

Marguerite Hersberger

Giving the Space Space

Oct 26, 2023 –
Jan 14, 2024

MEDIA ORIENTATION
Oct 24, 2023, 11 am

OPENING
Oct 25, 2023, from 6 pm

Curated by Sabine Schaschl and Evelyne Bucher

After twenty-eight years, Museum Haus Konstruktiv is presenting the second retrospective solo exhibition dedicated to Swiss artist Marguerite Hersberger (b. 1943 in Basel). One of the most important representatives of constructivist-concrete contemporary art, Hersberger has been equally interested in light, color, geometric form and space, ever since she began to work as an artist. The exemplary selection of artworks in the Haus Konstruktiv exhibition clearly shows that these aspects, which play such a substantial role in her oeuvre, are in constant dialog.

The exhibition *Giving the Space Space* spans two floors and begins on the fifth story. It provides insight into Marguerite Hersberger's creative periods from 1967 to the present day and is largely arranged in chronological order. Among the earliest works presented at Museum Haus Konstruktiv are those in which Hersberger began to experiment with acrylic glass prisms: In some cases, these light-reflecting bodies are set inside a colorfully painted wooden box (*Boîte magique Nr. 1*, 1967); in others, they appear as variable elements that cause a change in light and color by means of rotation (*deux éléments variables*, 1968). In *3-teilige Prismen* (3-Part Prisms, 1976), they lie stacked on top of each other and in *Prisma Relief Nr. 10* (Prism Relief No. 10, 1967), they are backed with painted canvas. In an effort "to replace painting with light painting", all these early works were conceived in acrylic glass. It has remained the artist's preferred material to this day.

In the early 1970s, Hersberger began to work with acrylic glass casings. She installed tense nylon wire inside them, thus creating three-dimensional drawings that engender sophisticated interplay between wire figure and cast shadow. Like the earlier acrylic glass prisms, these so-called *Organisations spatiales* refer to the main themes that run through Hersberger's entire oeuvre. These include light as the essential factor, transparency (which has a determining influence on spatial perception – the 'in front of' and the 'behind') and incorporation of the space.

Space is also thematized in the *Polissages*, realized from 1973 onward. The works in this series comprise wooden box frames and acrylic glass panels that become integral components of the compositions. Hersberger sanded certain areas of the panels horizontally, vertically or circularly with sandpaper, making them opaque. The untouched areas, which remain transparent, reveal the compositions in the background, drawn or painted using acrylic paint. Depending on the incident light and viewing angle, these visual objects give rise to changing impressions of the same composition.

The poetically playful *Lichtpinself* (Light Brushes, 1972/73), which Hersberger developed in the course of her first architecture-related project, are a special case. In 1971, she was invited to design a piece for the foyer of the hotel Nova Park. The artist proposed a wall installation with glass fibers in four different formations. The model, as well as several variations on smaller light objects adapted to today's electrical standards, can now be seen by the public for the very first time, at Museum Haus Konstruktiv. The original project was unfortunately never carried out.

In the 1980s, alongside *Polissages* in the classic square or rectangular format, Hersberger increasingly realized larger works in acrylic glass, with which she ventured out into the space. Still made of opaque and transparent acrylic glass, these visual objects have brightly colorful painted backgrounds. *Prismatische Körper* (Prismatic Bodies, 1983) is a work in two parts, each of which features a geometric composition in yellow and white. This triggers an optical illusion when viewed: The pair of three-sided prismatic parts are aligned horizontally so that their flat ends touch in the middle. If the observer now looks sideways through the glass bodies, an imaginary infinity opens up, produced by reflections in the non-matted acrylic glass. Despite how clearly constructed this ensemble is, it also shows us Hersberger's sense of playfulness. This is equally true of the five colorfully striped acrylic glass triangles, arranged in a manner that brings a kaleidoscope to mind. Indeed, the title of this wall installation is simply *Kaleidoskopisch* (Kaleidoscopic, 1987).

Marguerite Hersberger's use of diagonals made her works become increasingly dynamic. This is conveyed, for example, by the works produced from 1980 onward under the title *Rotation um einen Mittelpunkt* (Rotation around a Center) and the mural of the same name in the beamed hall on the fourth floor, which was specially conceived for Museum Haus Konstruktiv. The interior of this painting is organized by several lines positioned at certain angles to one another. Internal dynamics also evolve in *Ineinandergefügte Quadrate* and *Scheibenbilder* (Interlocked Squares and Disc Paintings, from 1990 onward), which can also be seen on the fourth floor. The works in these series each comprise a single acrylic glass panel, on the front and back of which, tilted rectangles or squares are painted – some appearing evenly pastose, others slightly cloudy. The resulting nestings and superimpositions lead to surprising visual experiences.

In 1993, Marguerite Hersberger started to intensively address the circle as an image-defining motif. From round surfaces or circle segments, sometimes in combination with squares and rectangles, she produced spatially sophisticated, seemingly multilayered *(Kreis-)konstellationen*: (Circle) Constellations. In these works, the image carriers consist of two acrylic glass panels mounted close together. On parts of both panels, geometric shapes are painted: On the front panel, they are translucent and applied carefully by hand, whereas on the rear panel, they are applied evenly, using a spraying technique. This procedure leads to startling moments of perception: Where the background is left white, it causes a glazed blue to glow, while the same blue appears dark and matt against a bright yellow background, as seen in *Viertelskreise, Nr. 63 a + b* (Quarter Circles, No. 63 a + b, 1995).

Marguerite Hersberger's most recent works are ultimately about light, transparency, colors and the shadows they cast. Hersberger creates works in this series, under the title *Farbschatten* (Color Shadows), by painting transparent geometric shapes on acrylic glass panels. Artificial light sources cause the shadows on the backgrounds to appear not in the expected shades of black, but in various hues.

The *Pliages*, exhibited in the left-hand cabinet, constitute a separate group of works that Hersberger has been realizing since the 1990s. These 'foldings' are based on sheets of transparent paper, parts of which are colored on either side using acrylic paint or graphite. Folded at certain angles, the forms generate minimal visual spaces, with a multilayered nature much like that of the acrylic glass objects. The more recent works in the series explicitly refer to an architectural context, with titles like *Houses, Doors, Windows* or *Spaces*. Hersberger's interest in architectural space is also particularly

evident in the numerous architecture-related projects that she has been able to realize in Switzerland and abroad. The right-hand cabinet is dedicated to these.

Be it a sculpture, wall-mounted object, work on paper, mural or architecture-related project, on either a small or large scale, every exhibit demonstrates Hersberger's sensitive approach to space, as well as her ability to take a vocabulary of forms characterized by reduction and infuse it with immense sensuousness.

A comprehensive publication on Marguerite Hersberger's site-specific work will be presented at a book launch on November 15th, 2023.

Marguerite Hersberger attended the Basel School of Design from 1964 to 1966, focusing on sculpture. She then worked in François Stahly's sculpture studio in Paris until 1970. From there, she moved to Zurich, where she still lives and works today.

MEDIATION PROGRAM

OPENING

October 25, 6 pm

Speaking from 6.30 pm: Andreas Durisch, President of the Foundation for Constructivist, Concrete and Conceptual Art, Michel M. Liès, Chairman of Zurich Insurance Group, Cecilia Jaber Breceda, Mexican Ambassador to Switzerland and Liechtenstein, and Sabine Schaschl, Director of Museum Haus Konstruktiv.

ARTIST TALK AND BOOK LAUNCH

November 15, 6.15 pm

Sabine Schaschl in conversation with Marguerite Hersberger (in German).
Registration is required via anmeldung@hauskonstruktiv.ch

PUBLIC GUIDED TOUR IN ENGLISH

January 7, 11.45 am

Further guided tours in German: Wednesdays at 6.15 pm and Sundays at 11.45 am

For more information and events, visit: hauskonstruktiv.ch

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