

GUTRUF

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

PAINTINGS AND GRAPHICS

EXHIBITION IN THE SAILI ART MUSEUM, HANGZHOU, CHINA

NOVEMBER 5th – 12th, 2016

NOTES ON THE EXHIBITED WORKS

Gerhard Gutruf is a radical maverick in the international art scene, setting his vision of a very personal new classicism against the mainstream of current art market trends. Brigitte Borchardt-Birbaumer stated in the catalogue to the Beijing exhibition in 2000: “In many countries, Gutruf is one of the few contemporary visual artists from our country [Austria] who is known and of importance.”

Gutruf develops his pictorial worlds between the conflicting poles of utopian ideas and structural studies of major works of European art. His creative method resembles scientific test series – he works simultaneously on different levels of abstraction, in diverse techniques, on various themes: ranging from studies from nature, to often ironic variations of well-known masterpieces, to artistic equivalents of spatio-temporal problems. His paintings and drawings are characterised as both virtuoso and puristic.

Gerhard Gutruf was born 1944 in Nikitsch/Burgenland and studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna from 1962-1970. He spent the following year in Rome as the benefactor of a stipend. In 1974, Gutruf was the youngest artist ever to exhibit his work in the *Kupferstichkabinett* (print room) of the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. In 1976 he presented his painting *Hommage à Vermeer* – a paraphrase of the studio painting by Johannes Vermeer – in the renowned Viennese gallery *Würthle*. Later, in 1979, he staged a solo exhibition at the famed Austrian *Galerie Belvedere*. One of his many educational trips brought Gutruf to Mexico, where the famous 90-year-old painter Rufino Tamayo encouraged a Gutruf exhibition in Mexico City. After further major exhibitions in Guadalajara, Cairo, Addis Ababa, Bratislava, Pretoria, and the *Museu da Electricidade* in Lisbon among others. Gutruf has been invited by Liu Xun, the doyen of Chinese painting, to exhibit his work in the *International Yi Yuan Museum* in Beijing. This exhibition was honoured through inauguration by Chinese Minister of Culture Pan Zhenzhou. According to the 14th June 2000 issue of *Beijing Daily*: “The exhibition of Austrian painter Gutruf has unexpectedly fascinated Chinese painters and audience”. Further solo exhibitions followed in Switzerland, Istanbul, the Czech Republic, in the *Museo Municipal de Arte Contemporáneo* in Madrid, Kiev, and 2008 in the *Ningbo Museum of Art* in China. Between 2009-10 he presented his work at various venues in the Netherlands, including Delft's *Vermeer-Centrum*, in which he displayed the first ever exhibit to feature a living painter. In 2012 the Austrian Chancellery extended an invitation to Gutruf to present a portfolio of his work in *Palais Porcia* in Vienna. In 2013 he dedicated an entire exhibition in the Italian Cultural Institute in Vienna to the quintessential landmark of Rome's classical period – the *Colosseo*. Two exhibitions in Zurich followed in 2014/15. An extensive Gutruf-retrospective was shown in Germany with great success in December 2015 / January 2016 in the European Cultural Center in Remagen, Germany.

Gutruf has been awarded with several distinctions, including 1970 the *Rome Fellowship* of the Federal Ministry for Education and Art, 1975 Award of the *Vienna Art Fund*, the *Theodor Körner Award*, the honorary title of *Professor*, the Austrian *Ehrenkreuz* (Cross of Honour) for achievements in science and art, the *Schaechter* Scholarship for Advanced Studies, New York in 2002 and the *Cavaliere dell'Ordine della Stella d'Italia* in September 2015.

The Gutruf exhibition “Different Perspectives” starts with the series

LITTLE VARIATIONS AFTER GREAT MASTERS (list 1-58)

Gutruf has been working on his *Little Variations after Great Masters* since 1976. This series of linocuts is a work in progress, expanded annually by the production of a few new pieces. Currently, one hundred examples pay tribute to wide-ranging paragons of art history – including frescoes from Pompei and works by Giotto, Master Bertram, Piero della Francesca, Bellini, Giorgione, Dürer, Tizian, Breugel, Cranach, Velazquez, Chardin, Cézanne, Klimt, Schiele, Klee and Picasso.

Regarding their production: After several studies (list 1) Gutruf cuts the inverted subjects into small-format sheets of linoleum and prints them. Due to the size of the format, motifs are reduced to their essentials and sometimes (with all due deference to their originals) interpreted ironically. The pieces are subsequently painted in acrylics (list 39-58) or in some cases onto ceramic (list 27). With his series of small-format oil paintings (list 2-26, 28-38) the intense involvement with “favourite works that have been selected according to very personal criteria” has finally led ever more consciously “to a search for a new classicism.” (Heribert Hutter, Gutruf . Estampas, catalogue for Mexico City, 1992, p.10).

It is a special joy for Gutruf, when his pictorial efforts are ingeniously interpreted or verbally accompanied. “The purist black-white works derive from drawings whose refinement exhausts all of the possibilities of realisation which print technique possesses.” (Philipp Maurer, Wiener Kunsthefte, March 2004, p.5) ”...the attention to strict lineation brings forth the essential” (Julian Schutting, foreword Gutruf exhibition Istanbul, October 2002)



In between are several works dealing with the mysterious paintings of the Dutch genius Johannes Vermeer of Delft (1632-1675), both on an artistic as well as a scientific level:

TRIBUTE TO VERMEER (list 71-74)

In May 2010, Gutruf was invited to arrange an exhibition in the Vermeer-Centrum in Delft (making him the first living artist to do so). There were several reasons for this extraordinary honour: the artist has been intensively concerned with Vermeer's *oeuvre* for decades. From 1973 to 1976 he worked exclusively on his *Hommage à Vermeer*, an original-sized paraphrase of the famous studio painting, which was presented not only in Delft but also during the course of the 2010 exhibition

“Vermeer – the Art of Painting” in the Museum of Fine Arts (KHM) in Vienna.

In the same year Gutruf created with *Blick in Vermeers Atelier* ('Glimpse into Vermeer's Studio') a second variation of this fascinating masterpiece. Through this work he consequently subjected Vermeer's interior pictorial world to a more radical appropriation: the curtain motif with the tapestry gathered aside – dark-hued in the back light – opens the view into the dazzlingly bright room.

Vermeers geheimes Vermächtnis ('Vermeer's Secret Legacy', list 72) once again features the unmistakable, noble interior of the parlour in Vermeer's Delft house, converted into a studio. The central subject of this variation is the further enhanced wall map of space – flanked on each side by ten vedute which have been deftly transformed from cityscapes to Gutruf's 'machinescapes'. The map's title is adopted from the *Hommage*.

In the foreground of the image the chair remains, blended visually with both a knotted carpet serving as the curtain, and the still life on the table which extends into the room. Also familiar from the original are: An expansive treatise; cloths; the plaster cast – a box is added – and the open sketch book. From these overhanging pages imaginary sparks leap onto the bold red cushion of the mahlstick resting on the easel board (symbolising the passage of an idea from genesis to execution through the supported hand of the artist). Several horizontal and vertical transparencies brace and accentuate the surface composition with careful regard to the picture format. Both painter and model have left the room. On the easel is seen a primed and carefully prepared (but as of yet unpainted) canvas encapsulating Vermeer's legacy.

Gutruf has pursued an interest in the historico-cultural, philosophical, and formal problems of perspective for a long time. Through research on *De Milkmaid* (list 73) in 1997 he was able to reveal both new and astonishing discoveries and connections.

The scientific study “The Hidden Geometry in Vermeer’s *The Art of Painting*” (list 74) written by the artist in collaboration with Prof. Dr. Hellmuth Stachel of the Technical University Vienna was published in 2010 in the Journal for Geometry and Graphics

<http://www.geometrie.tuwien.ac.at/stachel/j14h2gutr.pdf>

and in 2014 in the International Press of Boston

<http://intlpress.com/site/pub/pages/journals/items/iccm/content/vols/0002/0001/a006/index.html>

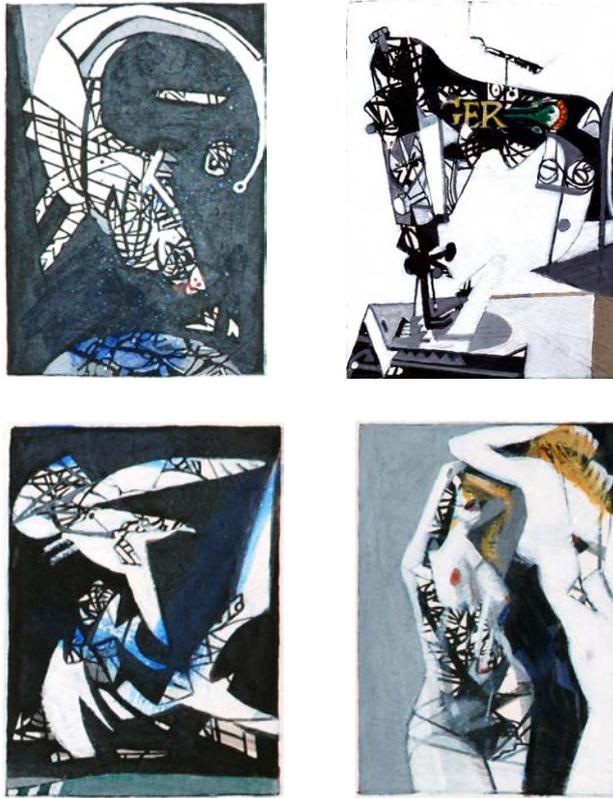
This study proves in a surprising manner by means of mathematics why Vermeer could not, for the composition nor the construction of his paintings, have used a *camera obscura* in a useful way. In its conclusion the study postulates that it was obviously not Vermeer's intention to imitate an artfully arranged natural model – but rather it was his ambition to suggest a pictorial reality with its own regularities.



With the recently created

CAPRICCIOS (list 59-70)

visitors to the exhibition are confronted with another aspect of Gutruf's range of subjects. The small-format test-linoprints, overpainted with acrylic, follow Gutruf's immediate inspiration and allow for associations both sublime and abstruse; sacred and sinful; ironic and abstract; profoundly human, and quintessentially Austrian.



The following is a section of works containing both watercolour and chinese ink paintings:

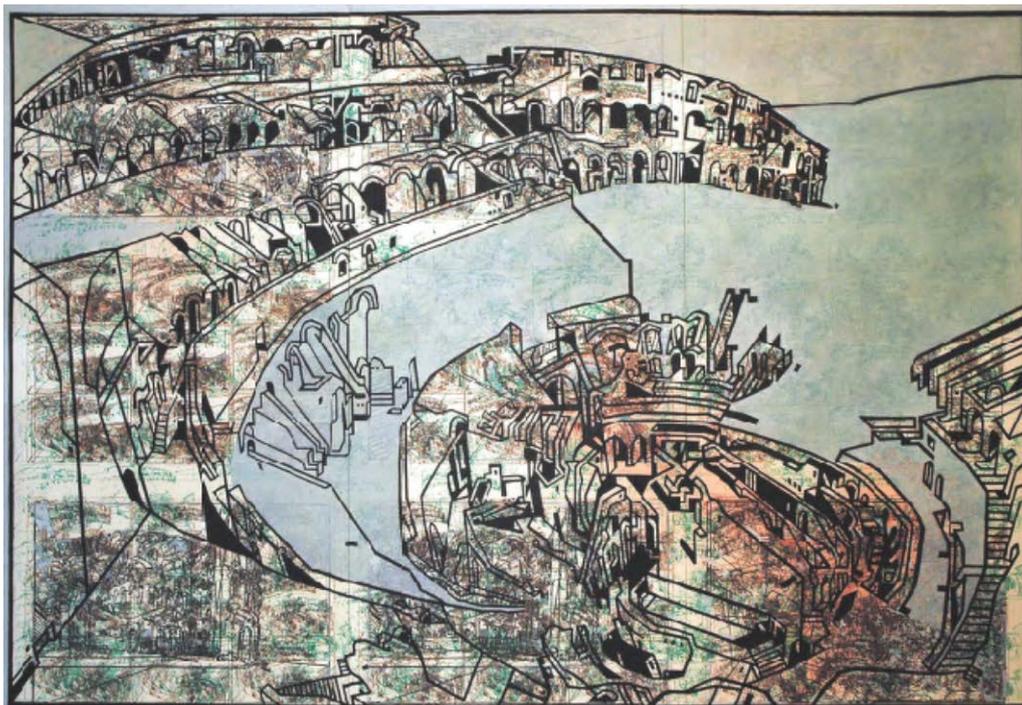
ITALIAN MOTIFS (list 75-111)

For decades, Gutruf has spent several weeks of each year in Italy. Focusing both on Tuscany and Rome he creates drawings, watercolours, and pieces using Indian ink. These works are realised without prior drafts, effectively as products of meditative concentration. Some subjects hold particular fascination for him: the panoramic Florentine vista (list 100-103); the birthplace of Leonardo (list 104-111) and the Colosseum (list 75-99).

Gutruf has sat in front of the incomparable Florentine vista well over 160 times. He has also produced over 60 watercolours of the simple farm house in Anchiano next to Vinci (always from the same spot, always in the same size). Here, the shadows of the backlit olive grove mutate to form Leonardo's 'secret alphabet'... In 2010 a collection of four of these works were exhibited as the sole Austrian contribution in the *Inaugural Shanghai International Watercolour Biennial*.

These consistent exercises in studying the same objects repeatedly are recounted in *The Tale of the Chinese Emperor and the Painting of a Rooster*. Hokusai's *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* are as famous as the 33 paintings Monet produced of Rouen Cathedral. Paul Cézanne's obsession with the limestone massif of Sainte-Victoire next to Aix en Provence is recorded in more than 60 watercolours and oil paintings created between 1870 and 1906. Variations are known chiefly from music: examples include the *Goldberg Variations* by Johann Sebastian Bach and Beethoven's *Thirty-three Variations of a Waltz* by Diabelli 1823.

For Gutruf, the Colosseum (list 75-99) is the perfect embodiment of Rome, magnificent and awe-inspiring at the same time. Gutruf has interpreted this classical monument in many complicated studies, multi-dimensional ink drawings, prints, watercolours, ink washes, and oil paintings from a contemporary perspective. These works give the Colosseum a time-transcending dimension. “Despite the strength of the subject, the draft is wholly characterised by abstraction. Our eyes follow the movement of dynamic lines breathing life into the pictorial space following the rhythm of baroque music, like notations of a higher order. The depicted subject slowly rises from the beauty of the abstract cage, only to slowly sink into it again, as though in a dream” (Paul Rotterdam, New York, foreword “Regarding Gutruf”, invitation card Gallery Peithner-Lichtenfels, Vienna, 1998, p.2).



Last but not least you can see

STILL LIFES (list 112-120)

In Gutruf's Still Lifes possibilities of a new pictorial reality are fathomed, where “individual objects are magically invoked in multiple perspectives” (Heribert Hutter, 1992, p.22).

“In his series of box paintings, the meaning of the object is reduced to a minimum in order to emphasise the compositional aspects as well as the distinct texture of the surfaces” (Friedrich Schächter, “Spotlights” catalogue Pretoria, 1998, p.10).

“Gutruf has hence revealed our epoch not only as the space age but, for painting, also as the space-

time-age: in these pictures the objects unite in crackling silence and emptiness and in clear subdued light – presented from different viewpoints but in compiled form – with time and eternity” (Claus Pack, catalogue Gutruf, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna, 1979, p.5).

“The pictorial material exists on various levels of abstraction, ranging from the immediacy of the surface to the depiction of subject content, taken either from reality or arising out of the construction of geometric elements... Gutruf's love for Vermeer points to his desire to find in painting not only an ideal but also a secret, which is hidden both in the complex arrangement of elements on the surface as well as in the presented subject, which is often not more than a cube with a shadow” (Paul Rotterdam, 1998, p.2).

In some of his latest works, Gutruf again combines utopian visionary pictorial worlds and inventions with his puristic box still lifes and thus achieves a new complexity.

Simply put, the most important aspect for the artist is the quality of the painting, which manifests itself on the image surface.

