

When the Bees Fan Out
by Georg Imdahl

In times of crisis, the offer has to be right - success promises quickest if the work shown has rare quality. This principle seems to be Thomas Zander's by showing a carefully selected group-show of conceptual Art of the 1970's.

The show seems to resonate with diverse museum people who have been doing well. Zander understands that his choices are the answer to commercial challenges in our time. The show confirms museum standard quality without any problems. It serves as a seed for a comprehensive summary of conceptual and process Art of the 70's.

In the foreground we don't see the usual American protagonists of conceptual art like Joseph Kosuth or Sol LeWitt but Victor Burgin and Lothar Baumgarten with renowned work-shops. Conceptual Art does not have to be as puritan as it's reputation. Full of irony and clever subversion is the photographic art which was done by Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel in the early 70's on a scholarship in California. They collected photos from archives of research labs, companies and government offices which were actually meant for the shredder. The duo grouped this curious material in a photo album named 'Evidence'. You see pictures of people in the oddest positions or in space-suits on a carpet, technical appliances in violent rotations or hopelessly messed-up cables and one never knows exactly what one is seeing - at the same time those impressions lead to a grotesque story about sense and nonsense of progress.

The possibilities of performance was plumped up by Mark Thomson as a bee-keeper, as he lets you experience time and permanence: in his film you see the artist with his chest uncovered as the bees settle on him. In the end his is totally covered by thee bees. Truly a metaphor for complex life-connections, as the brochure of this show informs you.



ONE More dedicated to Sol LeWitt

In times of crises this show presented by Thomas Rehbein is a courageous move. He presents conceptual art at its inception in order to portray connections to that time's extremely reduced Minimal Art. What is shown here is shown very discretely. Although Rehbein can offer well-known artists like Carl Andre or Robert Ryman, here the other dozen artists are hardly known.

The artist Dove Bradshaw is the curator, a New York sculptor and painter, who worked with Merce Cunningham and John Cage in the 80's as Co-Artistic Advisor along with William Anastasi as set and costume designers, as well as selecting other artists for design. Her companion William Anastasi has been with the Rehbein Gallery for some time. The work Bradshaw has put together in this exhibition is not of an equal level, but there are praiseworthy works and starting points which we here in Europe have only been aware of on the periphery.

One of the noteworthy works is the drawing of Anastasi (born in 1933). In the 60's he had already opened new doors with his unorthodox methods used in his paintings and sculptures – for instance when he removed 4" of a wall's surface vertically, pouring paint down a wall or stacking raw bricks in a square, an elementary discovery in itself. With his many-layered glass sculpture, 1967, he marks himself as an early innovator of this new type of sculpture. No less interesting are his drawings: perched atop a ladder he drops his pencil on a string onto the paper. The result is swarms of dots which pulse on the page.

I would have liked to have seen more of Cordy Ryman (son of Robert Ryman and Merrill Wagner, his wife, also in the exhibition): In the tradition of Richard Tuttle or Joseph Egan he painted fragile objects and then placed them in a corner.

Here is the weakness of this show: we did not need 14 participants, we would have preferred fewer artists with more works of each so that we could get to know them more profoundly.

Some people might remember Anna Gaskell from Cologne and her show eight years ago. Even then this artist from Iowa born in 1969 attracted attention with her unusual presentation of four films, the screens were hung cross-wise in this hall. Referring to psychological fears and mysterious findings in psychoanalysis. In her now fourth exhibition Gaskell shows two films about a subject which is well understood by all parents with small children. The offspring quarrels and the cause of this argument cannot be solved. Gaskell lets the children explain their own individual version in front of her camera and uses this discussion as an opportunity for role-playing with the adults. The conflicts of these children and the recreation of the actors under her direction becomes a metaphor.

We also meet a perfect Gaskell arrangement, as two films with great effect are projected on to the floor. This works very well as the camera takes a bird's eye view of a school yard. In spite of it's formal harmony - and unquestionably beautiful pictures of these children who justify themselves - it would have been better if the arc of tension had been revealed more strongly.