

BUNDESKUNSTHALLE

COLOR AS PROGRAM PART ONE

8 April – 7 August 2022

Statement by Liam Gillick

On August 25th 1967 at 10.57 Willy Brandt pressed a big red button in a gesture that represented the dawning of color television in West Germany. In a magical twist the color signal began just before the Chancellor pushed the button, the urgency of a new era manipulating time and eager to broadcast its own birth. Color and black and white are the binaries of the photographic, cinematic and televisual ages. We now exist in the era of 'high resolution' where color as a boundary has shifted towards increasing 'fidelity'. Where does that leave art that makes use of color as a carrier of meaning, a means of communication and as a lure? We have moved from a time of grand shifts between states of visual perception to a series of cumulative 'moments' where attention is pulled from image to image with increasing ferocity

Attempts to make exhibitions about universal abstractions are limited by their tendency to flatten the content of cultural production and dilute it in the service of a broad narrative. With *Farbe ist Programm* (Color as Program) very specific decisions were made to avoid creating a universal exhibition but instead to produce an 'essay' – an 'Episode One'. To achieve this, all the curatorial resources of the Bundeskunsthalle were deployed in an attempt at collective exchange and discussion. There is no single curator.

In contrast to this collective approach, the architecture of the exhibition sets out a very specific and subjective stage and context. Derived from Theo Van Doesburg's designs for the Aubette in Strasbourg I have produced a frame that refers precisely to a period when color was directly linked to new models of applied art that attempted to create improved conditions for human experience and interchange – with new demands upon the user of a space. Importantly Van Doesburg's work is always color as a frame and structure. This means that while the setting of the exhibition is a permeable structure with many vistas and potential routes it also ensures that moving one artwork in the exhibition affects the positioning of all other elements. This was a deliberate act – the building of an architecture that would mean all artworks and archival elements would need reconsideration in relation to each other at all times. A simple hierarchical or historical narrative would have to fight the open framework of the structure and instead, new connections and differences would be emphasised. Within and around this 'set' the work of a diverse group of artists is deployed alongside archival material. Each artist has their own logic system where color is neither the content of the work nor is it presented as an endgame or reductive strategy.

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Instead color in this exhibition is always a carrier of ideas. Color is and is not what it appears to be. Color is a vehicle to express contradiction and subjectivity.

There is very little here about the connection between color and consumerism, which explains the absence of Pop Art. Nor is there much work where color is used as an endgame in art to express the impossibility of content beyond pure perception. Instead it could be suggested that all of the artists 'grapple' with color. They confront its power and at the same time attempt to fold the intuitive visual potential of color into new forms of complexity and directness. There are no passive artists here who are resigned to the power of color as something beyond mediation, cultural conditioning and use value. This is not an exhibition about systems or modes of classification. It is not overly concerned with the science of visual perception or optics. In each case the works have to be considered and understood in isolation. Each proposing a world affected by chromatics, where the hue and saturation of their ideas is carefully modulated to draw us into further understanding and continued curiosity.

In the end, this is also an exhibition that exists within a specific context. Bonn was the capital of West Germany which left behind a specific color palette of implied freedom and quiet capitalist prosperity that in various faded forms adorns a city in transformation to this day. From the color coded u-bahn stations to the mute color schemes of the former federal buildings, this exhibition subtly exposes the way color as a lure and promise has always been ideological. As an 'Episode One' it is a precisely curated sequence of concepts and contradictions that reveals artists struggling with color during times of acceleration, technological development and ever increasing demands upon our attention. At the same time it harkens back to a time where the belief in color as a promise and expression of collective progress was at the heart of its use as a form of social 'branding'.