

AUREL SCHEIBLER

For Immediate Release

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FORM FARBE RAUM UHLMANN BAUMEISTER KRICKE NAY



Berlin – Aurel Scheibler inaugurates his new location at Schöneberger Ufer with *FORM FARBE RAUM* (*Form Color Space*), an exhibition which focuses on four German artists whose work very much evolved around these three elements: Hans Uhlmann (1900-1975), Willi Baumeister (1889-1955), Norbert Kricke (1922-1984) and Ernst Wilhelm Nay (1902-1968). *FORM FARBE RAUM* shows paintings, sculpture and works on paper mainly originating from the 1950s and 1960s. The exhibition runs from 8 December until 16 February and opens on Friday 7 December from 6 pm to 9pm.

'Degenerate' was a term which had made a whole contingent of Germany's most influential and important artists non-entities for more than a decade. Prohibited to work, to exhibit, to even obtain canvas or paint, they were bereft of their livelihood and their essence. For many of them, employment in another professional environment or military service formed their official existence while the shadow side of life was filled with a continuation of their artistic productivity. Against this background, the end of the war, despite all its destruction, also stood for liberation, for freedom, for the regained possibility to frankly express the innermost ideals.

Finding a new departure after the war proved to be a very individual undertaking. Depending on context, background and personal circumstances, artists reacted differently to their newly re-acquired liberty. All four artists presented in this exhibition decidedly chose a non-political way, elevating their art above the level of reactionism or misanthropy. The process towards abstraction which had found its origins in Cezanne's work and had subsequently gone through the motions of movements such as cubism, constructivism and suprematism had already found its way into the prewar oeuvre of Baumeister, Uhlmann and Nay. It was its ability to open up new dimensions and proximities as well as its propensity to communicate in an exacting and direct way which led these artists and a next generation including Kricke to be further guided by this new language.

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Recognition in Germany followed rather swiftly, but access to an international audience was harder to establish. 'German' proved to be a loaded denomination. It took years and very committed supporters for these artists' reputations to pass the German borders. Uhlmann, Baumeister, Kricke and Nay still may not be real 'household names' in today's international art scene, but the relevance of their work to international artists, museums and collectors has become more pronounced over the years. The relative 'obscurity' of these artists however is certainly part of the reason why every new encounter seems to reveal afresh how truly radical and groundbreaking their work was and still is.

Hans Uhlmann (1900 – 1975)

Two key words have been used to distinguish Hans Uhlmann's work – resilience and courage. Trained as an engineer, Uhlmann had established a discrete but promising parallel existence as a sculptor when in 1933 the political regime forced him to take his sculpting activities underground, where he continued his artistic life in a solitary atmosphere comparable to that of exile, creating sculpture impregnated with an aura of stillness. In 1945, the artist Uhlmann could finally re-emerge and his search for a new, transparent, space-defining form of sculpture was further developed. The use of wire, metal rod and surfaces on the one hand, his technical knowledge regarding statics, volumes and materials on the other, enabled Uhlmann to bring about a new form of sculpture. His work is defined in terms largely unknown to the sculpture jargon: rhythm, transparency, energy flow, and weightlessness. Although fully abstract in their appearance, his sculptures never lose touch with the natural world to which Uhlmann returned again and again, both in the drawings as well as the sculptural oeuvre. It is in their transcendence, in their force as spiritual and poetic translation of reality, that Uhlmann's works acquire their full dimension.

In the 1950s, Uhlmann's work was exhibited sporadically in Germany by Berlin-based galleries but mostly by the Günther Franke gallery in Munich. The Kestner Gesellschaft in Hannover presented selections of his work in 1953 and excerpts were also shown in Bremen, Wuppertal and Wolfsburg. His first international gallery exhibition was in 1957 at the Gallery Kleemann in New York. Uhlmann's sculpture was part of the first three Documenta editions in Kassel (1955, 1959 & 1964). Internationally he was shown at the Venice Biennale (1954); the 'New Decade' exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1955); the World Exhibitions in Brussels (1957) and Montreal (1967); and in the First International Exhibition of Modern Sculpture in Tokyo (1969). However, it was only in 1968 that the first retrospective exhibition of Uhlmann's work in Germany took place, which was at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin. Hans Uhlmann made his last sculpture in 1972, he died three years later.

Willi Baumeister (1889 – 1955)

Although fully established as a well-known artist and arts professor, the change in the political climate in 1933 resulted in Baumeister's dismissal from his professorship at the Frankfurter Kunstgewerbeschule and the removal of dozens of his paintings from German museums. Before and during the war, Baumeister earned a living from producing commercial art and from a day job in a varnish factory. His book 'About the Unknown in Art' was published in 1947 and revealed a fascination with the elements of movement and time. Guiding the viewer's gaze, providing him with an experience

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of mobility and rhythm and creating a sense of time, were his main preoccupations. 'All-over' – the equality of the depicted elements and their background – became a key concept in his oeuvre, especially in his late work. Once the war had ended, Baumeister, like Nay, formed an invaluable bridge between the prewar and postwar art world and an important forerunner for a new generation of artists.

Baumeister, thanks to his active and sustained international prewar network, was able to exhibit relatively swiftly again after the war. In 1948 he participated in the 'Salon des Réalités Nouvelles' in Paris and in the Venice Biennale to which he was invited again in 1952; in 1950 he had a solo exhibition at the gallery Jeanne Bucher in Paris. One year later Baumeister was represented at the first Biennale in São Paulo and received the Biennale Prize. In 1953 his works were part of the exhibition 'Younger European Painters' at the Solomon Guggenheim Museum in New York and of exhibitions in Tokyo and New Delhi. He had solo exhibitions in 1954 and 1955 in Stuttgart, Paris and Cologne and participated in the first edition of Documenta in Kassel. Willi Baumeister died in his atelier in 1955.

Norbert Kricke (1922 – 1984)

A generation younger than the three other artists represented in *FORM FARBE RAUM*, Kricke's work still shaped itself against a backdrop of war and a search for other media of artistic expression. The American avant-garde with its idiosyncratic vitality – specifically the work of Jackson Pollock and Alexander Calder – impressed the young artist. In the mid fifties, Kricke succeeded in breaking up the compactness and denseness which had characterized so much of sculpture for so long. He shaped expressive linear wire structures, at times accentuated with color, suggesting weightlessness and movement and leading the viewer into the openness of space rather than obstructing it. Kricke's sculptural compositions defy every attempt to order or fixate as his use of linear components signifies an uninterrupted sense of movement, without beginning or end, regardless of angle or perspective. Although the idea of 'transcending' plays a major role in Kricke's work, there was no intention on the artist's part to conduct a spiritual search. Kricke saw his work as an emotional gesture that takes on a physical presence in space and offers the artist access to the world.

Norbert Kricke's first solo exhibition in Germany took place in 1953 at Ophir, Gustl Böhler's gallery in Munich and was followed a year later by a solo show in the gallery Parnass in Wuppertal. 1955 was marked by high activity as Kricke's work was shown in exhibitions including 'Peinture et Sculpture non figurative en Allemagne d'aujourd'hui' (Paris); the Middelheim Biennale (Antwerp); and at the Düsseldorf Kunstverein where he received a solo presentation which traveled later that year to Istanbul. In the following years he had solo shows at gallery Samlaren in Stockholm, at Iris Clert's gallery in Paris and at the Kunstverein Freiburg. 1958 was a hallmark year as Kricke received the prize of the Chicago-based Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, which was followed in 1961 by a solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. His sculpture was also included in Documenta II and III (1959 and 1964). Over the years, Norbert Kricke also received and realized private and public commissions for outside sculpture in Germany and abroad. The artist died in 1984.

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Ernst Wilhelm Nay (1902 – 1968)

To Nay, the artist's gift was a sacred one: the capability to construct an image in which the sublunary and the transcendental touch. The artist whose paintings had been designated as 'degenerate' at the end of the 30's and whose war experience as part of the infantry was nothing if not repressive, returned to his artistic life in 1945 with a fundamentally positive attitude and a deep desire to invoke a solid foundation of European culture that ante-dated the destructiveness of its history. Nay's move to Cologne in 1951, a large and bustling city with an active musical scene, clearly inserted an element of rhythm and velocity in his work which had already left figurative allusions behind and had become preoccupied with an open pictorial structure and the value of color. Music to Nay symbolized freedom and stood for a perceived order evoked by the character of the different keys. These *modi* he expressed in his color constellations whose harmony was rooted in the intrinsic laws of color relationships. The freely rotating and frictionless colored discs slowly came to a standstill in the early 60's, fixing their gaze on the viewer, offering him a magical lens which seemed to enable a glimpse into the secrets of the universe. In the last turn of Nay's oeuvre, the gazing eyes dissolved into absolute clarity and simplicity, calling forth compositions in which the motives have become one with the ground and constitute an artful membrane between the 'Here' and the 'Beyond'.

Ernst Wilhelm Nay's work received its first postwar exhibition in 1946 with the galleries Franke in Munich and Rosen in Berlin. The Kestner Gesellschaft in Hannover gave him a first retrospective exhibition in 1950. His first international solo show took place at the Gallery Kleemann in New York in 1955. The Venice Biennale of 1948 showed wone painting by E.W. Nay and during the 1956 edition he had a solo exhibition in the German pavilion. Nay's work was presented during the Documenta I, II and III, the last one being particularly memorable because of the three large-scale paintings that were suspended from the ceiling of the Museum Fridericianum. A participation in the São Paulo Biennale took place in 1959 and was followed by the award of the Guggenheim Prize for German art in New York in 1960. During the 1960s, Nay participated in several exhibitions in the US. His last retrospective during his lifetime was at the Museum des 20. Jahrhunderts (Museum of the 20- Century) in Vienna. His final trip to Berlin he undertook in February 1968, to visit Uhlmann's exhibition in the Akademie der Künste. Ernst Wilhelm Nay died three months later.

FORM FARBE RAUM

Dates: 8 December 2012 – 16 February 2013

Opening: 7 December, 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Venue: Aurel Scheibler, Schöneberger Ufer 71, 10785 Berlin

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Images:

Hans Uhlmann, *Stahlskulptur (Variante)*, 1952, ©Nachlass Uhlmann/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2012

Willi Baumeister, *Figuren auf Gelb*, 1951, ©Baumeister Archiv, Stuttgart/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2012

Norbert Kricke, *Raumplastik*, 1967/1968, ©Norbert Kricke Archiv, Berlin

Ernst Wilhelm Nay, *Schwarze Kette Grün zu Rot*, 1966, ©E. Nay-Scheibler, Köln/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2012