

DIEGO ESPOSITO LIGHT-WORKS

AGNES KOHLMAYER

The exhibition consists in a whole series of new or recent works by the artist Diego Esposito, who was born in 1940 in Teramo, a small town in Abruzzo, in the centre of Italy. This is the first time that the Kunstverein in Ludwigsburg is presenting an individual exhibition by Esposito in Germany. Most of these works were especially made for the rooms in Villa Franck; only a few of them could be integrated into the exhibition itinerant just as they were and as they just have been exhibited before.

All these works have, first and foremost, something to do with light and with space, with colour and shape, with movement and with sound. They seem to be clear and simple in their construction: the very consciously chosen colours are intense and they have been carried out with exceptional precision. Not a speck of dust is to be found in the wrong place, no fingerprint may disturb or distract from what is essential. One can never find the irregularity of a stroke of the paintbrush on the painted surface. These surfaces are mostly spotlessly smooth and clean, so much so that they can even allow themselves to do completely without any colour painted on them at all.

The colour of the material itself, the soft light untreated wood or the rich brown of the MDF-panels, the strongly shining silver colour of stainless steel and even the reddish hue of iron Corten - they all contribute already themselves to that impression of sovereign spotlessness and peacefulness that is the characteristic of works.

We experience these works, by getting closer to them or farther away from them; in our movement itself lies the possibility of having a greater relation with these works of art. Striding through the rooms, wandering around calmly but attentively is of great meaning in this case.

The relationship that we can create ourselves with the works plays an important role. With every step we take, the work takes on those movements with which we approach it. And with each of our steps, it seems, its appearance changes inevitably. The size, in comparison to the room, to us, to the other works, changes, but the power that it exerts on us remains. The artist has put his sculptures and his paintings in a very particular order of rhythm in the single rooms; they hang at different heights on the walls and each of these heights were not prescribed by any museum's average measurements, but solely by the feeling and assessed by the eyes of the artist himself.

In other cases, these works are also in an unusual but always very precisely thought out order, in the middle of the room, once again each time in direct relationship to the lines on the walls, the ceilings or the floor as well as also the room next door. Perhaps, because they should be experienced exactly on that axis that you walk and see, on which one finds oneself on approaching the room.

Our own eye line - that of the observer - was the prescribing

factor here. Our own behaviour, our possible joy and surprise over, perhaps, another work in the same room, but which can only be made out on second looks, also became a criterion for the layout.

The objects communicate with us and amongst each other, but they also assert themselves in solitude. Some of the rooms were very consciously left airier or emptier than others, yes, sometimes they only contain one single work; others again definitely show the works close to each other on the walls, and this is also where the phenomenon of fullness wants to express itself.

The wall full of watercolours - on show for the first time - represents the whole impetuous wealth of gestures that the artist otherwise has to refuse in the meticulous construction of his sculptures, in the very carefully painted or carved surfaces of his paintings.

Here, on the contrary, it can only be experimenting and inspiration; there is, so to speak, only a very short distance between the idea and carrying it out. With the help of liquid watercolours the artist was able to dedicate himself to the unusual composition of the most different colour hues or the small study or composition made of unexpected obstinate lines, which interestingly, on the contrary to sculptures, are often very close to nature. Perhaps painted only on one single part on the paper; a quick scrap of thought, a quick idea, following an intuition, a wonderful poem comes into being in full opulence and exhibited one very close to the other: that's how it is meant to be, and so, at the same time, these works offer the transition in thought leading to the artist's programmatic set up:

As rich and opulent, colourful and shapely, meaningful and various as these impressions are - and one has to expect impressions until they fall into pieces with an artist who is practically constantly on trips to distant countries -, so consciously poor in shape and colour does this same artist then, however, work, when he creates his large works and brings them to perfection. In this case, it is still a very long way between the idea and the final preparation up to the highest perfection.

What Diego Esposito does in his art with us, the observers, but also with himself, may seem like an unusual game between attracting and suppressing.

The light, the tremendously attracting, shining yellow light of the NAOS sculpture, that particularly attracts us in the rooms of Villa Franck and in the exhibition itinerant, seems to play an extremely important role with Esposito.

Light, Lux, Lumen, - diffusing brightness and at the same time mysterious, making us keep our distance and arousing awe, as well as attracting us and arousing our curiosity.

A door, that invites us to come 'nearer, that on a closer look,

however, also blocks the entrance, since the opening turns out to be decidedly too narrow for us and, more than anything else, it is locked from the inside.

NAOS - it was once the name of the holiest sanctuary in ancient Greece; no one could go further forward than up to a certain point in its most inner nucleus. And also Diego Esposito's secretive light sculpture in the very centre of the Ludwigsburg exhibition is called NAOS, and is situated in the position to attract. shine out light all the way into the other rooms, but also all the way out of the Villa and into the dark garden. That is to say, from out of the garden, one can also see into the house and one looks, again, all the way into the yellow nucleus, all the way into the NAOS of the whole exhibition.

In reality NAOS consists of a large cube made of wooden casket walls that can remotely remind us, even if not by chance, of Japanese architecture, and in its inside another cube had been installed. Between these two wooden bodies lies the light, the strong yellow light, that signifies the same as the sunlight, the light of the south, but also, at the same time, of a spiritual light, with that "illumination, that finally lets you see a kind of internal sight, an enrichment". This light appears very early on in Esposito's works, he used it very often as a filter, as a "yellow of purification", and as the division between the inside and the outside.

This strong light-work with sends out its rays, until one reaches another room and one turns to a new work that, in its own way, does not seem to attract less magically, even if at first sight it seems much less theatrical.

ALTRE PAROLE/ ALTRI MOVIMENTI (other words/ other movements) in the room next door is a work with an extremely "musical" effect. A work that is set up bold and generous on the walls of a bright floodlit room, actually almost like a musical composition is perhaps written on paper. Ready for the performance, ready to be played. Five long, black and white striped horizontal elements made of varnished wood are spread out at an irregular, but carefully studied, distance on both of the walls which stand available and really emanate a strong movement.

Four of these elements each carry a strong bright inlaid-type of enclosure made out of one of the base colours blue, yellow, red and orange.

One would, perhaps, like to see musical scores in this work, the music. the sound is immediately to be heard. There was a very similar work with the title of MOVIMENTO to be seen at an exhibition in Pistoia a few years ago, but that work, even if it had almost the same colours, seemed yet very much more compact, it was made out of one single element. Here, on the contrary, almost like a homage to the "baroque" town of Ludwigsburg, the great work has been dissolved and gets a totally different swing due to its generous division into five parts pulled apart on the wall. The artist, who had already months previously, intensively studied the surroundings for this most recent exhibition before he chose the works for it, thought all this out as he created mostly new works of art for Ludwigsburg. The "movements" (movimenti) are here in fact of a different kind and such are also the "words" (parole).

IN-CANTO is a three-part series of square paintings completely covered with paper-thin leafs of silver; which the visitor finds in another exhibition room. Again no strokes of the paintbrush can be found on these paintings, one can, however, see the delicate squares of each silver leaf laid on with a brush. They very delicately structure, in all their preciousness, the beautiful surface of the works. And two of these squares additionally also bear the very characteristic horizontal lines, scanning lines that we so often find in Esposito's works and that seem to be something like a rhythm. All three works with the title IN-CANTO, not only hint at the word "In canto" (Enchantment) but also at the possibility to think "in canto", "when singing", but also bear another ever-recurring shape: the concave ellipse. Like a brand name, it runs many works belonging to this artist. The ellipse, the soft shape, the horizontal oval, an egg that represents the origin of the world but also continuously expresses tolerance and openness for the artist.

In the same room as the three IN-CANTO-works there is, like a bright orange-coloured window, the horizontal painting LOOK AT ME, one of the artist's homages to sunny California, whose architecture, whose light he learnt to appreciate on a stay as guest professor in San Diego just a shorter while ago.

DIALOGO is the name of another complete installation, in which light and separation, the inside and the outside once again play a great role. This dialogue, which refers to the pure possibility of a dialogue, if one observes two seats on which it would be quite difficult to sit on, due to the size and also to the material, is therefore performed in our heads and in our imagination.

The seats simulate the conversation and the wall of light in the background spreads out a peaceful soft white light for it. This light gives the atmosphere of peace, and of conversation. And it is again the light, although it was tamed and closed in behind a wall. through which it is once again filtered, that reaches further and shines out, although it is a threshold and an obstacle at the same time. The light is, in any case, stronger; it also envelopes another work on the wall, the UNICUM, an orange-yellow square with a trough-type of circle in it and also our already well-known ellipse on it.

Then we reach two works, where this time the colour blue comes into action. PARTITURA is a vertical work hanging on the front of a wall, towards which the observer steps slowly, and where he can ever more recognise the true character of the work of art. This "score" namely consists of a very complicated laid out structure made of subdivisions. squares or rectangles that make the whole work "start moving" so to speak. And on the wall next to it, the somewhat older work OTTOINFINITO (Infinite Eight Times). imposing - already only considering its weight - and horizontal, on which the pure MDF-material, the grooves emerge and each of the eight horizontal lines carry a light blue top.

And then there is still, going past the wall fully covered with watercolour paintings, a small room situated slightly out of the way.

The architectural set up itself is already interesting. One

approaches this room namely and enters it exactly on its diagonal axis. An artist like Esposito could not miss this fascinating detail and one will understand why he wanted to put such an important work like DUALITUDINE in the middle of this room. Also this work, that really only reveals its secret on nearing it step by step, at least most of it, has the strength to attract us to it initially. It shows us its shiny sparkling face made of stainless steel. But perhaps some people might step back a little again if they perceive the threatening chrome tip that pokes out of the top of a double vessel with in its centre a belly-like ball. DUALITUDINE is on a pedestal made of iron Corten which is part of the work, and both materials are interrupted by a thin layer of Plexiglas.

This layer now hides one of the secrets. Does it not have to do with 'Dualitudine', with being double-sided? Where is the second tip then? It actually becomes visible only for the attentive observer. Only he might see it through the glass, as it persistently bores into the reddish iron. Everything else, the room and everything that happens in it, is reflected on the mirroring surface of the vessel and fixed, not only once, but also twice and again and again according to our movement.

Already in the year 1995 there was a work which was set up in the open air and that gave Esposito the possibility, in a "natural way" to work in "nature", to which he, last but not least, also gives importance, depending upon the play on words as well as on the examination of both the expressions "natural" and "nature". In the garden of a couple of collector friends, it seems he thought about a small stream that flowed down all alone from a slight height, but in a wild anarchical way. This is how Esposito developed the idea for his CASCATA, his "Waterfall", since he strengthened the natural vertical subdivision of the term in with a division scanning it into seven parts with large plates made of granite like a slope with vertical grooves cut into them, over which the water had to "fall" each time. Esposito even manages to create a different hue of sound with the grooves, which lie at different heights with the fall of the water.

This scanning, this cutting in, this making a rhythm with lines, with grooves or also with elevations, always plays a very special role in Esposito's works, as we have already seen. Later the artist also used the wide spaces of flights and depths in Palazzo Fabroni in Pistoia as well as in an exhibition in Holland, to develop and transform the CASCATA into an indoor sculpture.

In the past few years, Esposito has now been working on a project that takes into consideration and includes various geographical situations. In some of the larger exhibitions of his choice, in the last few years the artist has been flying to create a particular relationship also to the specific position and more precisely - to the local rocks. He would like, and he has already done so in two cases - first of all in a private collection in northern Italy in the year 1995 and now recently also in Prato near Florence for the Pecci Museum, to find a rock of a typical local stone and then turn it into a sculpture by hollowing out its inside and by putting in a polished round eye made of mirror in the surface of this piece of rock.

Ludwigsburg should be a further station for such a work and the same is also true for San Diego, where the artist taught in the spring of 2000 for a couple of months. Such a work must necessarily be prepared long in advance. The search for a suitable rock, with the right colour, the right shape and not least the suitable consistency and then also the realisation of various practical aspects, such as the search for the place to set it up, the financing, the transport and so on need quite a long time.

But one day there should be a book about this complex project, which is spreading out over the world. The works are simply called, for example, 43° 51' 678"N-11° 6' 570"W (like the rock in Prato) named thus according to the degrees of length and breadth of each of the very precise places where they were found.

We know, of course, that the search for the relationship to each place of exhibition for most artists is getting ever more important and the desire to leave behind something which remains is also understandable and logical.

The rock at the centre of an artist's interest, who examines and uses the light, the space, the colour and the material, and who, in this case, wants to go out into the surroundings and into nature, is a beautiful and meaningful extension of such a precise work, which consciously concentrates on clarity and on a few elements, but which are, therefore, that much more important.

The mirror that was put into the rock - and, by the way, this theme is also very clearly present in the previously mentioned work DUALITUDINE, that strongly reflecting double-sided object in the exhibition, in which everything reflects that is in the room and that happens in it - poses an enigma: Is this now only the pure, only the material, in this case the mirroring chrome, that catches the light? Or is it more the connection that the artist wants to set up between himself and nature? Can it even lead us on trips, in which we can follow Jean Starobinski in his wonderful lectures on history and on poetry about melancholy and that means mainly the subject of "Melancholy in front of the mirror" - according to Baudelaire in the last case? We need not remind you that the iconological tradition of melancholy has always been connected with the picture of a mirror or a look that lays its eyes on a reflecting picture.

We will not be able to solve this enigma, but we should try at least to help the artist in his search for a suitable stone.

Translation by Susan Brodar