

# Florin Granwehr

## *“Order is the Fringe of Chaos”*

Oct 28, 2021 –  
Jan 16, 2022

MEDIA ORIENTATION  
Oct 26, 2021, 11 am

OPENING DAY  
Oct 28, 2021, 11 am to 8 pm

curated by Sabine Schaschl and Evelyne Bucher

Museum Haus Konstruktiv is honoring artist Florin Granwehr (1942–2019) with a retrospective. This sculptor and draftsman left behind a multi-layered oeuvre which, in addition to several realized art-in-architecture projects and sculptures in public spaces, also includes a wealth of sketches, models and drawings that have rarely seen the light of day. Via selected examples of his work, the full breadth of Granwehr’s oeuvre is now being shown.

Many Swiss people may have already encountered one or two of Florin Granwehr’s large sculptures: Born in St. Gallen, he made Zurich his adopted home back in the 1960s and was able to realize various works in this canton’s public spaces in particular, such as *Raumwandler* (1984) on the University of Zurich’s Irchel campus, *Axiomat* (1990) at the jetty in Wollishofen, and *Angulon* (1999) in front of the district court building. *Transeunt*, one of the last works he produced, has been standing in front of University Hospital Zurich’s staff-accommodation building since 2005. The exhibition at Museum Haus Konstruktiv shows that Granwehr’s completed sculptures were always preceded by a multi-stage work process, leading from quick initial conceptual sketches on napkins to meticulously precise drawings, sculptural designs in wire and exact models in wood. The fact that this sculptor quietly developed an oeuvre of drawings comprising over 40,000 sheets, on which he worked incessantly until 2018, is also thematized in the exhibition.

Set up on the fifth floor, the show begins in the passerelle with a selection of photographic impressions of Granwehr’s Südstrasse studio in Seefeld, Zurich, taken in 2019 after his death. They reveal various rooms in a multi-story timber-frame house, with furniture of the artist’s own design, where he would spend over ten hours a day working. Granwehr’s sense of order and occasional preference for serial arrangements were reflected not only in his artistic activity, but also in his everyday life: Plates, cups, pans, shirts and tools were all very neatly stacked, lined up or hung in rows. The so-called ‘napkin drawings’ exhibited in display cases provide insight into Granwehr’s thoughts. This artist always recorded his initial ideas in felt-tip pen on simple paper napkins; these formed the basis from which he would go on to develop his drawings, three-dimensional models, sculptures and art-in-architecture projects.

In the first room, visitors encounter two large three-part sculptures in wood (*Voluwandler*, 1985) and steel (title and date unknown). Resembling a skyline, these sets of harmonious bodies, which become narrower towards the top, testify to adept handling

of sculpture and the surrounding space. They also clearly convey Granwehr's interest in the relationship between numbers, proportions and volumes. The gray steel bar structures that comprise six steadily shrinking cubes on top of each other, each rotating to the left, to the right, or alternating between left and right, offer elaborate views to those looking through them, while the white painted wooden towers thematize the perception of volume and silhouette. Their elements, eleven and twenty-two respectively, each of which is somewhat smaller than the preceding one, are stacked in such a way that their contours sometimes appear linear, sometimes convex and sometimes concave. "Contour defines curve and counter-curve," wrote Granwehr in 1995. "Contour makes it possible to experience form." The tower-like sculptures are accompanied by early ink drawings from the 1970s and early 1980s. Some of these sheets take up themes from his sculptural oeuvre and carry them further. On other sheets, Granwehr plays with simple geometric forms to create a spatial effect.

Granwehr's works are always constructed according to a logic based on mathematics and geometry. An affinity to constructivist-concrete art seems obvious, although the artist himself repeatedly emphasized that he had nothing in common with the Zurich Concretists. Since many of his works come across like conceptual models, it cannot be denied that there is also a certain closeness to conceptual art. This is particularly evident in his drawn magnum opus *Granwehr'sches Theorem* (Granwehrian Theorem), a harmonic arrangement based on the numerical sequence 3, 4, 5, 6, which the artist discovered in the digits of the year 1998. Fascinated by the harmony that results from the doubling, division, addition and inverse subtraction of 3, 4, 5 and 6, Granwehr combined various equations in 1998, such as:  $33 + 44 + 55 + 66 = 198$ ;  $198 \div (3 + 4 + 5 + 6) = 11$ ;  $1998 \div (3 + 4 + 5 + 6) = 111$ ;  $951 - 753 = 198$ ;  $357 - 159 = 198$  etc. Around the turn of the millennium, Granwehr put his observations on paper with pencil and ruler, testing them via various dimensional and angular ratios, rotations and axial reflections. He obsessively and tirelessly kept working on them until shortly before his death, producing up to eight sheets a day. These are structured in sequences of 32 sheets each, which he carefully archived in cardboard boxes or deposited in his studio as stacks of paper and only rarely presented in public.

In the second exhibition room, 12 of the more than 600 series are now on display. A number of preliminary studies, via which Granwehr arrived at his visual solutions, as well as some manuscript pages featuring his written *Sentences* reminiscent of concrete poetry, provide insight into his artistic thinking. No matter how sober and clearly constructed the pencil drawings from his theorem seem, they do not hide the fact that Granwehr was also fascinated by the irrational: by numerology, for example. He was well aware that rational order can quickly tip over into irrational chaos. "Order is the fringe of chaos," he wrote in one of his *Sentences* in 1991. Nine years later, he came to the following conclusion: "Order is that which absolutely directly leads to chaos. The more order you have, the more chaos there is."

The third exhibition room focuses on Granwehr's medium-format white painted models in square-section wood, produced between 1980 and 1995. Although only a few of them were realized as large sculptures, these models exist as autonomous artworks within his oeuvre. Each of his self-contained series is based on an abstract problem, which Granwehr systematically examined on the basis of numbers, dimensions and proportions, much like his drawings. *Angulon*, in which Granwehr addressed various angular relationships, constitutes the largest group of works among his models in square-section wood.

Rhythmic systems of numbers and angles also form the basis for the sculpturally condensed works reminiscent of architectural models in the *Winkelweit* series, four of which are presented in the fourth exhibition room on the 'ideal plinths' that Granwehr made specially for them. This room also exhibits several sculptural designs in brass wire (preliminary studies for his precisely executed models in square-section wood) and selected photographs documenting Granwehr's large sculptures in public spaces in and around Zurich.

The exhibition at Haus Konstruktiv, conceived in close collaboration with the team from Granwehr's estate, provides an introduction to the Granwehrian cosmos – in which this

artist proves to have been a methodical systematic sculptor, a draftsman and a numerologist in equal measure.

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For more information and events, see: [hauskonstruktiv.ch](http://hauskonstruktiv.ch)

The digital program and the mediation offered on site are constantly being updated and adapted to the current situation.

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