

## »Deviating from the norm«

Exhibition zs art galerie, Vienna with works by **Beti Bricelj and Thomas Koch**

Grid, system, principle of order. assistance and guidance. Confining and limiting.

It is the starting point for an infinite number of possibilities - by breaking up the given structures, by deviating from the set of rules.

This exploration of options, the search for freedom of expression through the confrontation with self-imposed limits, is the basis of the artistic work of Beti Bricelj and Thomas Koch. In different ways, they allow us as viewers, to participate in these thought processes. Searching and finding the next step, the next system, with which they challenge their own principles of order. As different as their analytical approach and artistic translation may be, the energy, dynamics and in particular, the depth that resides in the works is palpable resulting from the serious and personal examination of the created framework, is palpable.

Andrea Zehetbauer and Guido Zehetbauer-Salzer have managed in a remarkable way to track down the interplay between the works of Beti Bricelj and Thomas Koch. The works selected for this purpose span several years in the creative process of the artists. They find their inspiration in going back to older systems in order to ask new questions, to start anew. The works shown here make the constant search for new options, for ways of deviation - and finally the diversity of their systems visible. Located in an overall context that becomes tangible and tangible through the underlying principle of order.

The grid that **Beti Bricelj** has been working with since 2015, is neither straight nor right-angled. It is not a grid in the visual sense: not a linear visible structure; it's more of a logic that she follows, a rhythm. She combines intervals she defines, which she changes in different variations, from which she continually develops new, ever-changing systems. One half, one, two, three... Up, down, right, left. In countless variations, it moves in sequences and steps through the principle of order. What we see is an interplay of always the same proportions - but never identical, always different, always new.

She starts every new system with a sketch, which, however, is more like a matrix, a punch card. She only thinks in black and white. In positive and negative, in »area« and »no area«, reducing all, to an absolute minimum, from which it starts to grow. Nothing is spontaneous, nothing is left to chance, with the grid and the idea of the system, dictate the plot. Spontaneous 'mistakes', as Bricelj calls them: the wrong step, the wrong direction, often allow her to discover new systems. Unpredictable ideas that seek their space within their supposed limits. The playfulness that she feels in her work, the pleasure in the multitude of possibilities, can be felt as lightness in her work. But »decisions are so hard«, she said in a conversation, and Beti Bricelj makes her decisions in advance, without being view. She shows us the result of her thought processes, in search of the solutions.

In Beti Bricelj work, we see excerpts, details of the respective system, individual coordinates. Like the works »*From the composition 64*«, which make the entire system of 64 variants perceptible, she plays with her systems, sometimes the actual empty space becomes the dominant surface.

Sometimes she interprets it with lines like the details from »L1N35«, sometimes she translates it into shades of grey. In the meantime, primary colors have only been added to them in isolated cases – the works »Colour Composition« from 2016 mark the return from intensive colors to the grid, although for this work it is still the way it started a good 20 years ago – but now also with the illusion in the third dimension: With its grid, it turns the »Flat Cubes« into »impossible objects«. And yet nothing is actually impossible. On the contrary.

»Discover the old, see the new« is how **Thomas Koch** described the process of searching and finding. Going back again and again, tracking down hints of long-existing possibilities. Sometimes fragments of reality in which he discovers the option of new design spaces, sometimes materials that promise a system change.

The versatility in Thomas Koch's work stands for the tireless search for new, different questions, for the curiosity and fascination of finding new things, accidentally as planned. The connecting element is not only the recurring signs - areas and lines, in a muted, clear color canon, but is also the square as the unit of its ordering principle. Sometimes alone, sometimes in a row, sometimes as a larger grid. Initially only a perceptible rhythm in the background, a subtle grid, it has become more and more a fixed, visible pictorial element through the confrontation with it. Lines and planes support as well as give (take away) and challenge them. Thomas Koch's complex pictorial systems emerge from this dialogue: his objects – deconstructed realities captured with delicate or powerful lines – explore the limits of his rules. The dynamic in his work arises from this tangible confrontation: every line seems to fight for its space, every surface asserts itself in balance with the neighboring one. The depth that arises from this emotional density allows us viewers to take part in this process of creation. Supposedly - because his fragile work, consisting of transparency and lines, is explained as a sketch and gives us an insight into his pictorial systems, which have been thought through down to the last detail. Here, too, nothing is left to chance, every question, every decision clarified in the methodical working through of the system.

Objectivity and rigor are ideals for Thomas Koch. In search of it, he arrives at paper, fascinated by its unambiguousness and clear boundaries, in order to superimpose, interlock, and dissolve these in depth through »layering«. The colored book covers are similar. With their specified dimensions, they bring their own regularity with them; their reduction makes decision-making easier, but the multitude of possible combinations raises new questions. This leads to a wider range of spatial constellations, the naturalness and lightness of which is almost surprising, given the intensity and seriousness of the analytical examination, in the process of creation.

»It could go on like this forever,« say both Thomas Koch and Beti Bricelj - analogously - in conversation. The interaction of the works shown here lies in the field of tension between playful and self-challenging, between security and questioning. The grid is read and interpreted through its different systems. Sometimes in dialogue with, sometimes out of their system. Dynamics from dealing with the grid, this becomes clearer here on the other side.

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