

Realms of Play

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Commerce is finding and opening new markets. Winners are celebrated, losers, mostly, left unmentioned. The daily routine is determined by cost/benefit calculations. The buzz-word of our times is Globalisation. The disadvantages are tangible as quickly as the welcome effect in our shrinking world, of being at home at any time, any place.

Globalisation is a term that Julia Lohmann could have declared as her motto in a sense beyond any economic debate or definition. But she neither esteems such labelling, nor does she wish to find herself following in the wake of political disputes. Lohmann has come to know almost every continent. She has worked in Asian, American and European countries. But it was never her aim to conquer new markets. Her personal method of 'globalisation' is one of her own development in order to create an awareness as the basis for acting with responsibility. For, to the artist, Julia Lohmann, all historically, geographically and culturally evolved civilisations form the foundation of her creative work. Her projects not only offer insights into the structures of the way we used to live together, but also convey such about the state of our society today and its potential for the future.

One door to understanding Julia Lohmann's mostly very heterogeneous activities lies in the concept of space. It is the common factor of the different connections between spheres, such as delimitation, connection or overlapping, that constitute the artist's primary concern. The term is also important, however, in relation to the mastery of space in creative interpretation through a visual artistic idea. Lohmann's activities can all be called scope or realms of play. The artist does not stop at painting and the creating of installations and sculptures, though this is certainly one of her central activities. She is as much the author behind texts, photographs and films and a researcher who has made it a central element in her work to enquire into circumstances that strike her as incomprehensible.

Studio

The concept of the studio can be applied to a space – in English it is common parlance for the artist's place of work, in Italian it has meant, since the Renaissance, a room for work and research. The Latin studium stands for inclination and zeal, and scholarly striving. Julia Lohmann is familiar with these semantic variations, but again, philological elucidation is not her aim. The various aspects of the term do offer us some access,

however, to the diverse facets of this artist's work.

A studio, the artist's workshop, is first and foremost part of the artist's wherewithal: the place where she is active chiefly on the material level. But she also has a kind of study, where texts and concepts come about. This is the place where her observations, the results of her researches, converge. That is also the location of her archive.

It is to the sphere of research that Julia Lohmann's historical interest belongs. The artist explores other eras, distant periods of time, and so literally digs into the past. She wanders through different historical spaces. (...)

An example of her reflections on specific cultural, geographical and historical features is ??Abacus, a calculation framework blown up to table proportions (160 x 120 x 90 cm). The work, which quite fills a room, was developed in Istanbul in 1999, out of two porcelain rice-bowls joined to form a sphere. Lohmann multiplied this nuclear form, mounted it in a frame in traditional abacus construction, and turned the calculator in to a kind of gaming table. The leap in scale does more than place the calculator of daily use in Asian and Southeast European countries in the limelight; it further underscores the use of the archetypal instrument in day-to-day trade and in the international exchange of goods in that the artist has exchanged the spheres for objects given her by friends and acquaintances. Julia Lohmann's Abacus has thus emphasised the significance of the calculating machine as a symbol for trade and economic relations, and this all the more forcefully when its mode of operation is compared to that of the computer, today's indispensable aid in trade and industry.

The Abacus embodies the economic links between geographical arenas. It is no coincidence that the idea for the work came to Lohmann in Turkey, the historical turntable for trade between east and west and north and south as well as the bridgehead to the Asian world.

Lohmann replaced the wooden beads with spheres of white clay. The choice of a material related in its properties to china clay again evokes the trade routes from east to west. Unlike the Coke tin as a symbol for the world of Western trade, this material looks back on a very long history. In the East, porcelain and kaolin were not only developed, but also used before the Europeans thought of doing so. It has remained a modern medium, for example in hi-tech applications.

Some of the spheres in Abacus are coloured cobalt blue, others white or

turquoise. The colours allude to the associations that subsist between different cultures irrespective of geographical borders. In the East as in the West, such pigments have a special, sometimes spiritual meaning, being made out of extremely precious, expensive raw material. In China, cobalt blue is the pigment that was used in the manufacture of porcelain ware. Turquoise is one of the tones often used in the country that gave it the name. The translation from the robust source material of wood to fragile white clay is a pointer to the fragility of relations with their vulnerability to disruption. Sensitive handling is called for if these fragile spheres are to survive the journey along the trade routes; sensitive handling a premise for the encounter between cultures on the distant way.

The choice of working material is a crucial factor in all of Julia Lohmann's works. On her sojourns in various countries, the artist has responded to the encounter with unfamiliar cultures and to the specific conditions in situ, and as far as possible, used materials from the immediate vicinity. A concomitant is that such materials are often charged with local meaning. From 1989 to 1992, for example, in the Mojave Desert in America, she worked aeroplane parts from a nearby scrap yard into painted sculptures. During her stay in Japan, the traditional home of paper processing, that medium was her main preoccupation. In Pakistan in 1993, at an Artists' Camp on the theme of violence, her central subject was the social conditions of the host country. Against the backdrop of restrictive rules that govern human/social relationships there, Lohmann developed composite works in collaboration with Pakistani artists. The encompassing sculptural aspect of the project stood in stark contrast to the indigenous works. The latter are mostly small-scale as soon as they are conceived as an autonomous expression of artistic assertion, distinct from the officially sanctioned artistic output.

Colours and Spaces

Lohmann's researches into historical eras and her exploration of geographical territories are closely related to the spaces she makes, physically or virtually. These include realms of colour that can quite absorb the viewer, and spaces to walk into in the literal sense. Another characteristic common to all these works is the integration of the location and its conditions. In the installation entitled ??Zeit-Raum und Gedankenflug ('Space-time and Flight of Fancy'), realised in the central hall of the Volkssternwarte observatory in Bonn in 1994, the artist took her inspiration from the changing astronomical methods used to observe the celestial bodies, and made the relationship between time and space her theme on a general plane. The work, completed in co-operation with

Carlotta Brunetti, takes the environment on board, beginning with the title. The materials used, such as glass fibre cable and transparent ?? umbrellas also appear to be associated with the observatory equipment. The paint, applied with verve, also tells of both, the creative process which Lohmann invites the viewer to retrace, and the relation to the vast distances of the universe and the high speeds needed in exploring it. (...)

translated by Stephen Reader