

**THOMAS D. TRUMMER:**

**From monument to momentum  
Roland Goeschl at the Museum of Perception**

Four pictures are joined together to form a composition. A white-painted cross separates the painted surfaces, which are reminiscent of a stained glass window or a large-scale mosaic. Different associations open up depending on whether the motifs are viewed individually or whether the four pictures are perceived as a whole. The to and fro of perspectives creates astonishing tilting effects, depending on how the beams are interpreted - as empty space or as reinforcement. The motifs are limited to Roland Goeschl's characteristic colors red, yellow and blue. He does not use any separating contour lines, such as those found in the paintings of Piet Mondrian, or pure white areas in the background. Instead, the individual areas of color are homogeneous, have no foreground or background and show no handwriting or traces of application. In addition, Goeschl predominantly uses triangular areas, whereas Mondrian restricted himself to rectangles. While Mondrian strove for inner-pictorial harmony and brought the forms into a balancing optical weighting, Goeschl is concerned with illusionistic mobility and an activation of vision. To this end, he largely dispenses with orthogonals, i.e. lines that are oriented to the horizontal and vertical of the picture format. Nevertheless, there is a (usually shorter) line in each subject of the two paintings, which is aligned with the format and lends the pictures visual stability. It is significant that the diagonals become decisive, represented by red in the two left-hand pictures and yellow in the lower right-hand one. The other halves are divided again between the three available colors. This results in acute angles in the restricted picture area, trapezoids or even an isosceles triangle, which in turn is split in the middle, as in the motif at the bottom left. Some of the subjects appear as if the colors were not applied, but rather areas that have been folded over. This effect is irritating and extends the painting - at least illusorily - into space. In another series of works, Goeschl plays with this idea by deceptively folding in corners; he calls these studies "dog-ears". These effects not only reveal the picture as a body, but also its reverse side and thus a possible space. There is a horizontal line in the motif at the top right. It is longer and more dominant. Here, too, there is an isosceles triangle, but it points to the center, where it is continued by the edge of blue and yellow. This image appears clearer and therefore more striking. We tend to recognize a flag or ensign, as used in shipping, for example. Finally, the motif at the bottom right is determined by the descending diagonal, which grants a yellow triangle the large territory, while at the same time the colored elements in the remaining segment are compressed. This picture in particular makes it clear how puzzle effects are conveyed as spatial leaps. It looks like an isometric representation of an architectural sketch. The eye is prompted to read a spatial alignment, perhaps an interior space, in the composition of the surfaces.

Next door, in a composition of four of the same size, this type of perspective vision is set in motion even more strongly. Goeschl no longer uses bars in the middle; the white cross is painted and is now part of the picture. In addition, and this is the most important aspect, the four pictures communicate with each other to a greater extent. Only very short horizontal lines are used. Intense internal energies and surprising power relationships unfold between the parts, which extend beyond the format boundaries of the individual segments. The effect is mainly achieved by the fact that the ascending diagonals move upwards to the top right and are reinforced by a second trick that is extremely rare for Goeschl - he places a matt red next to the red, a colder blue next to the blue and a shade of yellow next to the yellow. The multiplication of the colors creates a perspectival alignment that finds its culmination at the top right. We therefore view this four-part picture more as a representation of space than as a

relationship between planes. The fact that variations of colors are incorporated here actually represents a serious disruption of the dogma of the three primary colors, which had been valid since the art of the avant-garde. De Stijl in the Netherlands, but also Suprematism in the Soviet Union and Concrete Art, especially from Switzerland after the war, had shaped this canon, which Goeschl quotes and at the same time overcomes.

Roland Goeschl is actually a sculptor. Throughout his life, his art remains a way of thinking in spaces. The geometric form that appears in his paintings is actually stereometric and conceived in space - a body. Goeschl's teacher is Fritz Wotruba, known for his sculptures in which he breaks down human bodies into their component parts. Limbs, head and torso become cubic elements that are staggered or stacked. Reclining and standing figures become symbols without a face or history. The human being becomes a sculptural building, pure being without characteristics. Goeschl adopts some of these ideas, such as the profound examination of space and initially also the interest in the human figure. However, he changes them by expanding and dynamizing them. Statuary becomes movement, the standing figures become striding figures. With this reinterpretation, he set a significant accent in the art of the post-war period. Goeschl responds to the lack of history with a possible future; he counters the timeless with the contemporary.

Goeschl finds one way of freeing himself from the heavy history of the generally human in the use of color. He regards it neither as superficial decoration nor as illusionary camouflage, nor as proof of naturalness. Instead, he presents color as evidence of the artificial. In fact, he even regards color as an artistic material, which is indicated by the title of the exhibition. Goeschl chooses only the colors red, blue and yellow; later, when he began working with walk-in spaces, he added green. In the beginning, he even limited himself to red and blue, thereby tying in with the constructivism of the avant-garde, which not only restricted itself to the unmixed triad in the spectrum, but also to geometry and design laws. However, Goeschl was not an ideologue and was critical of the normative claims of the classical avant-garde. For him, color was not a dogma, but a means of application, just as form was not a fixed essence, but closely linked to perception and the act of seeing. Instead, he developed his choice of color in confrontation with the then new Pop Art. During a scholarship in London, Goeschl became acquainted with other visual worlds and design ideas, including record covers, inflatable architecture, posters, music and fashion. The influence of Bridget Riley, one of the most important representatives of Op Art, is unmistakable. In London, Goeschl encountered an abstract art that was not defined by the simplification of the visible, but by phenomena of optical illusion and complexity. Not balance, but duplication, psychological effect, irritability and irritation became attractive. Viewing thus became essential; perspectivity and projection were added as aspects constituting the image. Last but not least, this use of everyday colors reveals life in the now and an idea of hedonistically experienced time.

A new conception of sculpture began to develop, shifting the focus from the pure carrying and burdening to the activity of viewing art and anchoring it in temporality. Goeschl always pushes to dynamize figures, surfaces and spaces. His work "Die Schreitende" was exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1968, and a year earlier he was a guest in Graz for the three-country exhibition "Trigon". In the Stadtpark, near the Künstlerhaus, Eilfried Huth and Günther Domenig set up a temporary pavilion for the exhibition "ambiente - environment", which brought together artists from Italy, the former Yugoslavia and Austria. Goeschl's contribution is a sawn-open cuboid the height of a storey, a walk-in sculpture, an object that can be entered - a constriction, a maw, an isometric trap. This object, called "Sackgasse" in reference to the address of the Neue Galerie at the time, illustrates the idea of movement. Sculpture is no longer conceived as a stationary, pausing object, but as a temporary stage that opens up a

relationship to empiricism and to one's own body. It is only by stepping onto it that seeing is revealed. It is only in the movement that an object is conveyed, which presents itself but is still only fragmentarily accessible. It is significant that in the course of perception there is a shift from object to subject. In this semi-architectural space, the visitors take on the function of the sculptural figures. They are now the "walkers". The artwork is no longer an autonomous being, but an experimental spatial arrangement, an environment that triggers stimuli. For the 20er Haus in Vienna, Goeschl radicalized this idea a little later and released Wotruba's tectonic limbs, which he made from polystyrene and thus as light as a feather, into freedom. He places colored cubes on the roof, which tumble to the ground and roll in front of the entrance. In the interior, colored cuboids become playful elements that can be hoisted into the air and passed on by the audience. In advertising films made at the same time for the company Humanic, colored walls are blown up, objects tumble and stumble into rooms, Wotruba's elements are set in motion at random. Television allows for narration. Time and performative aspects embed the sculpture in a narrative.

Goeschl ventures from monument to momentum. In all these projects, Goeschl relies on the activation of perception. In order to intensify the experience, he must not only include time, but also remove the equation between seeing and recognizing, decouple seeing from knowledge and identification and even from language. Ludwig Wittgenstein had a clear thesis on this subject. He claimed that seeing functions as a kind of "seeing-as". We recognize something in a certain form. Even if we cannot identify a specific object, we interpret a form as something specific. Wittgenstein called this process "aspect-seeing". In the amorphous outline of a cloud we may see a face or the contours of a country, and in a blob of color we may recognize a bat or something similar. Although Wittgenstein was a highly gifted mathematical thinker, he pointed to a kind of magical or mythologically inspired vision, which is also known to be responsible for the interpretation of zodiac signs. As proof of this, he even sketched a tilted image from which - depending on the perspective - a duck or a hare can be read. Vision thus has an intentional structure; it strives to assign a meaning to what it perceives, namely the urge to assign it a certain correspondence in reality.

It is interesting to note that Wittgenstein developed this thesis in the 1930s, at a time when the classical avant-garde seemed to prove the opposite. Constructivism and the abstract art of modernism strove to detach form from an identifiable equivalent. A geometric shape should no longer represent anything; it should be perceived for itself. A purely abstract form was no longer something, but only itself. Goeschl became a clear advocate of this idea. In the 1997 exhibition "Formalism" at the Upper Belvedere, together with Lois Renner and Heimo Zobernig, this realization reached a conscious climax in comparison with subsequent generations. Alongside color and dynamism, Goeschl introduced a significant aspect into Austrian art history with his rejection of "seeing-as". At the same time, he went against the school of his teacher Wotruba, who had led viewers to see either figures or cubes in sculptures, i.e. not a self-determined entity in the forms, but a correspondence for content.

In a portrait-format painting, which is just over two meters high, the limitation to the triad of primary colors can be found once again. The painting is characterized by blue and red stripes that create a clear horizontal order, similar to the lines of a page or the horizontal pattern of a carpet. Nevertheless, as is inevitable for Goeschl, the diagonal also appears here. A row of diamonds runs from the bottom left to the top right. It is based on the pattern of the bars and - with one exception in the middle - crosses two colors or two rows. The yellow areas could be interpreted as the steps of a staircase, but caution is advised here. Although the tilt effect is intentional and the see-as, i.e. the identification of these bars with a staircase, could set in, this is not the intention. Anyone who interprets the yellow areas as rhombuses will see them as

two-dimensional, and their diagonal arrangement again promotes the principle of increased movement. However, there are other elements that contribute to liveliness and dynamism. And this is the strength of the lines. They increase towards the top, so that the stripes become thicker at the top and denser at the bottom. These condensations and loosening can be better described by using metaphors from time-based arts such as music. The bars can also be interpreted like the beats of a drum, whose initial staccato slows down and becomes more powerful. The rhythm ebbs away and at the same time we seem to experience a colorful crescendo.

Goeschl's work invites us to rethink our own processes of perception and to observe ourselves as we perceive. It does not strive for a final decoding, but rather opens up a continuous game of perception. The puzzle effects of his artworks are emblematic of this. There is no decisive moment at which a pictorial constellation dissolves or a formal idea leads to a final conclusion. On the contrary, seeing is an act of self-reflection that is only revealed through self-correction and in the course of time. Cognition and perception should be experienced as a pleasurable process. For Goeschl, perception is an exploration of the self that aims to enable infinite and fulfilling play. Instead of anticipating instructive definitions, he sees his art as a stimulus and himself as the animator of this rich process.

March, 2024