

## The curve, the slant, and the line

Geometrically layered linear structures are the starting point for Christian Eder's art series *Strings*. In computer sciences, a string is defined as a sequence of symbols of finite length. The legibility of these paintings is based upon a game of optical effects, played clearly, puristically, yet also complexly by the artist. The series is anchored in the field of tension between regularity and variation, and functions according to the phenomena of patterns.

By comparing the individual statements expressed by the variations throughout the series, repetitions, reflections, principles, and similarities become apparent. The paintings seem to be subject to a formal syntax. Yet Christian Eder avoids being pinned down to calculability by inherently infiltrating his formal language grid with the seed of change. *Strings* is based upon ovoid forms, their dynamic lines overlapping with the horizontal geometric layering. The placement of the ovals varies from painting to painting, usually around a central element. In a way, the groupings evoke the image of a nest, cradling the freely floating elliptical, if not organic, forms. Unlike in a strict arrangement, the angles of the formal elements are placed with less rigidity than one would think at first glance. This shift causes a change in the patterns generated, and draws attention to the exactitude of the paintings displaying precisely parallel sequences. The overlapping of the ovals' basic geometrical structure with the underlying linear areas creates new optical effects that influence the perception of the geometric body with each object that is added to the picture.

The closely set color strips begin to vibrate with each other and with the grey- black grid of the ellipses. It is not the lines, but the closely packed impulses of color that meet the human eye and keep it in continual movement. The colors start to move off the canvas onto the white of the walls.

The profound examination of visual perception is an important precept of concrete art. Mathematical and geometrical deliberations result in planar color elements. When van Doesburg, one of the earliest ambassadors of concrete art, speaks in 1924 about working with mathematical methods, he is referring to the scientific research approach of this artistic direction. Max Bense discusses the melding of aesthetics, mathematics, and semiotics on a philosophical level in his 1934 publication *Space and I*. In his writings on mathematics in art in 1949, the semiotician examines the question of ornamentation:

*The mathematization of art has a morphological intention: not only the creation of certain figures from materials intended for the artistic act are subject in this way to mathematical factors, also the composition of artistic details and artistic elements is forfeit to mathematization, whether in the generation of geometrical patterns encompassing all details, or in the repetition of an element according to the laws of symmetry, one of the oldest and most widespread mathematical processes in the fine arts, which also possesses the excellent characteristic of unifying geometrical and arithmetical aspects<sup>1</sup>.*

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<sup>1</sup> Max Bense, *Konturen einer Geistesgeschichte der Mathematik. II. Die Mathematik in der Kunst*, Hamburg 1949, p. 57

Max Bense also refers to Owen Jones' *Grammar of Ornament*, published 1856 in London and stating 37 propositions, including "Proposition 10. Harmony of form consists in the proper balancing, and contrast of, the straight, the inclined, and the curved."<sup>2</sup>

Unlike the perpendicular world of some concrete artworks, van Doesburg introduced a dynamic effect and electrification through slanted lines in *Kontrakomposition*. Christian Eder takes his ovals even further, continuously developing symmetry and bringing three schemata together: the curve, the slant, and the line. The modular composition of *Strings* opens up unconceived possibilities to continually reposition forms.

The "Symbol-Number-Beauty-Connection" presented by the Stuttgart theoretician Bense in his work *The Improbability of the Aesthetic and the Semiotic Concept of Art*, is, from the study of proportions in antiquity to modern computer graphics, a "practically and theoretically based interaction between mathematical and artistic means of conception and construction at the most universal and fundamental level of our conscious ability to represent."<sup>3</sup>

In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Marc Adrian, one of the most important Austrians representatives of Concrete Art, delved into the use of the computer as a tool, above all for mounting materials. "Since the 1950s, a fierce understanding of art has manifested in his work, pushing for a demystification of the author, of the creative process, and of the work itself; made up of the conscious acceptance of our "technical existence" (Bense) in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and of the relativity and modifiability of the societal state."<sup>4</sup> In the publication *inventionen*, Marc Adrian states that, "It's about developing methods for artistic production processes that allow the individual coherency factors (k) of each artist in every way (v) become visible within the respective process. These methods must be representable and plannable. The generation of these programs is an artistic activity. The invention of these methods is the practice of Methodical Inventionism and the most important task of modern art theory."<sup>5</sup>

Developing a means of art production that sees its mechanization as an analogy for the industrial mass society of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Marc Adrian used the computer to generate an infinite number of works. In contrast to this, Christian Eder puts painting *per se* back in the spotlight:

*There is no preparation outside of the picture. All decisions are made directly in front of the canvas during the work process. The evenly spaced parallel lines painted in oils challenge the viewer's eye. There is no way of visually adhering to the painting. The spacing of the color lines determines if the observing eye is caught up or if the picture is perceived as a whole<sup>6</sup>.*

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<sup>2</sup> zit. nach: *ibid.*, p. 63

<sup>3</sup> Die Unwahrscheinlichkeit des Ästhetischen und die semiotische Konzeption der Kunst, Baden-Baden 1979, p. 133

<sup>4</sup> Margit Rosen, Programmierte Angriffe auf die Wirklichkeit, in: *Annar Artaker/Peter Weibel* (publisher), *marc adrian*, Exhibit Catalog Neue Galerie Graz am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz 2007, p. 69f.

<sup>5</sup> Marc Adrian, *inventionen*, Linz 1980, p. 7

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.christianeder.com/werke1/werke1.html> (9.9.2008)

If Marc Adrian's conceptual parameters get caught up in the spirit that recognizes technological/cybernetics solutions as radically breaking with the earlier prevalent voices. The now omnipresent inundation of computer generated technical images through the media can make the return to the manual activities of artists a soothing experience, as another young up-and-coming Concretist, Gabi Mitterer, expresses in an interview. The models developed by Christian Eder divest themselves of any need to be a technically perfect embodiment of the concept. They exhibit traits of the hand-made and even of a certain longing for authenticity.

Van Doesburg wrote that color plays a special role in the composition of the picture, "Color is the basic substance of a painting. It means only itself. Painting is a way to visually materialize your thoughts. Every painting is a color thought."<sup>7</sup> Form arises from the meticulously scrutinized interplay of colors. The series *Strings* limits itself to a reduced color spectrum, as do the artist's other series such as *Dualen Systeme*. Black-white-grey tones are contrasted with cool yellow or soft violet. Hues graded to metallic blue create a relief-like impression. Christian Eder doesn't use shinningly brilliant colors, but instead underlines the dimensional effect of the illustration.

The canvas vibrates.

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.mkk-ingolstadt.de/content/html\\_files/sammlung/konkrete\\_kunst.php](http://www.mkk-ingolstadt.de/content/html_files/sammlung/konkrete_kunst.php) (9.9.2008)