

G E O R G K A R G L B O X

Press Release
ERWIN THORN

Georg Kargl BOX
Exhibition dates: September 5–November 8, 2008

In engaging with the discourses of the conceptual avant-garde in the 1960s, Erwin Thorn developed an independent artistic position all his own. “Occasional affinities can be made out to the visual strategies of a Hans Bischoffshausen, as well as forms parallel to the work of the artists in the Düsseldorf ZERO group around Heinz Mack, Otto Piene, and Günther Uecker. At the same time, he is interested in the work and attitude of Karl Prantl,” as Roland Schöny summarizes.¹

In large spatial installations, sculptural images or image-like sculptures, collages and fine paper works, he explores emancipative perspectives with the concept of language and reversal when it comes to the question of traditional relationships and the visual communication of events. Rhythm and waves—also reminiscent of sound waves, thus making clear the audio aspect of language—are an important aspect of Thorn’s conceptual work. “His visual language can be described as a visual, linguistic system, in which the coordinates consist of elevations and depressions,” and consciously sets himself apart not only “from the individual gestural work of abstract expressionism, art autre, and the Informel” (Schöny), but also distances himself from the esoteric interests of European art movements. His turn away from the pathos-laden formulas of the 1950s and 1960s is exhibited in a “reductionistically formal order,” as Thorn himself describes.² Here, “nothing is not nothing, but a breathing surface” that with an architectural character explores constructs in spatial terms and seems systematized by concave and convex distortions. Beyond any mannerisms, he intervenes in the flat surfaces, manipulating them, executing his formal principles in different work groups. A change in the beholder’s perspective makes clear the complex play with structures with shadow and light, omissions and distortions, visible forms, and those first revealed by the movement of the beholder, which Thorn conceives as symbolic.

With irony and humor, Thorn breaks the semiological plane over and over. The term *Ohrwaschel*, an invented word (the English equivalent might be “ear waxel”) some of the objects humorously makes clear the linkage of elevations and depressions as forms, visual associations to the tone-setting rhythms and language. He conceives “the visual medium as a language, and language does indeed transport content” (Thorn).

¹ Roland Schöny, “Zum Werk des Künstlers Erwin Thorn: Konzeptuelle Avantgarde mit ironischen Tupfern,” *Parnass* 03 (2008), pp. 98–102

² “Farben Lust und Form Gedanken,” *Abstrakte Wege in Österreich 1900 – 2000*, eds. Gabriela Nagler and Erika Patka, p. 119

In so doing, “earnestness and sensuality are by no means mutually exclusive, but the condition for one another” (Schöny). All of Thorn’s formal studies are committed to this primacy, as is clearly shown in the biomorphic spatial installation *Von der Wiege ins Boot* [From the Cradle to the Boat]. Inserted into the corner of a room, a vertical reminiscent of a joint with bones seems to coagulate at the margins, reminiscent of “very delicate drops,” as Alfred Schmeller in 1960 wrote on a Thorn sculpture, by and in so doing, the “plausible result of a critical reflection about the Greek column as a symbol of power” (Schöny).

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opening times
Di – Fr 11.00 – 19.00 Uhr
Do 11.00 – 20.00 Uhr
Sa 11.00 – 15.00 Uhr