



Jürg Stäuble «Affinitäten»

with Silvia Bächli, Franziska Furter, Eric Hattan, Edit Oderbolz, Maya Rikli

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The line, “the heart of art,”¹ has been considered the dominant principle for creating and ordering images ever since the Renaissance. It surrounds fields of color and defines the contours of the objects depicted. Perspective in turn derives from a linear projection, an abstraction that uses the line as a constructive point of departure. As Leonardo da Vinci already established, the line doesn’t exist in nature, for in reality it is merely an intellectual construct, an overarching concept that in itself describes nothing at all. If the line was originally reserved for the “master drawing,” during the course of the twentieth century new dimensions open: the line frees itself from representation and breaks away from existing supports, often small sheets of paper. Instead of the drawn gesture, the line increasingly appears as a fragment with its own conceptual possibilities, a visual situation, an alterable trace. It no longer serves as the necessary condition of a drawing, but as an independent agent of formal creation and thus becomes an object of intense phenomenological and artistic research.² But the line as such only describes itself. It is the affinity of one line to another, its proximity to the background, to the emergent interstitial spaces that grants it an expressive power as a contemporary artistic device.

The exhibition “Affinities” at Galerie Mark Müller presents five recent works by the artist Jürg Stäuble alongside pieces by Silvia Bächli, Franziska Furter, Eric Hattan, Edit Oderbolz and Maya Rikli. For these artists, the line, as a formal commonality or a constructive foundation, becomes as it were as a point of contact across forms and between one another. Taking this as a point of departure, myriad additional links between the works exhibited here can be found: affinities that demonstrate the importance of spatiality, materiality, and its form-giving structure, affinities that challenge us as observers to take a closer look and to decode the many commonalities and differences between the works for ourselves.

Since the 1970s, Jürg Stäuble has been intensely engaging with spatially expansive structures and the linked conceptual questions that explore the qualities and perception of space and spatiality. His works are based on complex systems of order that use “game rules” that were developed especially. Geometric structures line up, layer, shift, and penetrate one another initially in preparatory construction drawings and models.³ This results in works that are based on the mathematical principles of the theory of space, but only refer them indirectly in visual terms. Stäuble’s processual form finding and implementation between geometric concision and amorphous-organic appearance is also revealed by the three floor sculptures in the first space of the gallery (*Faltung Band, 2 Schnitte, 2022; Faltung Band, 4 Schnitte, 2022; and Faltung Ring, 3 Schnitte, 2022*). Due to their considerable size, the three recumbent sculptures seem incredibly solid, but at the same time weightless, for the edges of the aircraft plywood primed with gesso only touch the concrete floor of the gallery in a few places. An additional dualism lies in the visible form of the three works: from various perspectives, a constantly changing impression of various curves, angles, cutting lines, and torsions results. The three floor structures seem impenetrable and arbitrary. Here, however, Stäuble’s rules set the criteria: as already alluded to in the descriptive titles, two ribbon elements and a section of a ring serve as points of departure. According to

laws of his own design, the artist defines a number of circular segments that he draws on his paper models. Along these rounded lines, Stäuble folds the ribbon and ring elements that thus elevate as three-dimensional bodies in the space. As in many of Stäuble's works, the virtually contemplative seeming sculptures reveal nothing of the basic geometric rationality of the construction.

Ambivalent fields of tension inhere in Jürg Stäuble's works, moments of disturbance created by the artist himself. A labile order between geometry and sensual appearance is also the foundation for the seven steel rods installed on the wall (*Horizont, 2 Fluchtpunkte, 2022*). With the help of two vanishing points, the artist lets the dark rods run towards one another. This does not primarily demonstrate the linear projection of perspective, but, depending on the perspective and the fall of the shadow, creates a slightly shimmering horizon, or even the impression of a minimalist, barren landscape. Like a distant echo, the large format drawing by Silvia Bächli (*Rote Bänder Nr. 14, 2022*) on the opposite wall takes up the line of the horizon. The nine reduced brushstrokes run opposite our standard reading direction across a total of eight sheets of paper. We can almost see how the brush runs out of paint during application. The immense power of the individual lines inheres in the constant balancing of the voids between them, their relationship to one another and to the edge of the picture, to the paper support and the wall surrounding it.

Gaps are also key to the artistic work of Edit Oderbolz. Like a relief, the lacquered reinforced steel juts into the space (*Untitled, 2011*). The grid, consisting of the intersection of several lines, already became a touchstone for many artists in the second half of the twentieth century. Here, the slightly curved rods cross to form a more or less open grid structure that also serves as the support of individual fragments of fabric. Fascinated by simple forms of housing and relics of residential life, the scaffold and fabric repeatedly serve as points of departure in Oderbolz's works. The work of Maya Rikli on the rear wall of the gallery (*Salento, 2022*) takes us out into nature, but also stands in opposition to it: manual precision encounters formal succinctness. While from a distance the work seems almost formalistic, upon closer inspection we see where the range of color comes from. On the two-meter-high wood panel, numerous dry flowers condense that Rikli herself cuts, dries, and applies to the foam. While the artist initially focused on installations, objects, texts, and drawings, flowers increasingly became part of her work and culminated for the first time in a large-format work in which she works exclusively with dried flowers and grasses.

While many of the works exhibited here emphasize the horizontal, the sculptures of Eric Hattan (*Kantenmax, 2022; and Fassmax, 2022*) focus on the very opposite: various rods, some bent, thick, thin, colored, perforated or rusty, strive upward and with their emphasis on the vertical upset the many visible horizontal lines. The rods are anchored to the floor in concrete or plaster pedestals that consists of discarded empty vessels like buckets, bins, or paint canisters. Spontaneity, chance and the awareness for the puzzle of everyday life play a key role in Hattan's artistic practice. He plays with moments of recognition and upends them with moments of disorientation and disturbance.

In the second gallery space, we once again encounter Hattan's pipes and concrete pedestals, which stretch to the ceiling illuminated by the light from the large window (*Keimmax, 2022; Hotelmax, 2022; Silbermax, 2022; and Henkelmax, 2022*). From the first corner, an additional work by Jürg Stäuble grows (*Eckstück mit 6 Winkeln, 2022*). The polished aluminum sheet climbs along the two floor edges and up the wall. Here too, the artist uses geometric regularities as a point of

departure to create a sculpture that due to the selected material literally creates new angles from various perspectives. Its oscillating form seems also in this case to oscillate between strict formality and sensual association. With the sculpture, Stäuble also activates the corner of the room, a place in the exhibition space that normally remains empty and goes unused. But considerations about space with all its prerequisites and characteristics form an important cornerstone of Stäuble's oeuvre. Diagonally opposite, the slightly shining surface of Stäuble's corner sculpture repeats in a net-like web by Franziska Furter. Like a transparent waterfall, the work of countless glass beads affixed to the wall seems to spread slowly across the floor (Wavelans / Jharjhar, 2019/20). The shapeable grid crystallizes from a drawn impulse of the artist, for the line plays a very conscious role in her work. With the help of conceptual and material experiments, Furter creates a seamless bridge between drawing, object, and installation.

In the exhibition "Affinities," we encounter a wide range of objects of perception that develop their very own impact using subtle interventions and their very own materiality and structure. The rational systematicity and graspability of Jürg Stäuble's works is countered by a constantly changing appearance that expresses itself spontaneously and intuitively. It thus seems no accident that the quite emotionally charged concept of affinity is also founded mathematically in geometry. The very same duality is expressed in the form of the line as well: it is an intellectual concept, as already emphasized by Leonardo da Vinci, and can serve as a formal point of departure. But in the exhibition, it becomes a unifying, associative idea, an emblem that materializes in each work individually, a constantly changing trace in space and time.

Marlene Bürgi

¹ Bernice Rose, *Drawing Now* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1976), 10.

² Catherine de Zegher, "A Century Under the Sign of Line," *On Line* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 23. But it should be pointed out that the line already was already understood as both a phenomenological and an artistic manifestation, as illustrated by Pliny's recounting of the story of Apelles and Protogines.

³ Dominique von Burg, "Die Laufmasche im System," *Jürg Stäuble. Mehr sein als System* (Zurich: Museum Haus Konstruktiv, 2017), 18.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.