

APPEARANCES

by Uta M. Reindl

Since time immemorial, the common concern of the arts has been representation. In general, the subject is people, with all their preoccupations throughout time and space. The ways in which humans can get caught up between reality and fiction are staged in Andreas M. Kaufmann's performances. Often it is not easy to discern who the actual protagonist is: the person who appears in the work, the space, time — or is it the observer? The people who act on Kaufmann's stage are taken from observed reality. The figures appear both alone and in constellations, they are typified, reduced to a fragment or a human gesture and, ultimately, abstract. Analogous to the scenes in Kaufmann's more recent work, which are more sociopolitically charged, the dramatised figures approach the reality of the observer or become identical with it. His experiments with time lead — after different variations of movement and progression — to images that appear to be static. Andreas Kaufmann's works are always driven by interest in the play, both in the dramatic illusion as well as its reception, and not at all in critique of reality for fast consumption.

In the late 1980s, I made a decision that henceforth I would not make any more contributions to the production of images — which I see as increasingly redundant — but, instead, I wanted to work with the pictures that already exist. To begin with, my first address was the rich heritage of images in the history of art. Not least because there the earliest images are found that portray human life in its complexity adequately.

In the selection of figures and images as well as the formal accentuation of content, circling motion rather than linear development determines Kaufmann's works, analogous to the circular movements of the appearances. In *FILM COLLAGE* (1984), one of his first works, the artist gives a role to people who have been important in his life: portrait photos from the family album show Kaufmann's parents in Paris in the mid-1950s over which are superimposed autobiographical scenes from his stay there 30 years later. From this time in Paris, people on the street, itinerant entertainers, and clochards appear in the photos yet it is not until the 1990s that a real person plays this leading role again.

Until then, characters from the history of art and film dominate the video and slide projections. A personification of beauty, *BELLEZZA* from "Iconologia" by the Renaissance theorist Cesare Ripa was projected, in all her voluptuousness and surrounded by the prescribed iconographic aura, onto the anthropomorphic frontal façade of the Schirn Art Gallery in Frankfurt. One year later, a work of similar colossal dimensions in presence and symbolism was the gigantic Phaethon who drove across the façade of the Amsterdam Hilton Hotel and appeared to be about to plunge into the public space below. Schloss Corvey, which was originally a monastery and is now a tourist attraction, became Kaufmann's screen for a host of historic illustrations, namely, characters from a collector's edition of "Dreizehn Linden" by Hoffmann von Fallersleben. Transformed into decorative wallpaper or gift wrapping, historicized scenes from the period when the building was erected covered the west façade. *BELLEZZA* made her second appearance 1992/93 in Münster's exhibition hall Am Hawerkamp in a round dance with other depictions of the virtues from Cesare Ripa's book, with female and male personifications of Truth,

Liberty, Poetry, World, Conflict, and Judgement. They were projected over the water's surface and their appearance changed through perturbations caused by the visitors' movements.

Due to my fear of artistic platitudes, at first I did not have the courage to use topical images in my argumentation. To me, they seemed to be far too encumbered with with manifest desires and ideological connotations. Although I have great respect for artists like Les Levine, Antonio Muntadas, Hans Haacke, and Krzysztof Wodiczko, their concrete, often constraining and excluding ideological commitment was contrary to my own awareness of life. However, I do see myself as someone who thinks politically and socially, so I combed the so-called archives of cultural heritage in order to arrive at both contemporary and universal statements about humankind and their relationships.

Apart from the blown-up and mainly awesome figures and scenes from books on art history, fragments of bodies increasingly appear and pathos gives way to an undertone that is reserved, sometimes humorous, sometimes ironic. The outstretched arm of God from Michelangelo's paintings of the Creation in the Sistine Chapel, the magic gesture of endowing each human with a soul, becomes the protagonist of a number of light spectacles in interiors from the early 1990s. Over and above its symbolic reference, the circling finger indicates the limitedness of human perspective through anamorphic transformation of the original subject. In SAGACHO EXHIBIT SPACE TOKYO, Kaufmann realizes multiple appearances with still images that move slightly. Twenty projectors hanging from the ceiling project the favourite pictures of friends and patrons. Whole pictures also become the protagonists of the mise-en-scène in MASCHINERIEN, where the observer is also an actor, for his/her body becomes a screen and joins the ensemble of images that are in action in the room. It attains almost the quality of a concert because the rhythmic clicking and whirring of the rotating projectors is the acoustic accompaniment to the performance. Then in 1999, in the Gabriele Rivet Gallery in Cologne, the observer sees him/herself in real time on 27 monitors of a video presentation: surveillance cameras have brought the observed observer into the action.

In the early 1990s, Andreas Kaufmann turned increasingly to images from the mass media: personae from the cinema and printed media appear in his projections with the object of visualising their multi-perspectives and media-specific features. In 1993/95, Kaufmann worked on some segments from the Japanese film "Rashomon" by Akira Kurosawa, in which the murder of a samurai is narrated from different perspectives. These scenes were projected on the walls of the Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum in Duisberg so that the different versions ran simultaneously. In a video installation 1994/95, the sterile but legendary cinematographic kiss of James Stewart and Kim Nowak in Alfred Hitchcock's "Vertigo" runs in endless loops and thereby mutates into a comic scene. Figures of press photographers make an appearance projected onto a screen made up of piles of newspapers.

My finds from the various archives I staged in public places and in this way, I tried to dust them off a little. This made me aware that, actually, I work like a director.

Increasingly, the cast in Kaufmann's works has become tied to the function of the scene or space. Kids' gestures and shouts of opposition and protest are projected over water onto the blackboard of a classroom. There, the images, set in motion by the sound of the extremely loud, multilingual shouts of "No!", wipe each other out. The scene is a UNESCO school in Cologne with its international students. Then there is the video presentation where a street entertainer makes an appearance: the disabled man juggles balls with his crutches with great virtuosity in front of the video camera and occupies the urban space — he becomes himself a public monument.

In recent works, inordinately large hands perform everyday actions: a hand slowly opens and closes again to a fist, turns on a tap, strikes a match. Finally, numerals become Kaufmann's dramatis personae in one small production. Projected from a carousel slide projector, they perform a merry dance on the wall, which the spectator would dearly like to join in...

The hunters of Lascaux probably drew pictures in order to get into the right mood for the hunt, that is, for the activity that would secure their survival. In this case it is justifiable to speak of the effect of a picture on people and their everyday life.

The real spatial contexts for Andreas Kaufmann's light presentations are mainly heritage spaces and buildings. Projected icons from the history of painting described their circles for the first time in the interior of Schloss Presteneck and the large-format projection of the Creation in 1993 appeared on the facade of the Buddhist Gyokozouin temple in Urawa. In most cases it is the architecture, seldom neglected and uncivilised spaces, and never the open countryside, that is the real scene of the light appearances. Even Kaufmann's first projection — a circle on a piece of nature — was realised in the wild and overgrown park of Schloss Loburg.

A real space is overlaid with fictive or what use to be a real space, when the old Jugendstil windows are projected onto the 1950s facade of the Kiel Art Gallery as light traces. A production that reflects on and comments metaphorically on both the historic and current function or the architecture of real space was when in 1996, the gasometer in Oberhausen became the screen for projections of historic industrial architecture and in Essen, a fragment of a score by Karlheinz Stockhausen appeared on the facade of the Aalto Theatre.

In most of my works there are at least two time axes: a concrete one — for example, in the form of a running videotape or a rotative projection — and a historical one — for instance, when I bring in art history or utilise pieces of technical equipment from the last thirty years.

A performance by John Cage, where the pianist sits down at his instrument and, for the four minutes and 33 seconds announced in the title of the piece, remains silent and motionless which makes the restless, waiting audience into the protagonists of the performance, was a key experience for Kaufmann and his performance that is devoted to time. A grand piano of cast bitumen was propped up with a rod, on the wall behind it were adhesive strips on which were hung Polaroid photos of the slowly tilting bitumen piano taken at regular intervals. The Polaroids, placed very close together, developed their colour as time passed and analogue to the tilting piano. The impression is an illusion of the perfect handling of time.

The starting point of all Kaufmann's projections is a static light signal, a still which only becomes temporally accentuated through seismographic reactions to the movements of the audience. Then it quickly gains a definite rhythm as Kaufmann projects several paintings from important 20th century artists over each other simultaneously and, in this way, reveals basic configurations of each painter's position. Dramatic or cyclically instrumentalised time ultimately plays a role in his slide and video projections. Here it is for one a question of temporal succession or simultaneity of what is shown, and for the other, of condensing or stretching the action and events presented. Of dramatic importance is the temporal design where the arm of God goes round and round because the position of the rotating projector and the change of position of the spectator determine the temporal and spatial progression as well as the suspense curve of the performance.

The temporal and perspectival anamorphosis which results from rotative projections challenges the observer's perception. The repetition of the processes heighten perception as the rotating projectors play with static and moving images through the spaces, sometimes superimposing them and this can lead to a relativisation of the observer's sense of space. As the acoustic accompaniment is important in these projections for the temporal succession of the appearances, Kaufmann emphasises this element — this is undoubtedly connected with his passion for music — in the little abstract theatre with the flashing numbers and their dance to a Spanish rhythm which is intoned by the fast-changing mechanism of the carousel slide projector. The appearance of the street entertainer is also acoustically accentuated with the sounds of juggling, as are the 27 metronomes beating at different speeds in the monitor installation that was shown in the Gabriele Rivet Gallery.

Kaufmann's works seem to be determined by extremes when, in contrast to the often breakneck speed of successive images and the background sounds of many installations, one considers the video paintings in which time seems to stand still and there is utter silence. However, this standstill of time turns out to be an illusion. For the hand that opens and closes to a fist or turns on a tap never really freezes to a static image and imperceptibly, there are processes running in the background because the image is constructed from segments of original photos and morphed connecting pieces.

The presence of a picture was always something that interested me. If someone asks me what I regard as the essential quality of art, I reply with pleasure: In particular, its special way of being present. It is this presence of a work of images that casts a spell over people; presence is what gives things an aura and a person charisma.

Translated by Gloria Custance

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