

František Kyncl: Phonetic Structures

(Speech from the opening of an exhibition in the Church of Albert the Great in Düsseldorf on November 8th, 1998; published for the first time in 2006.)

It has been almost twenty years since the moment when I received a phone call from František Kyncl: He spoke about a technical invention – a new art technique. I was to go to his studio unconditionally. At that time, his studio was located in a warehouse building, no longer in service, belonging to the Stockheim Company, located in a part of Düsseldorf called Flingern. I went there right away and found the artist standing over a huge, slowly rolling drum, covered with paper. Kyncl had invented a “painting machine” of sorts. As part of a continuous exercise he executed melodies in rhythm, which he perceived through headphones, onto the individual brushstrokes on the rolling paper. Always-new individual strokes. This process went on for days and weeks before a universe of a large painting developed from colour and black-and-white particles.

This “painting machine” was even more of a surprise since František Kyncl had for years been interested in sculptural works. Large plastic structures entering a space, growing out of small bamboo sticks, connecting first a triangle and then a tetrahedron. Those spatial netted structures were transformed, extended and brought to color with the help of the new drum machine in a painterly way.

This style of painting made in time with tone and noises, derived from the pulse of music, was not driven by feelings, emotions, or intoxication by colors. It was planned, directed, coming into being through the rhythm of mechanics, of a machine; and yet there was still manoeuvre for accident and the instant. It was impossible to predict individual brushstrokes. Out of this spontaneous game of accident, a coherent painterly universe full of surprises grew, a structure created by numerous variations. A comparable example can be seen in nature – as is well known, no snowflake is alike, even though they share the same crystal form. This is also true for the Phonetic Structures of František Kyncl. At first sight, they all appear similarly prismatic, structurally and mathematically pure; yet from the law of form grows a multifaceted richness of variants, an astounding universe.

The result of this therefore very surprising technique, paintings from the period 1979-1982, we are able to see on the wall of the church nave. It is an opening. So far, a larger number of the drum paintings were exhibited only once, in 1982 at a special exhibition of the Düsseldorfer Kunstverein für Rheinland und Westfalen (Düsseldorf Artists' Association for the Rheinland and Westfalen). But the Phonetic Structures have never been exhibited by themselves within a corresponding architectural framework. Only in this way can they unfold the entire power of their tones. These works have the effect of as if bright shining windows were put into the stone walls of the church; always five on the side aisle walls and a blue pair on the front wall, left and right from the Crucifix. Appearing as if, through these colors' painterly path in the church nave, a view into the Universe had opened up.

When I was in this space several days ago, I thought this opening in the walls through Kyncl's works to be especially clear. The paintings hung at first in the shadow and appeared only as decorations on the wall. Then they were hit by the limelight – and the architecture began to unravel and circulate immediately. The paintings began to flow and unfold. We know this phenomenon from the stripes of large windows in gothic chapels, for example, in Sainte-Chapelle of Paris. When large dark clouds drift across the skies, these windows let in only a little brightness, but when the sun pours in, works of art shine.

Let us return to the studio in 1980. The drum is rolling with the spread out canvas. The tape lets out rhythms, noises, music, partly created by the artist himself. He recorded the bustling

and humming of street sounds, cars; he even sang – it was part of the futuristic element of the musical programme; the street penetrated the room and thereby the works of art. But Kyncl also painted to the sounds of a clarinet, in which Andreas Brüning contributed. He let himself be inspired by Steve Reich or Tchaikovsky. The rhythm of this music, of these tones was directly reflected in the painterly expression. During the noises, individual brushstrokes were created, some rounded - others in the time of staccato, until in the end a closed structure of the painting crystallized, a phonetic structure, which is also the title of the exhibition in this church.

The works from the period 1979-1982 had an important impact on the further development of Kyncl's work. Now the paintings are equal to the sculptural works. As in Kyncl's earlier netted sculptures made of bamboo sticks resembling something windblown and in which a three-dimensional universe opens in plasticity, the now-painted and drafted structures absorb the transparency of the space into the plane. In the series of his later works, Kyncl left the technique of the "painting machine" and the painting drum. Like a printer, Kyncl now printed on moist paper, creating netted patterns he then colored using little drums. Besides the large monochromatic paintings, polychromatic works were also born; where he kept changing the color surface. Sheets of individual papers were fastened next to each other on the wall thereby creating a sketch pad, a wall painting. A resounding, beaming spatial rhythm was created from the a priori incalculable stacking of individual sheets of paper. These sketchpads could be seen in František Kyncl's one-man exhibition in the Kunstmuseum in Düsseldorf and subsequently in the House of Art in Brno, which was the second stop of the exhibition.

Czech architecture plays a stimulating role of a sort in Kyncl's work, which always follows some universal conception and lets itself be cut from the country of the origin. In his youth Kyncl had already experienced the decorations of Baroque churches where the wall can be opened in a painterly manner. The Czech Baroque stood before the artist's eyes in his later visions of a holistic work of art, composed of painting, sculpture, architecture and music. The present exhibition allows us to feel this particularly well, installed in a church nave. Indeed, sacred buildings in recent years have in increasing numbers proved how powerfully effective open exhibition spaces they can be for contemporary fine arts. I have in mind, for example, the Kunststation at St. Peters in Cologne or the local Church of the Holy Trinity. However, even within a sacred context the art preserves its own laws. What connects art and church is the far-reaching dimension of thinking and feeling, and the universality of the message.

Besides the Phonetic Structures, there are fifteen drafts of the Rests at Calvary – the latest of Kyncl's works. This series of works creating a synthesis of abstract and figurative art was purpose – fully developed by Kyncl when he worked with the space of the Church of St. Albert the Great.

The exhibition is dedicated to the late Pavel Filip, professor of applied mathematics who, like Kyncl, emigrated from Czechoslovakia and then became a lecturer in the Federal Republic of Germany at the Technical University in Bochum, (where František and Elsi Kyncl used to meet quite a wide international circle of friends, both from the West and East). The fact that arts and mathematics are in harmony and at the same time are antipodes is demonstrated by this exhibition. Kyncl's work cannot deny purely mathematical structures, but it cannot be derived from mathematics. Art brings into play a rather new element that enables it to reveal itself in a different way and often sees into the universe.

Stephan von Wiese