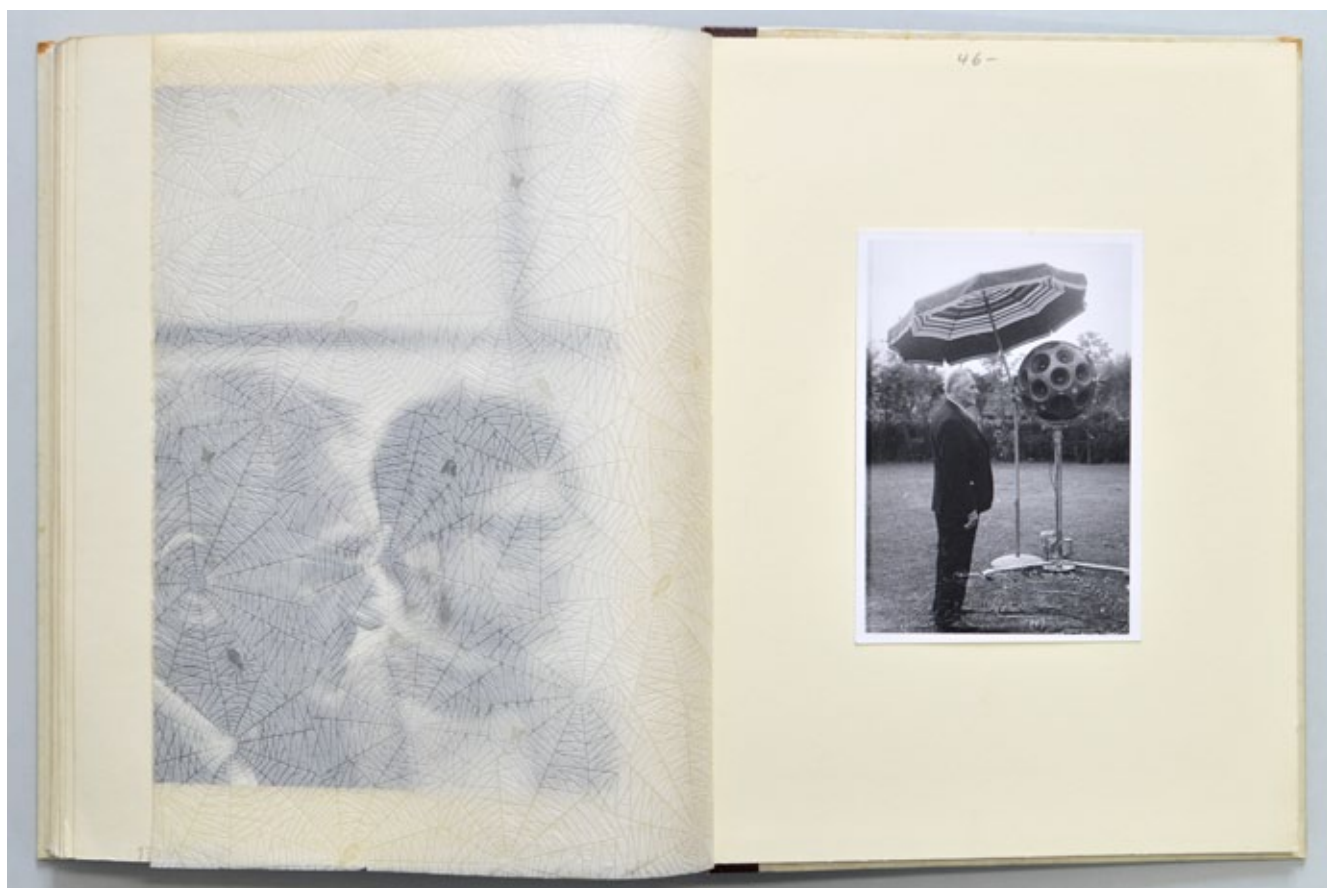
24 prints, each / 24 Drucke, jeweils 42 x 59,4 cm

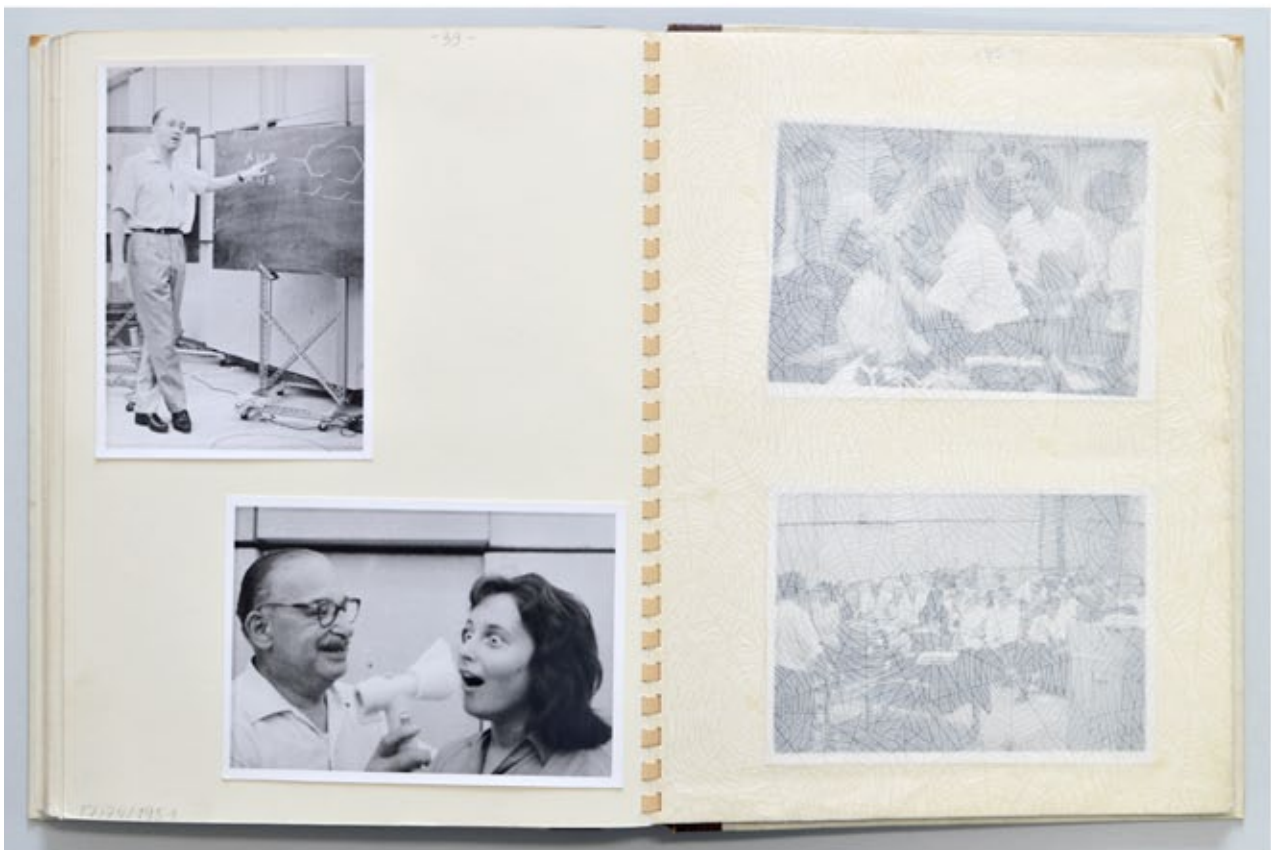


Installation views / Installationsansichten
Gravesano Album
2015

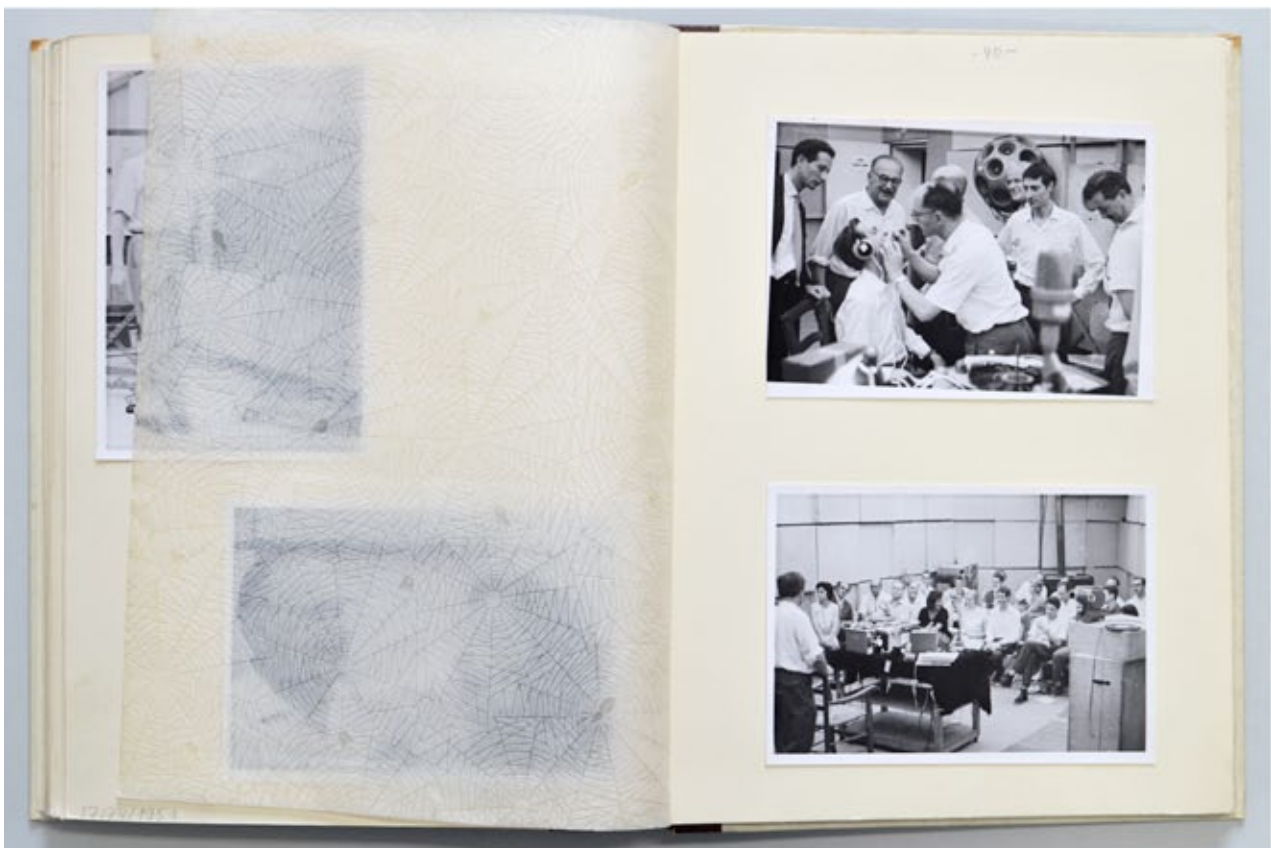


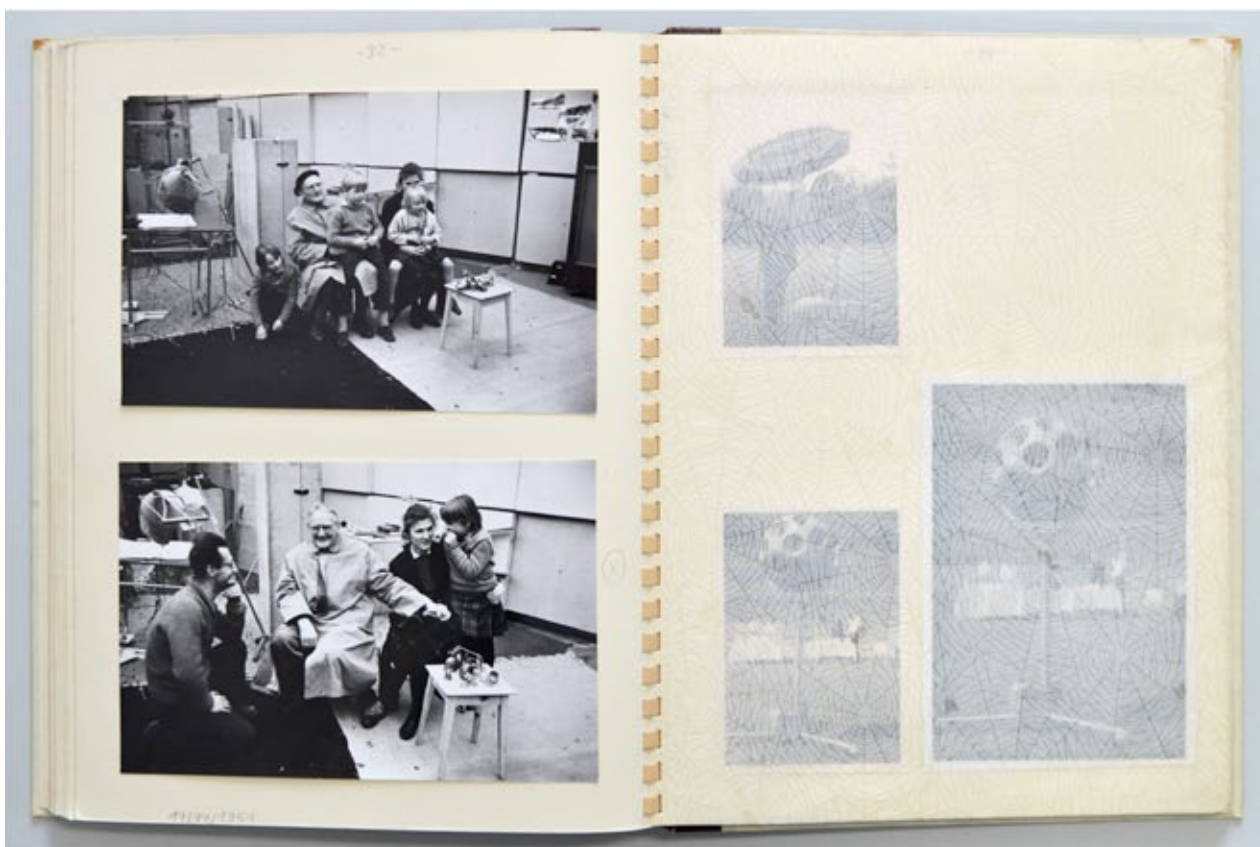
Details
Gravesano Album
 2015





Gravesano MUSIK • RAUMGESTALTUNG • ELEKTROAKUSTIK





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Selected press material about /
Ausgewähltes Pressematerial über
Luca Frei

Untitled, 2008
Silk paper, dimensions variable



LUCA FREI

ECONOMY OF FORMS

DIE ÖKONOMIE DER FORM

Grant Watson

The first work I saw by Luca Frei was part of the exhibition "Studies/Play" at the Lunds Konsthall in 2008. I remember one element of the show in particular, an installation made from paper strips that Frei had cut into geometric shapes and arranged across the slate floor of the gallery. The strips measured the same width as the carrying walls of the Konsthall, and their arrangement suggested a template for potential exhibition structures. Close up the paper was fragile, transparent and vulnerable to being walked on or blown out of place. But if you climbed the stairs to a higher level you could see the work as a more stable presence – as a series of geometric shapes matching the scale of the architecture and responding to the spirit of the Konsthall, with its quirky, elegant modernist design.

This work hints at the spirit of the artist. From the particular attention Frei devotes to the given situation of each exhibition in which he takes part emerges an intervention that is both informal and precise. These interventions often include the use of preexisting elements from the artist's practice, so that materials, forms, and strategies from past projects appear repeatedly in different situations. In doing so, elements that Frei develops in response to the

Das erste Mal begegnete ich den Werken von Luca Frei 2008 im Rahmen der Ausstellung „Studies/Play“ an der Lunds Konsthall (Kunsthalle Lund) in Schweden. Eine Arbeit ist mir besonders in Erinnerung geblieben: eine Installation aus Papierstreifen, die Frei zu geometrischen Formen zurechtgeschnitten und auf dem Schieferboden verteilt hatte. Die Breite der Streifen entsprach exakt der Tiefe der tragenden Wände der Kunsthalle, und ihre Anordnung wirkte wie das Modell für potenzielle Ausstellungsgrundrisse. Aus der Nähe betrachtet erwies sich das Papier als fragil und transparent, somit in Gefahr, durch Besucherfüsse beschädigt oder Windstöße aufgewirbelt zu werden. Doch wenn man die Treppe ins obere Stockwerk nahm, erhielt die Arbeit – nun von oben betrachtet – eine weitaus stabilere Präsenz. Eine Serie geometrischer Formen im Massstab der Architektur reagierte auf den Geist der Kunsthalle Lund mit ihrem einzigartigen, eleganten und modernistischen Design.

Dieses Werk verrät uns einiges über die Künstlerpersönlichkeit. Aus der besonderen Aufmerksamkeit, die Frei der jeweiligen räumlichen Ausstellungssituation widmet, entwickelt sich eine ebenso informelle wie präzise Intervention. Teile seiner Installationen

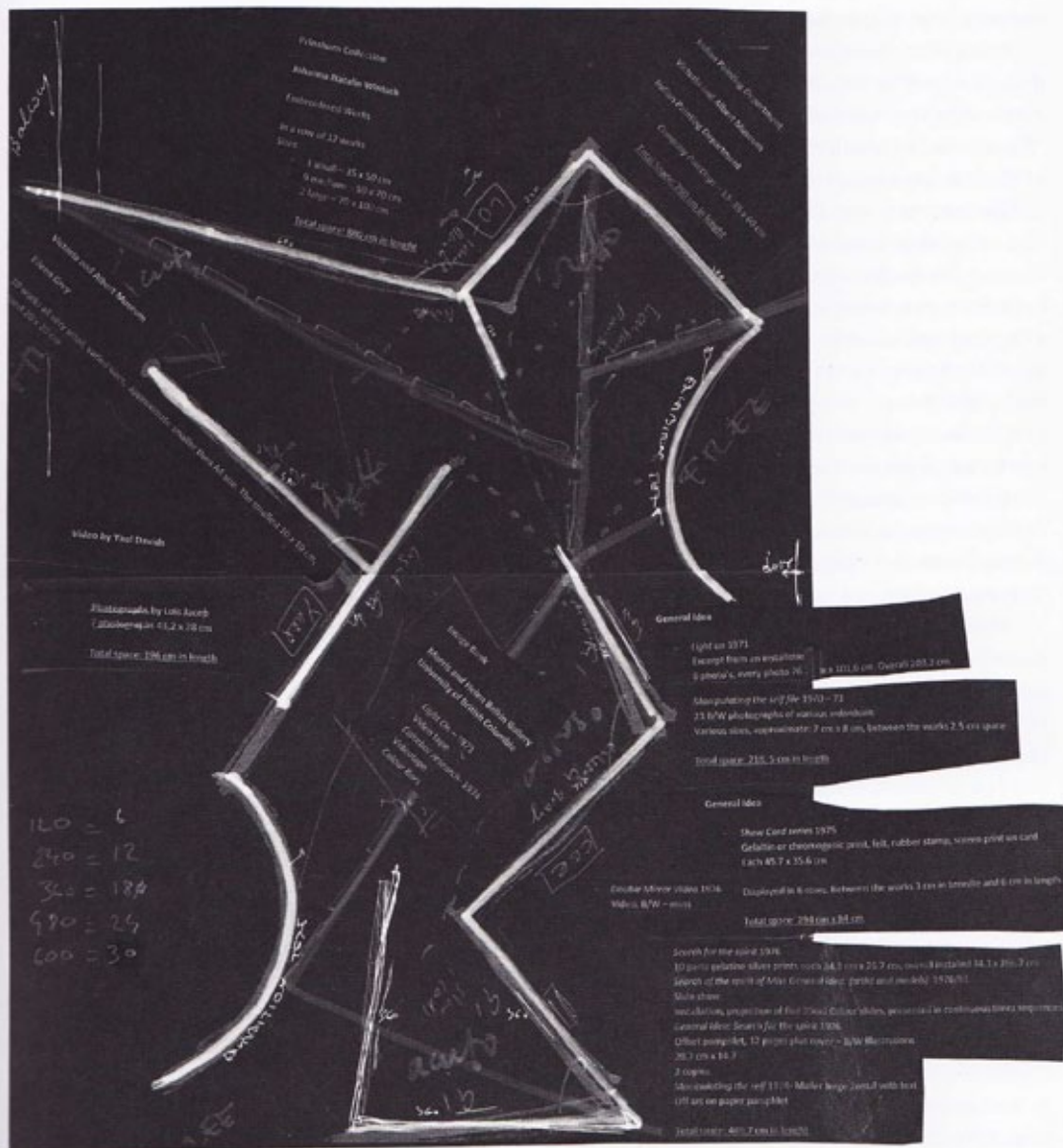
conditions of specific exhibition venues travel to new places, assuming new forms but carrying their initial spatial and conceptual implications with them.

After seeing the show at the Konsthall, I subsequently went on to collaborate with Frei on several exhibitions. In 2009 I commissioned him to produce a design for the exhibition "Search for the Spirit" which took place in Mechelen, in the assembly hall of a Catholic School, a space, which through its iconography and ornate detailing asserts its own atmosphere of religious instruction and faded grandeur. Here Frei introduced an exhibition structure, one of a series of what he calls "Wall Works". Sometimes these are autonomous sculptures that mimic exhibition design, sometimes they are actually functional. This *Wall Work* consisted of thirteen sections made from MDF painted white, which occupied the central section of the hall. These walls produced a series of smaller, contained situations for viewing within the larger exhibition. This structure engendered an experience similar to many temporary exhibitions even though the walls were odd lengths, running diagonally in relation to one another, or doubling back to create triangular shapes. The viewer walking through the space, however, was not necessarily aware of these spatial distortions. Yet as in Lund, the structure could also be viewed from a balcony. Seen from above they suggested a schematic line drawing of a figure that Frei loosely based on drawings of angels by Paul Klee. Like Klee's, this angel was reduced to a series of geometric shapes, with simplified features and mechanical wings. The exhibition itself explored the idea of spirituality as a range of human experience from sensual pleasure and camp to feats of endurance, through the work of artists such as General Idea and Image Bank, as well as archival material from different historical periods. A lighting rig directly above Frei's structure made the angel/structure glow and the room fade away. His *Wall Work* had the double effect of structuring the space of the

sind oft bereits bestehende Komponenten vorheriger Arbeiten, sodass Materialien, Formen und Strategien früherer Projekte wiederholt im Kontext verschiedener Konstellationen auftauchen. So reisen Elemente, die Frei als Antwort auf eine bestimmte Ausstellungssituation entwickelt hatte, weiter an neue Orte, als vermeintlich neue Formen, die ihre ursprüngliche räumliche und konzeptuelle Bedeutung doch mit sich tragen.

Mein Besuch der Kunsthalle Lund war der Auslöser für die darauf folgende Zusammenarbeit mit Frei bei mehreren Ausstellungen. 2009 beauftragte ich ihn mit der Gestaltung der Ausstellungsarchitektur für "Search for the Spirit". Sie fand in der Aula einer katholischen Schule in Mecheln (Belgien) statt, einem Raum, der durch seine Ikonografie und das detaillierte Dekor eine besondere Atmosphäre von religiöser Erziehung und vergangener Grösse beanspruchte. Frei fügte hier eine Ausstellungsstruktur ein aus einer Serie, die er als "Wall Works" bezeichnete: Teils sind dies autonome Skulpturen, die Ausstellungspräsentationen imitieren, teils sind sie tatsächlich funktionale Ausstellungselemente. Das *Wall Work* in Mecheln war in der Mitte der Halle aus dreizehn weiss gestrichenen Elementen aus MDF-Platten zusammengefügt. Die Wände bildeten kleinere, abgeschlossene Bereiche der Betrachtung innerhalb der grösseren Ausstellungsstruktur. Obwohl die Wände unregelmässige Masse hatten, mal diagonal zueinander verliefen, mal dreieckige Räume bildeten, vermittelte die gesamte Struktur doch die vertraute Erfahrung vieler zeitgenössischer Ausstellungen, und so waren sich die Besucher der räumlichen Verzerrungen nicht zwangsläufig bewusst.

Auch in Mecheln konnte man, so wie zuvor in Lund, die Wandkonstruktion von einem Balkon aus betrachten. Aus der Vogelperspektive ähnelte ihr Umriss einer Figur, die Frei den Engelszeichnungen von Paul Klee nachempfunden hatte. Wie die Klee-Zeichnungen war der Engel auf einige geometrische Formen mit vereinfachten Zügen und schematischen Flügeln reduziert. Die Ausstellung untersuchte die Thematik



Search for the Spirit, 2009
Sketch for exhibition design, 42 x 39 cm

temporary exhibition within the complicated architecture of the hall and helping to define and overlay a transgressive notion of spirituality onto a room normally used for the purpose of conventional religious education.

In 2013 Frei designed the signage and gallery décor for another exhibition that I curated inspired by Raymond Williams' seminal book "Keywords", in which the author writes a series of short essays about the words he considered critical for understanding culture and society. The premise of the exhibition was to juxtapose words from the book with works from the Tate collection, produced in the decade immediately after the book's publication in 1976. Frei decided to paint a frieze of words around the upper half of the gallery, using a font designed with graphic designer Will Holder. These words appeared above the works, at times establishing a relationship and at other times a discontinuity. Trying to negotiate the connections between the two, visitors to the exhibition could become actively involved in a process of interpretation.

At the same time, Frei also carpeted the gallery and provided chairs for the viewers to sit on. The effect was to dampen the acoustic, but also suggested the atmosphere of an old fashion civic space such as the interior of a public library. He proposed that each participating artist should donate a chair to the show. Together these chairs formed a disparate gathering in the space – simple curve backed school chairs, fold up garden chairs, sturdy wooden kitchen and fake regency ones draped in fabric. This arrangement transformed the gallery into an environment where the visitor was encouraged to linger and converse.

For his solo show at Kunsthaus Glarus in Switzerland Frei made use of the *Keywords* font, spreading the words – *work, ordinary, myth, tradition and class* – across one wall of the gallery. This transition (and elision) was both surprising and interesting for anyone aware of both exhibitions. In linking the British socialist Williams to Glarus, Frei drew attention to the fact that Glarus is one of three Swiss

Spiritualität in ihrer gesamten Spannweite menschlicher Erfahrungen, von ausschweifend sinnlichem Genuss bis zu Meisterleistungen der Ausdauer, vermittelt Künstlerpositionen von General Idea und Image Bank sowie historischem Archivmaterial unterschiedlicher Epochen. Ein Beleuchtungsgerüst über Freis Konstruktion liess den Engel / Aufbau hell erstrahlen und den übrigen Raum im Dunkel verschwinden. Sein *Wall Work* strukturierte nicht nur die Räumlichkeiten der temporären Ausstellung innerhalb dieser komplexen Hallenarchitektur, sondern beteiligte sich auch aktiv an der Definition einer grenzüberschreitenden Spiritualitätsauffassung an einem Ort konventioneller religiöser Erziehung.

2013 entwarf Frei die Beschilderung und Ausstattung einer weiteren von mir kuratierten Ausstellung, die von Raymond Williams' grundlegender Publikation „Keywords“ inspiriert war. In dieser Essaysammlung beschäftigt sich der Autor mit denjenigen Wörtern, die er für das Verständnis unserer Kultur und Gesellschaft als unverzichtbar klassifiziert. Die Leitidee der Ausstellung war die Gegenüberstellung einiger Wörter aus diesem Buch mit Werken der Tate Collection, die in dem Jahrzehnt nach 1976, dem Erscheinungsdatum der Publikation, entstanden waren. Frei malte einen Wortfries entlang der oberen Wandhälfte des Ausstellungsraums. Dazu verwendete er eine Schrift, die er zusammen mit dem Grafikdesigner Will Holder entworfen hatte. Zwischen den Werken mit den darüber erscheinenden Wörtern ergab sich mal ein Bedeutungszusammenhang, mal eine Fehlstelle. Im Bemühen, diese unterschiedlichen Verbindungen herzustellen, beteiligten sich die Besucher aktiv am Interpretationsprozess.

Ausserdem liess Frei die Galerie mit Teppichboden und Besucherstühlen ausstatten. Auf diese Weise wurde nicht nur die Akustik der Räume gedämpft, sondern auch die Atmosphäre eines altmodischen Gemeindeortes kreiert (beispielsweise das Interieur einer Volksbücherei). Frei bat jeden teilnehmenden Künstler, einen Stuhl zu stiften. So entstand eine abwechslungsreiche Zusammenkunft der unterschiedlichsten

cantons that still continue the tradition of the "Landsgemeinde", one of the oldest forms of direct democracy, so that key words like work, tradition and class can be understood in relation to both political histories.

Seeing this line of words, from the exhibition that we had worked on together now appropriated into a new context also helped me to understand Frei's approach on a number of levels. It became clear to me how the artist designs and operates a flexible economy of forms and strategies that can be used in different circumstances; that the challenge for the artist is often to determine how, when and in what form these should be applied; and that by working with Frei you can enter into this economy as potentially both a catalyst and a beneficiary.

Sitzmöbel: einfache Schulstühle mit gerundeter Lehne, Gartenklappstühle, robuste Holzhocker aus der Küche und in Stoff gehüllte Regency-Imitationen. Die Ausstellungsräume luden durch dieses Arrangement zum gemütlichen Verweilen und Diskutieren ein.

Die *Keywords*-Schrift nutzte Frei auch in seiner Einzelausstellung im Schweizer Kunsthaus Glarus, um eine Museumswand mit den folgenden Wörtern zu beschriften: *work, ordinary, myth, tradition* und *class* (Arbeit, alltäglich, Mythos, Tradition und Klasse). Für jemanden, der beide Ausstellungen kannte, war diese Übertragung (und das Weglassen) überraschend und interessant. Durch die Verknüpfung von Glarus mit dem britischen Sozialisten Williams machte Frei darauf aufmerksam, dass Glarus einer von drei Schweizer Kantonen mit traditioneller „Landsgemeinde“ ist, eine der ältesten Formen direkter Demokratie. Schlüsselwörter wie Arbeit, Tradition und Klasse können demnach im Kontext beider politischer Vergangenheiten gesehen werden.

Als ich die mir von der gemeinsamen Arbeit an der vorherigen Ausstellung bekannte Wortkette nun innerhalb des neuen Ausstellungszusammenhangs sah, wurde mir Freis Herangehensweise noch einmal auf verschiedenen Ebenen bewusst. Mir wurde klar, dass der Künstler ein flexibles Repertoire an Formen und Strategien entwickelt und handhabt, das unter den unterschiedlichsten Umständen eingesetzt werden kann; dass seine Herausforderung oftmals in der Entscheidung besteht, wann und wie diese angewandt werden sollten; und dass man in der Zusammenarbeit mit Frei möglicherweise zugleich als Katalysator und als Nutzniesser auf dieses Repertoire einwirken kann.

AUFRUF ZUR
ALTERNATIVE



LUCA FREI

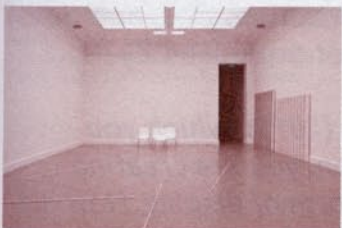
Your work The so-called utopia of the centre beaubourg – An interpretation (2007), the first translation and publication of a book of 1976 by Albert Meister imagines a radical libertarian space of 76 stories beneath the Centre Pompidou. In the following years you have often created installations in the line of this enquiry. In what way is this utopian space and idea important for your work?

Overall there are many reasons why the book has been important for me, for a time it was almost a physical space that I would inhabit, or perhaps on the contrary, it was the book that was inhabiting me. It was not well known then. By translating it into English, I wanted it to be better known, and to reintroduce Meister's ideas within current questions around the institution, community, culture, etc. Before the publication I had made a series of works that were a result of my research around the book, with the Centre Pompidou as a departure point.*



1012KD, 2010
Opake und transparente farbige Plastikplatten, Discokugel-Motoren, Nylonfäden, Metallclips, Fahrrad, Strahler, Installationsansicht Frascati Theatre, Amsterdam

Foto: Peter Cox



5611NH, 2010
Holzstäbe, Ketten, Installationsansicht Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven

Foto: Sal Krooneberg



D2, 2010
Holzstäbe, Ketten, Installationsansicht Project Arts Centre, Dublin

The works made after the publication are more independent from the Centre, and more speculative or fragmentary in terms of how they relate to it, bringing them to a next level of interpretation, more sculptural, physical. The two projects commissioned by *If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution* followed this approach. *1012KD* (2010) at Frascati theatre in Amsterdam was more of a scenographic experience made up of several colored plastic sheets hanging from the ceiling, rotating mirrors, lightning, and a bicyclist biking in the room. *5611NH* (2010) at Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven consisted of a long line of chains and wood dowel rods connected to each other and disposed on the floor and against the walls, which the audience could manipulate. Both titles referred to the postal code where the projects were realized. In the case of *5611NH*, which was exhibited afterwards in Dublin, Paris, and Turin, the title changed according to the postal code of the place where the work was exhibited, *D2, 75191 Paris Cedex 04, I-10126*. An homage to Meister's chronicle; once the underground centre is in full swing, several centers begin to appear in France and elsewhere, and many of them are named after the postal code.

You have created a few displays, like libraries, exhibition displays or reading rooms. What is your interest in creating alternative spaces that people can make practical use of?

The installation *Cubitus* (2005) for Casco in Utrecht belonged to the group of works that had the research around the Beaubourg as a departure point.

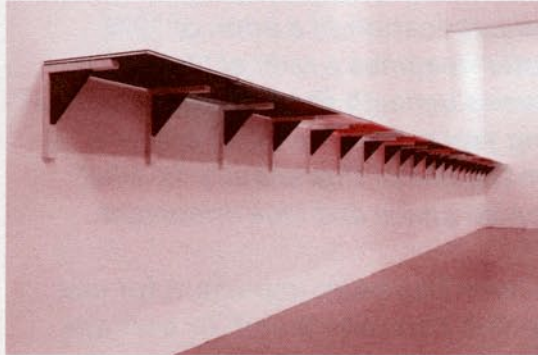


Foto: Andy Keate

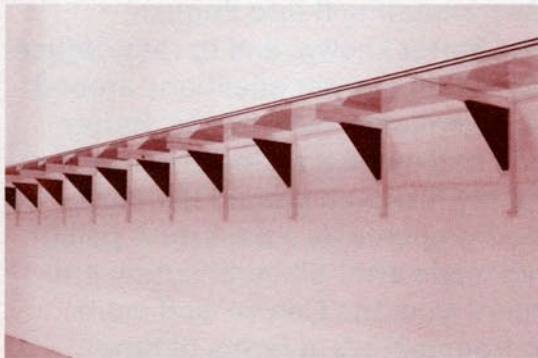


Foto: Andy Keate

Shelf for Cardew, 2009
Holz, Glas, Acrylfarbe, Installationsansicht Cornelius Cardew:
Play for Today, The Drawing Room, London

The *Bookshelves Form-Content* (2009) were inverted bookshelves, the space for the books was on the narrow sides while the larger front side was flat, for projections or presentations. *Shelf for Cardew* (2009) at the Drawing Room in London was a display for musical notations, manuscripts and notes, by Cornelius Cardew. Every project is different, some are more specific than others in terms of how they relate to space, or to a particular material to be presented, therefore the degree of my involvement, interest or intention, changes too.

Mainly I am interested in the way we move in an environment, the way we look at it, search it, map it with invisible lines, the way we organize it in our mind, and the way our movements, thoughts, emotions, are affected or organized by it.

In your work Transmitters (2011), which you conceived for this exhibition, you are creating a much more associative form of display. How did you arrive at this extended table structures?

It's a group of three elements; each one holds a Caribbean trumpet shell. It's quite unclear whether the display is meant for us, or for the building; since we can only see the shells from down below through the glass tabletops, which are high up close to the ceiling. At eye level instead we are confronted with the "bodies" of the structures covered with mirror that reflects the walls around. There is an attempt at opening up the space horizontally on a visual level, while reinforcing a communicative, vertical dimension between the floor and the ceiling. It's hard to say where the work comes from, but some elements are traceable to previous works and present concerns, about containment and expression, restraint and release. The shell functions as a transmitter, ear and mouth in one, and associates a natural and mythological, almost ritualistic dimension to the concrete architecture. More than a display I like to think of the work as some act of offering.

All your work is essentially poetic, but also socially engaged, how would you describe this balance?

This tension between the poetic and the social brings up existential questions about affections and ways of engaging and relating. It implies

a continuous repositioning of the self in relation to the world; it's a gravitational tension, which is not always equally balanced.

* Paradoxically the book was sold out and today is hard to find. A french reprint has been published in 2010 by Les éditions Burozoïque.



Foto: Andy Keate

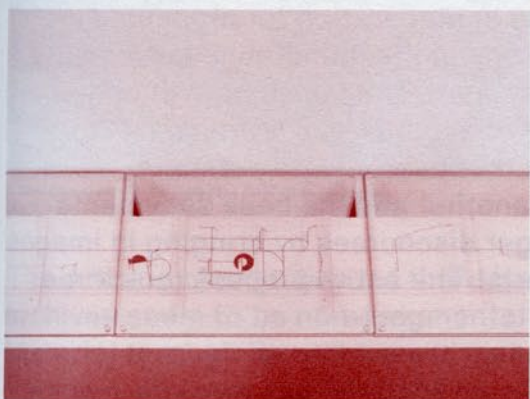


Foto: Andy Keate

Shelf for Cardew, 2009
Holz, Glas, Acrylfarbe, Installationsansicht Cornelius Cardew:
Play for Today, The Drawing Room, London

Luca Frei, geboren 1976 in Lugano, Schweiz, lebt und arbeitet in Malmö, Schweden. Er studierte an der Malmö Art Academy und am Edinburgh College of Art.

Mit Ausdrucksformen wie Installation, Performance, Zeichnung und Text testet der Künstler, wie Kunst zur Vermittlung beitragen kann, indem er alternative Räume gestaltet, die zum freien Lernen und zur emanzipatorischen Praxis anregen. In seinen Arbeiten bewegt sich Luca Frei zwischen diversen Formen der Kunst, zwischen autonom-ästhetischer Praxis und öffentlichem Prozess, indem er Objekte schafft, die sowohl poetisch anmutend zur Kontemplation anregen als auch zur aktiven Teilnahme einladen. Partizipation und Dialog ermöglicht Frei in seinen Arbeiten mittels spielerischem und assoziativem Denken in Form alternativer pädagogischer Modelle.

Frei zeigte Einzelausstellungen unter anderem bei Balice Hertling, Paris (2009 und 2010), dem Schweizer Kulturinstitut, Mailand (2009), dem Studio Dabbeni, Lugano (2008), der Lunds Konsthalle (2008) und dem Grazer Kunstverein (2006). Seine Arbeiten wurden darüber hinaus in folgenden Gruppenausstellungen gezeigt: *The Incidental Person*, Apexart, New York (2009), *Textiles, Art and The Social Fabric*, MuHKA, Antwerpen (2009), *Audio, Video, Disco*, Kunsthalle Zürich (2009) und *Archaeology of Longing*, Kadist Art Foundation, Paris (2008) sowie im Rahmen der 3. Biennale in Prag (2007) und der 9. Istanbul Biennale (2005).

Luca Frei

Making room for learning and un-learning; jugglers and public space

As Öyvind Fahlström once sloganized, to manipulate the world is to take care of the world. This roughly summarizes the way the Swiss-born, Stockholm-based Luca Frei fuses pedagogical strategy with planetary concern. For him art-making, or creativity, is essentially part of public life. Currently there is a curatorial vogue around educational systems, and if we look a little way back in art history we can see how artists' involvement with education (apart from being a staple of art activism) has ranged from populism to parody – in Joseph Beuys' social sculpture principles of form were applied to democracy in a kind of macro-pedagogic effort – or how education has been the butt of Conceptual disingenuousness, as in Art & Language's School project from the mid-1970s, a spanner in the works of any edifying ideology.

Frei's approach in terms of mediating knowledge and the potential for social change is to create space, to open up means and ends. In *Space Jockeys* (2002) the line between art work, toy and motivational strategy becomes blurred in a situation with many authors and no beginning or end. The installation is simply an overhead projector placed on a table filled with coloured, transparent plastic pieces and various tactile and formal objects. It is a situation or a stage waiting for the audience to interact with it, to create and project new backdrops to their actions. *Space Jockeys* has that particular lightness that occurs when form and sensation are reduced and separated in order to meet again through surprising postulates or new syntaxes. In this way Frei's works are host bodies that invite parasitic activities, albeit in the form of modest proposals. They convey the suspicion that learning, above all, is the desire to energize social space through an emptying out of some of the stuff that culture habitually accumulates: a process that requires not larger syllabuses and tougher questions but a kind of holistic reconstruction.

About this article

Published on 02/09/06
By *Lars Bang Larsen*

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The real promise held out by learning, then, is that of revitalization: that the transformation of knowledge into action can be synched into the very groove of life. In Frei this rhythm is sought in narrative environments, such as Tobacco Warehouse (2005), created for the 9th Istanbul Biennial. A collaboration with the art group Oda Projesi, based on their book *Neighbourhood, Room, Neighbour, Guest?* (2005), the installation consisted of an arrangement of walls combining domestic and urban architecture, put at the disposal of local stencil and graffiti artists. A number of triangular tables in recycled iron with mirror tops allowed Oda Projesi's book 'to explode in three dimensions into the architecture of the space', in Frei's words. In 2004, in another attempt to focus and disseminate collective energies, Frei founded Gruppo Parole e Immagini, a kind of public reading group whose mission is the free appropriation, elaboration and distribution of textual and visual materials. Accordingly, on one of the group's posters a quote by Pier Paolo Pasolini is

The terrain between unlearning and re-imagining is one in which Modernism sits squarely, with all the ideological optimism of its marooned adventures. 'Everything was to be done. All the adventures are still there', goes the emancipatory swing of a quote from Kodwo Eshun, appropriated in a work consisting of a giant blackboard and magnetic white letters that can be manipulated from a stepladder. Nodding to the built spaces and grand societal imaginaries of the 20th century, Frei also used the Eshun quote to full ambivalent effect by having it accompany a poster made from a photo of the Beaubourg Plateau in Paris before the construction of the Centre Georges Pompidou. The poster shows the plateau as an unsuspecting car park, to our eyes the image of a great absence laden with potentiality. (Sometimes one wishes there were policies against filling up urban space, rather than policies for building things, as both people and culture thrive quite well in the in-between.) The poster also refers to the Swiss sociologist Albert Meister's novel *La soi-disant utopie du Centre Beaubourg* (1976), a science-fiction scenario about a subterranean space for alternative cultural activities more than 70 floors below the foundations of the then newly opened Pompidou Centre.

In the slide piece *Balancing Acts* (2004) the outside of the Centre Pompidou is again the setting. In front of its transparent mega-tubes full of art-goers a juggler is seen rehearsing his routine with balls whose colours match the external mechanical systems of the centre: yellow for power, blue for air, green for water and red for the lifts. The juggler – an outsider removed from any kind of modernity but omnipresent in urban space – embodies an idea of itinerant creativity that for today's networked classes comes across as naked and naive. But in the slides Frei's street performer simply passes us by as an autonomous figure, inviting neither alms nor attention from people around him. Where urban planners such as Le Corbusier juggled whole cities, this guy simply produces a grammar of keeping the ball in the air, of perpetual motion and improvisation. The juggler's movements oppose the static and the finished in a play that is a kind of pure agency; according to Frei, a 'becoming that is no longer a secondary characteristic but an operating mode'.

Lars Bang Larsen