

Insights into George Steinmann's intellectual cosmos

Over the past 30 years, George Steinmann has developed a specific vocabulary for his system of thought and understanding of his work. Focussing on terms that come up time and again when dealing with his work, we can venture a glimpse into Steinmann's cosmos. Based on a conversation with the artist, a glossary of selected terms was compiled, which records his view, and also the personal connection to the frequently recurring keywords.

And

"The beginning is the recognition of coherences. One will increasingly be able to see that there are no specific questions that can be detected or solved in isolation, because ultimately everything is intertwined and interdependent. The continuation of the beginning is to discover more correlations and to exploit them for the most important task of humankind - for development."

Based on Wassily Kandinsky's essay, my work is about the "and". It is not about the "either...or", but about the "as well as". My interest is based on the insight that all phenomena are interconnected and interdependent. Everything is relationship, nothing exists by itself. Each action exists in a context.

Awareness

We live in a superficial time, where there is little space for subtle perception. It is therefore necessary that we once again learn to develop awareness and empathy. For me, empathy is not the opposite of analytical precision, but its precondition.

Blueberry

The use of blueberries (lat. *vaccinium myrtillus*) in my oeuvre has no purely aesthetic reasons, but investigates the plant in question for its therapeutic significance. The blueberry is "source material". This primarily concerns the essence myrtillin contained in the plant juice, and therein lies its deep symbolism in relation to the *quinta essentia*. For centuries, the blueberry has been a popular medicinal plant, among others a therapeutic agent for the eyes. The wonderful blue-violet colorant myrtillin helps to improve eyesight. I use this aspect in my artistic practice.

Blues

Blues is more than just music to me. It is a way of life. The blues is sensitivity, pessimism of feeling and optimism of action, something between melancholy and zest for life, Weltschmerz and love, a message from the now-or-never time. For the blues, there is only one criterion:

the lived life. Every day the blues is a source of inspiration for me, directly on the instrument and also as spiritual roots, and it has been like that for 50 years!

Complexity

My work is about perception and the understanding of complex systems of life. I see art not only as a tool to describe the world, but rather as a driving force, by which the world can be perceived and respected in its context.

Creativity

The resource of the 21st century is creativity. It is an expression of a different culture of knowledge, because in all fields, the escalating crises urge every single human being to realign to a free, responsible and creative thinking beyond selfishness, arbitrariness and intellectual rigor - be it in science, economics or politics, in the cultural sector or in the lived-in world. Sustainable development means the development of humanity.

Dialogue

The dialogue is the essence of the 21st century – we live in a globalised world, are totally connected, and have access to infinite information. But all this is not enough if we do not simultaneously find the way to a culture of mutual respect. Only a mutual understanding about different viewpoints and perspectives allows for the solution of current problems. I therefore believe that an art that adequately meets the challenges of our future would have overcome its self-imposed isolation in the modern age. With my art I not only want to respond, but also enable relationships networks. I am interested in dialogue, cooperation in the knowledge that the social reality of the 21st century has become too complex for us to afford us the luxury of disciplinary simplification.

Forest

The forest is a mystery and means comfort to me. It is a wonderfully complex, multifaceted phenomenon: a constantly changing organism with different structural configurations, not to speak of the sounds, the scents and the various facets of light. The contemporary forest interests me as a social mirror, a place where you can see the fear, the ideals and ideas of nature and beauty. I always feel extremely well in a forest.

Growing Sculptures

The term “growing sculpture” has developed organically over the years of my artistic practice. Growing sculptures are about cyclical processes, change and development. They are enquiries, contain vagueness and cannot be fully planned in advance. Growth does not

mean the linear-quantitative progress, the “faster, higher, further, more” of industrial modernity. It is rather growing beyond accumulating. Growing sculptures are always in flux. Something grows, transforms, but also dies at the same time. This position includes an awareness of “being in transit” and refers to a different understanding of the culture of time. I like to imagine an art that is guided by the cycles and rhythms of nature.

Indigo

For me the indigo colour is a symbol of power. The symbolism is based on the manufacturing process of the deep blue dye, which was originally produced from natural plants by indigenous and later African-American slaves in the USA. Since the processing led to countless deaths due to the extreme working conditions, I use real indigo (today synthetic indigo is also available) as a metaphor for oppression and exploitation.

Interdisciplinarity and Transdisciplinarity

Interdisciplinarity is a discourse between different experts. It is about an exchange with multiple perspectives to solve a specific task.

Transdisciplinarity in turn transcends academic knowledge. It is not only intellectual knowledge that is relevant, but also the skill of an artisan, the local knowledge, for instance, of old women, intuition. If one gets involved in transdisciplinary processes as an artist, it means that for the moment one accepts entering a very complex level of cognitive effort and that the vocabulary of one’s own discipline and the image of the artist in general, has to be radically put into perspective. Transdisciplinary art cannot be a hermetic work of loners but is the product of networking.

Limits

Limits in the geographical, territorial or political sense are no longer relevant. Self-limiting, however, can be useful and necessary.

Multimediality

My artistic practice inherently contains multimediality. It has been like that from the start. I like to play with different media and make no distinction between a brush, a video camera or an instrument. They are all means to an end. What drives me are the substantial questions, only later do I select the media that is the most suitable for the work process.

Negotiating

Negotiating is part of my artistic work and needs diplomatic skill. How to convey, for example, in a meeting that the renovation of an art gallery is a work of art and needs financial support?

I see myself as a “negotiator” or a mediator similar to a diplomat. Not least, because otherwise cross-border artistic concerns never even get to the stage of discussion.

Network

I am a networker. I already believed in the power of networks of relationships and networking very early on. In 1986, for instance, I presented the vision of a first public art Highschool in Switzerland under the project title *Netzwerk* (Network) at the Kunsthalle Bern. Even today, network structures are of fundamental significance in my work.

Place

A topic that has accompanied me since childhood. Over time I have developed a great sensitivity for places, their aura or pathogenic forces. To engage in a place means to seek a dialogue, feel what is. Wonder. To appreciate the rough surface of reality on the one hand and the underlying phenomenal complexes on the other. A place must be internalised before one decides on an intervention, which possibly also includes omission.

Processuality

All my works are process-oriented. The dynamic process is in the foreground, which has to do with a system-critical aspect. I do not believe in the dominance of Cartesian logic, in the static or the final truth. It is rather about seeking, questioning, improvisation and intuition. I increasingly rely on these energies. Interestingly, something intuitively comprehended is never unclear, quite the contrary: the wonderful moment between the first instant and the subsequent mental work is of great transparency, a free space that is capable of creating art.

Research

As an artist, I have always seen myself as a researcher. Creativity is connected to curiosity, it is the essence of artistic or creative activity. In my case, the curiosity is so great that it automatically entails the quest for new findings. My art is basic research. A thinking and acting that does not operate with the categories separation and polarisation, but seeks systemic relationships. Limitations, fragmentation and deadlocked patterns are replaced by networks. Artistic research works differently from scientific research. It is primarily concerned with questions of aesthetics, at most with issues of holistic perception or “priming”, which means intuitive work processes. It is also about forms of representation that are not committed to the discursive expression. But, above all, artistic research shakes up the conventional epistemological basis of Western sciences. It does not strive to be free of any subjectivity or passion, and therefore subtly questions the epistemological value of the sciences.

Resources

Material resources are power and wealth. But they also represent potential danger. Fossil fuels, for example, show that we have now reached a turning point at which the earth turns out to be a fragile, overused and depleted entity. Mental raw materials, however, are the true potential of the future.

Responsibility

A sense of responsibility is essential for our time. The responsibility of art for society and the environment is central to my work. I think art today must explicitly face the question of responsibility.

Shamanism

Shamanism is a specialised form of holistic knowledge. I first came across this knowledge in the Sámi culture during my six-year stay in Finland. Later, again, during my studies in the US, when I visited Hopi and Navajo reservations. And since then time and again during my expeditions in the Russian Arctic, in Komi or in Kyrgyzstan.

Society

For me, art is not an isolated entity outside society, but a part of it. I therefore prefer to engage at the crossroads between the field of art and other environments. It is my belief that the real purpose of art is not only to convey knowledge, but to produce knowledge.

Solidarity

Everything depends on whether we are able to cope with the challenges of our future, together and in solidarity. The demand for more solidarity, however, means nothing less than the programme of a profound revision of our social values. But, this also requires an unwavering confidence in the capacity of the human being to develop and demands faith in the global "we". Who else, but ourselves, can develop and implement global sustainability?

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is the most indispensable vision of the 21st century. The term, however, is now used so excessively that it has become almost meaningless. Therefore, it is important that this term is again purged and returned to its original meaning. Sustainable development means to get orientation not only from what factually exists, but to be sensitive to the subtle developing forces of the world. Only then is sustainability understood in society as an opportunity, when it is connected with sensuality and the passion of one's own actions.

Sustainable development in the context of the arts means to integrate the competence of art in the quest for a sustainable culture. The traditionally handed down concept of Western art is thereby called into question to the last. An aesthetics with sustainable prospects investigates, for instance, forms of the less and also explicitly contains another time culture. Both aspects are of great importance in my work.

Time/Time Culture

All my works focus on the time culture: When I travel, for example, to the Lower Engadine for 25 years, to collect pigments at 16 mineral springs, instead of buying industrially produced pigments in the store, that is connected to a conscious use of time. For me, the time culture also implies a differentiated involvement with deceleration. Linear time does not exist, but is merely our own construction.

Transfer of Knowledge

I increasingly place more importance on the transfer of knowledge and education, and this might have something to do with my age. To share experiences and knowledge with a new generation is a wonderful thing, but also a great responsibility. One wants to communicate and hopes that this creates resonance.

Visions

There is no future without vision. My personal visions are about “global governance”. We need a “global governance” including art, because it is predestined to cross borders, and can reassess deadlocked patterns. The knowledge of the arts is vital within the horizon of sustainability.

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