

Eberhard Bosslet

EN - Gisbourne, Mark; Continuity and Variation on the exhibitionm Eberhard Bosslet , Import/Export , Valletta Contemporary, Malta , 2018

EBERHARD BOSSLET: CONTINUITY AND VARIATION

From 1981 in the declared manifesto of the Material and Effect group, and where Eberhard Bosslet was a co-founder, two things have remained consonant in his art and installation practice. They are the continuities of investigation and variation in relation to materials of industrial derivation, and to those mass-produced sources that have become assimilated as popular vehicles of consumption. The 1980s manifesto referred to these as being the artists' emotional, discursive, functional, intuitive, coincidental, and cultural standpoints, a strategy that Bosslet directed outwardly towards an objective (non-subjective) further embracement of the material conditions of the world. Hence what became evident from the beginning was the principle of working with readymade pre-produced materials and the immediacy of the found situation, which might be that of a site of dereliction or abandonment, or simply direct interventions into found and/or opportune spatial situations. In each situation or circumstance Bosslet's interventions were dialectical with what was either spatially and/or structurally framed and predetermined, whereas the artistic response was to actively re-functionalise the non-functional or underutilised material situation. With regard to sculpture and installation this has always been evident from the outset. The works of this first decade therefore laid the epistemological groundwork for what has been expanded and subsequently followed.

In the current gallery exhibition three installations have been developed that emerge as distinct strands from within Bosslet's established formal practices. For example the work Supporting Measures/Unterstützende Maßnahmen comes from his using heavy-duty industrial materials. Most often referred to as 'Modular Structures' (first begun c. 1985, free-standing after 1988) they are frequently based on series of sketches that the artist has worked through for each particular project installation in detail. The idea of units as sculptural structures is often linked to a particular site-specific architectural setting, and the dialectic between architectural space and the tensions of sculptural presence is the main motivating concern. This said the modular units tend to be autonomous but paradoxical inasmuch as they function simultaneously as allied to architecture, as sculpture, object, and reductive Judd-like minimalist systems in their own right. The idea of system and structure and scaffold is imperative in Bosslet's installed modules as they create a sculpture through their objective presence, but at the same time they often confuse or puzzle the viewer by appearing as if they were nothing more than part of an anonymous industrial power units, or simply feel like the unspecified components and/or abandoned machine innards of a central heating system. It must also be said that through serialised development over the last thirty years, that the artist's 'Modular Structures' have become more sculptural and less industrially focussed in pictorial terms. The repeated use of unit elements as modules, which on some occasions were colour pre-fabricated, sometimes gave the appearance of a pictorial skin like the minimal works of the American Donald Judd, masking something of industrially mass-produced utilitarian nakedness. In the current installation the artist has focused on the unadorned and literal nature of the system and structure. The paradoxical quality of the units is that while they suggest utility, they are in fact without utility, and this brings into conflict the denotative function of an indicative sign, with the connotative realities of an implied use.

The installation Heimleuchten (Home Lighting) is part of another series of works that deals, perhaps, ironically, with ideas of a mass-produced aestheticism. The word "heimleuchten" when literally translated means "pathway lighting" and refers originally to those lamps and/or lantern bearers that were used to guide people through the streets in earlier centuries. This said over time "home lighting" has come to mean in common German parlance a sense of negative reversal, or a tiresome rejection and getting rid of someone. Though as to whether these former languages uses are intended by Bosslet remain unstated by the artist. What is self-evident is that the constraining structure on which the star-like and snowflake light assemblage are arranged has little to do the home in a conventional sense, unless we speak of celebratory seasonal lights

usually installed on the exterior of the house. The artist has worked extensively with lighting, beginning as early as 1979/80 (SehenSucht), where neon strip lighting was configured into sculptural elements. Though the term “SehenSucht” can mean other things in the case of Bosslet it was self-generated concept meaning “seeing looks for something” or in the most literal of senses a “seeing searching.” The current colourful installation relates to work that was first seen in 2014, where each component element (stars, snowflakes, clown and celebratory animals) was placed on a four-sided ‘H’ frame scaffold within a museum space.ⁱⁱ Again the configuration plays with ideas of the appropriated and the displaced, that is to say either as “fiesta” lights, or as Christmas lighting seasonally emblematised by actual subject contents. Like earlier “modular structures” the question of inside and outside, interior-exterior, the utilitarian transposed into the environs of the aesthetic, sets up a contestation between a mass produced series of objects and its status as sculpture.

If in general the works touch upon the primary interests associated with Late Modernism, that is to say with the use of industrial materials, principles of mass- manufacture and accumulation, repetition, displaced signification, and appropriation, this does not of itself mean that they deny a sense of having earlier historical prescience. In the third work exhibited Import/EXPORT – Deep sea boogie woogie there are intended references to Classical Modernism, specifically to the Neo-Plasticism of Piet Mondrian, and to his famous painting “Broadway Boogie Woogie” painted in the last year or so of his life.ⁱⁱⁱ Bosslet has taken the famous language of primaries (red, yellow and blue, accompanied by the non-colours black, grey and white) associated with the Dutch Master, and recast them into three dimensions as a casually displayed piece of sculpture. The rectangular boxes made of cardboard or polystyrene reveal both metaphor and substance, a further reference perhaps to Mondrian, who in late life became an import, and one might say a “deep sea” export émigré to the United States. But more significantly than that, we find the austere abstract formalism of De Stijl has been appropriated and installed in an asymmetrical and deliberately informal arrangement. Moreover, the conceptual idea and painted rigour of vertical and horizontal allusions to the ground plan and street life of New York, has been vulgarised by using commercial masking tape, almost as if to say that the once utopian proclamations of Modernism have been packed away. What were once in the painting sourced intersections and chromatic pulses of theatre life and jazz music references to Broadway, have been intentionally de-animated, boxed up and exiled in a state of export. Given the use of cardboard boxes or polystyrene as common packing materials the viewer is therefore left with unforeseen bathetic feelings of uncertainty. Yet the viewer also realises that there is a deeper inner critique at play as to the relentless commodification of culture, and the mind is quickly drawn to think of works like Warhol’s “Brillo Boxes.” This bi-focal sense and state of doubled reference is present in nearly all the works produced by Eberhard Bosslet, for there is a synthetic relationship between the mass consumption and celebrated aspects of Pop Art, and the frequent use of industrial repetitiveness in the “Systemic Structures” seen in Minimalism. For in both Pop and Minimal art we find the same internal devices of similitude expressed by repetition and accumulation, a celebration of production and manufacture, and the continued pursuit of a strategy of appropriation and displacement.

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20 June 2018