

Abstract-geometrical heresies About the works of Mara Ruehl

By Bernd Zachow

Truly creative action has always been a more or less conscious, more or less radical departure from the existent. The search for one's own style, which is undoubtedly required within the field of contemporary art, inevitably leads to frequent unconventionality. On closer examination, the work of the painter and sculptor Mara Ruehl is thus a continued parting of the ways with the principles of the artistic style of the modern, to which her works on the other hand formally seem to adhere. The concrete-constructivist style is meant here, whose creative practice is based on the exclusive use of the "concrete" (freed from all so-called references to nature) picture elements of area, line, volume, space and colour.

Established in the early 1930s with extremely theoretical formulations, this artistic purism was thus right from the start strongly loaded with a sweeping philosophy and an almost mystical aspiration. The founding fathers of the movement claimed to be sublime "spirit-creators" and prophets of a new creative age. In the early days of the Soviet Union there was even temporary cooperation of the new art heroes with the political powers.

From the viewpoint of the representatives of concrete orthodoxy at that time, the present-day conception and works of Mara Ruehl would doubt-

lessly be the most blatant heresy. Her use of abstract-geometrical shapes aims to achieve results that differ fundamentally from those of the historic concrete and constructivist art. Ruehl's approach, which at first appearance is clearly constructivist, adheres to the principles of the concrete at most in similar dependency as the emotional-individualistic style of a Baroque master adheres to the proportion and composition schematism of the Renaissance.

Where the concrete-constructivist aimed exclusively for logical structure, monolithic stabilisation and clear edges, Mara Ruehl strives to make change, relationship, solution and unification visible in her paintings, reliefs and colour-space-reliefs. The artist wrestles for the visualisation of pulsating, flowing vitality. The clearly defined elements of abstract geometry suddenly appear to be set in motion from the inside outwards; the contours become hazy, the edges weathered. Even the uniform surface structure required by the concrete is inspired with painterly and sculptural means, lines vibrate. Surfaces gain corporeality and an enamel-like shimmering sheen.

Apart from the said concrete and geometrical-constructivist method, the very official recorded history of art since 1945 has recognized a second developmental stream of non-representational, non-figural artwork of the modern. This further epochal stream is described as abstract-visionary, lyrical-intuitive, gestural or abstract-expressionistic. On closer examination, the work of Mara Ruehl

demonstrates how makeshift and questionable such classifications and predefinitions must always remain.

In its entirety Mara Ruehl's artwork proves that a sensitive way of working that aims for expression and atmosphere is certainly not very compatible with the mere coarseness, simple uncontrollableness and ultimate formlessness of many abstract expressionists, yet is excellently compatible with systematic constructivism. To stay with the comparisons of art history: the soft area modulations achieved by Ruehl through the placing of diverse wafer-thin layers of paint on top of each other are just as close to Caspar David Friedrich's, the romanticist's, way of painting as they are to the in no way completely different creative intentions of the square constructivist Josef Albers.

The enlivenment of the rigid and static picture "plate" constantly striven for by the artist has led her to the development of paintings with the addition of sculptural elements and to the construction of coloured reliefs. The arrangement of identical bodies following a comprehensible system forms geometrical patterns which are more than "concrete" ends in themselves, however. The calculated utilization of wood platelets or plastic cubes more or less similar in design and generally stuck on in rows rather causes an additional rhythmicity of the painted area. The picture which has been extended to the object projecting into the surrounding space also enables the artist the (positively irritating for the viewer) utilization of the natural alternation of light and shadow. In all this

Mara Ruehl does not design abstract ornaments or accommodating decorations. Invitations to original visual experiences are created in her atelier.