

Pascal Dombis. Eurasia

The difference between the German sculptor and performance artist Joseph Beuys and the French artist Pascal Dombis could not be greater. One is a shamanistic manipulator of different materials and the other a philosophical mind whose base materials are language and writing. With the term "Eurasia" Pascal Dombis picks up a topic that has been very important for Joseph Beuys and which he commented on with various actions and objects. Beuys' central works on this subject are the actions "Eurasia" (first shown October 14th — 16th 1966, Gallery 101, Group Handwangen, Copenhagen, together with the "34th movement of the Siberian Symphony", as introduction the "Kreuzesteilung") and "Eurasienstab 82min. fluxorum organum" with Henning Christiansen (February 10th — March 5th 1967, Gallery Nächst St. Stephan, Vienna) as well as the slightly modified revision in the Wide White Space Gallery, Antwerp, February 1968. This action's central object was an "Eurasienstab" made of solid copper about 3 meters long and bent into a curve at its end. Beuys moved it within an imaginery space which was marked by four felt-corners corresponding to the room height. Götz Adriani, Winfried Konnertz and Karin Thomas sum it up like this in their monograph: "'Eurasia' to Beuys was all about breaking-up polarities and conflicts. In some kind of Arcadia or Orplid differences evaporate, 'Eurasia' is his synonym for balance, unity, embrace of all life. With the Kreuzesteilung Beuys hints on the historic 'fundamentally inorganic process of peoples' parting' which was founded in the last seperation of the Roman Empire and which now is to be revoked again. For this reason he completes the divided cross with a dotted line in a diagram to 'The Division of the Cross' and returns its former shape and essence: he revises the historic process. Furthermore Beuys aims at the basic east-west polarity and on its abolition. The contrast between the rational 'Westerner' and the 'Easterner', who majorly thinks in philosophic categories, has to be overcome by interpenetration for the sake of unity."¹ In the works of Joseph Beuys this philosophic content manifests itself via symbolic actions, spiritual and content loaded materials like felt, fat, copper, coal, oil, paper, as well as writing, actions and gestures, which archaic powers accrue by the artist's influence.

Almost 50 years later Pascal Dombis deals with the same topic in a completely different way. The floor-work in the TZR Galerie Kai Brückner titled "Eurasia" is mostly composed of very long lines of text in different font sizes which are placed against each other at right angles and altogether mark a cloud-shaped field. Based on materials from seminars, which Beuys held at the end

of the 1960's at the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie, Dombis' text is not to be read as a continuously, linear narration or discourse. The text becomes the raw material of an organic form that, so to speak, creates a picture of the Eurasian continent's expansion. Single thoughts, ideas or fragments of this are legible and the artist does not dictate an order. The viewer has to develop his own pattern. However, aspects of formal and inner perception blend together and the central idea of the opposition between "western" and "eastern" principles and their possible agreement emerge. During the observation the right angle and the cross appear as prime motives. While Beuys' halved cross was a graphic symbol that was exactly set by the artist, Dombis' cross is more fleeting, almost spirit-like. It has a lasting effect on the viewer, who has to reconstruct it in his mind anew. The work with the form, as Dombis presents it to us in the wake of his dealings with text fragments, has materially an ephemeral character and it can barely be grasped physically. His digital wall prints make that especially clear. In his artwork "Eurasia_Explosion" the western cross-shape comes into contact with the Chinese Ya and results in a demonstration of the approach and dynamic penetration of both cross-signs. Its impression remains open and no evaluation is made. "Eurasia_Explosion" is, like many of his other pictures, a collage that was made by the technical method of lenticular print. Depending on the observer's point of view it can generate different pictures and create a three-dimensional ever changing impression that prevents the perception of a complete form. That way Pascal Dombis' works escape a clear definition and are captivating for that very reason.

The internet is a decisive source of our perception of, and information about, the conflicting world. It is used by Dombis, like by a few more artists only, in a manner for his works that visualize the quality and the dilemma of the medium at the same time. The two 2-part pictures "Google_Red-White-Blue-Black_West/East" and "Google_White-Black_West/East" are digital collages made of Google image search results for the words red, blue, black and white. The picture halves compare the search results of Asian and European Google pages. Google .com, .de, .fr or .it on one hand and Google .cn, .kr or .jp on the other. The motives from the internet are put together into a collage with the help of a random algorithm. The results are connected structures, that combine both picture halves, east and west, on one hand as well as show clear differences in the motives on the other hand, which emphasize a clear distinction of both sides. That which determines the current sight is once again the observer's point of view and his movement in front of the artwork. In the same way that the bulk of information in the Cloud can be fixated only for a short moment, and depending on the access

always appears differently, these works also present an extremely unstable, ever-changing picture made of an apparently infinite amount of information. [Description taken from press text TZR Galerie Kai Brückner]

In these works a perception arises that iridescently and brilliantly covers up a great shortage of our time — the loss of the ability to focus on a single phenomenon. Pascal Dombis' fleeting pictures point inimitably at this shortcoming of our culture whose dangers gradually affect society — for a lot of people the ability to register and analyze complex phenomena along with their ability to judge and the accuracy in handling details is fading ("everything is as interesting or as boring" — a reason for the increase in scandalization of our social lives in the media). We trust mechanical production processes too easily.

Pascal Dombis' art is very suited to raise our attention to the need of the development of these cultural skills of concentration and accuracy — a question that is as basic as the commitment to global culture, goods and information exchange. By shifting the focus from the archaic mystically charged materials to the information itself — mediated by a seemingly immaterial, permanently oscillating font — Pascal Dombis expands the Beuysian art term by a virtual dimension.

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1 Götz Adriani, Winfried Konnertz, Karin Thomas, *Joseph Beuys. Leben und Werk*, Köln 1986 (3. Aufl.), S. 165f.