

Mark Handforth

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Mirjam Varadinis: You have a way of twisting things, both literally and figuratively. You make a lot of your sculptures by taking ordinary things apart and then putting them together again so that they lose their original meaning and acquire a completely new and different significance. Would you describe your method as deconstructivist?

Mark Handforth: Well, I probably wouldn't describe it that way. I imagine artists themselves rarely do, but I think you're right at the same time. Although weirdly enough, it was old fashioned Constructivism that pictured a kind of animation of the original, of the ready-made, and in my work I'm often picturing a similar type of movement. The difference, I suppose, is that the Constructivists were always pushing toward some great utopia, while I'm sitting here dismantling a kind of paradise. [...]

MV: You often work with the same motifs, but configured completely differently each time. How do the works relate to each other and what role do they play in the exhibition as a whole ?

MH: I see my exhibitions as « landscapes ». Every work is closely connected to the other works on view and together they create a totality in the espace. Depending on where and with which other works a sculpture is shown, the sculpture's meaning is changed. So the selection and the composition of the works are very important for me and are done very carefully since I always see an exhibition as a whole.

[...]

MV: You keep returning to the motif of street signs. They play a distinctive role in American culture and evoke memories of Ed Ruscha's famous photo series and Robert Venturi's *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972). But instead of reproducing or depicting them, you go a step further and make replicas of them. The resulting sculptures have something very sexy and Pop-like about them with their voluptuously colorful surfaces.

MH: Pop is the American cultural language. It's unpretentious and is the only culture in the US that is not learned or borrowed. My sculptures are pop, they recognize popular culture as the real culture of this country and they are ready-mades, but their meaning doesn't solely lie in the surface. They deal with "the facts on the ground." Literally the "facts on the ground" - lampposts, signs, hydrants, tires, you name it - and with the existential implications of those facts.

MV: You obviously also have an affinity with the aesthetic vocabulary of Minimalism, especially in the neon works that bring to mind Dan Flavin's light sculptures.

MH: When I grew up, Minimalism had already become part of classical art history along with Pop art. For me all these past art languages are simply that: available languages that I can speak. And sometimes I'm happy to use two different languages in the same sentence. Even if it is a little confusing. Besides I think this distinction between Pop and Minimal art is questionable anyway. Wasn't Donald Judd fairly Pop with fluorescent Plexiglas surfaces?

(extract from *All that is Solid Melts into Air*, a conversation with Mark Handforth by Mirjam Varadinis, in *Mark Handforth*, Kunsthau Zürich, ed. JRP/Ringier, 2005)