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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PAINTINGS OF MARKUS LUPERTZ

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO:

THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN & COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES

AND

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FACULTY OF FINE ART  
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BY

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ILLUSTRATIONS.....	2
INTRODUCTION.....	3
Chapter	
I Influences on Twentieth Century German Art History.....	5
II Dithyrambic Painting.....	14
III Motif Painting.....	20
IV Style Painting.....	24
V Conclusion Lüpertz' Attitude to Painting and Life.....	31
- - - - -	
FOOTNOTES.....	35
APPENDIX.....	36
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	40



# Illustrations

No.		Page
1.	<u>Covers of Der Blaue Reiter and Die Brücke</u> ,.....	11
2.	<u>Sea Battle.</u> 1913 by Wassily Kandinsky.....	11
3.	<u>S S on Guard.</u> by Ferdinand Slaegeer.....	12
4.	<u>The Yellow Horse.</u> 1912 by Franc Marc.....	12
5.	<u>Artillery Men in Shower.</u> 1915 by Ernst Ludwig..... Kirchner.	13
6.	<u>Dance of the Cut-Throats.</u> 1938 by Max Beckmann.....	13
7.	<u>Mexican Dithyrambic.</u> 1964 by Markus Lüpertz.....	18
8.	<u>Hovering Dithyrambic.</u> 1964 by Markus Lüpertz .....	18
9.	<u>Railwayline Dithyrambic.</u> 1973 by Markus Lüpertz.....	19
10.	<u>Apocolypse Dithyrambic.</u> 1973 by Markus Lüpertz.....	19
11.	<u>Legend Dithyrambic.</u> 1975 by Markus Lüpertz.....	23
12.	<u>Arrangement for a Cap.</u> 1973 by Markus Lüpertz.....	23
13.	<u>German Motif.</u> 1972 by Markus Lüpertz,.....	23
14.	<u>Amour and Psychic Series.</u> 1978/79 by Markus Lüpertz....	28
15.	<u>Stil: Eurydice.</u> 1978 by Markus Lüpertz.....	29
16.	<u>Stil: Death and the Singer.</u> 1978 by Markus Lüpertz....	29
17.	<u>Stil: Death and the Girl with Long Hair.</u> 1978 By Markus Lüpertz.....	29
18.	<u>Stil: The Fisherman's Death.</u> 1978 by Markus Lüpertz...	29
19.	<u>Markus Lüpertz.</u> Photograph: 1983.....	30



## I N T R O D U C T I O N

German Art has become more International and part of the "centre of interest" in the art world for the past several years. There has been a general return to painting during this time.

In West Germany today there are a number of groups of artists, working in different cities around the country. These artists could be divided into two groups, a younger group and an older group. In Berlin Fetting, Middendorf, Salome; Cologne Dokoupil, Dahn, Bömmel; and in Hamburg Büttner, Oehlen - these artists make up the younger group working in West Germany. Baselitz, Lüpertz, Immendorff, Kiefer and Hödicke make up the older group of artists. Some of the older group have been painting for more than twenty years outside the international art world.

From this older group an artist emerged around the late sixties, named Markus Lüpertz. It is this artist whom I would like to examine and trace the development of Lüpertz's painting from the late sixties up to around the early eighties. I also want to comment on his attitude to his own persona and attitude to life in relation to his art.

When Markus Lüpertz was eight he fled to Bohemia with his parents. He is now along with Baselitz and Polke living in exile in West Germany.

Lüpertz studied at the Werkhusstahule, Keifeld from 1956-61, with Lauren Gossens and then for a period at the monastery of Maria Laach, where he painted the crucifixion series. From there Lüpertz went to Keifeld for further studies at the Kunstakademie, Düsseldorf. During this time Lüpertz also worked as a coalminer and a road-builder. Since 1961 he has devoted himself to painting and has settled in Berlin.



Lüpertz's work in the sixties centred around the word "Dithyrambic", a coherent and large motif symbolic of the psychic, which is a pictorial equivalent of a hymn or poem in honour of Dionysius.<sup>1</sup> Lüpertz explains his purpose in inventing the "Dithyrambic". "The grace of the twentieth century will be made visible by the Dithyrambic founded by myself". With this as an aide, Lüpertz built a foundation for a style that could describe social realities without illustrating them.

Lüpertz works in series in which he seeks to transcend subject matter, some of which has been made taboo or suspect by historical events in Germany. In this series of painting called "Motif Painting", Lüpertz treats German war images as Monumental still lives. These motifs soon developed in his "Stil Painting". Lüpertz in his "Stil Painting" seeks to try to exorcise style by appropriating elements of Picasso, Cubism and other art historical sources. Lüpertz demonstrates all these elements involved in the building up of the picture, so that the observer becomes witness to the alchemy of painting.

In the last number of years Lüpertz's work has become more unplanned, more improvised. His work often seems scuffed and stained and unfinished. This is part of his message, that these paintings are not coherent statements, but raids on the inarticulate. Their results are no more than provisional. Lüpertz has no real concern for the final result of his painting. He leaves the final presentation of a painting to his assistants to stretch up and make decisions about cropping, an attitude shared by some German artists. Their emphasis is on the activity of Art rather than the final result.



## Influences of Twentieth Century German Art History

It has been some time since Germany has existed as a complete nation and a state at the same time. It is seldom that the German people have had "a realistic" identity which justified them inwardly and outwardly.

Central Europe, without natural borders, has helped to foster this identity. Germany has been divided up and awarded to different spheres of influence in its past history. The main unifying tie in Germany today is the German language. The other unifying factor in Germany was a political force, as with Hitler and the rise of National Socialism after the Great Depression in the 1920s. German history changed so quickly that one generation is different from the previous generation. At one time in Germany there were poets, thinkers and composers who helped to shape the image of the German "race", and for a long time Germany was a laboratory for new ideas in the 20th century. The ideas formed by Marx, Freud and Einstein all originated in Germany, views which still influence the world today. Germany today is divided up into two states, the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic, both with citizens who call themselves Germans.

The German identity has played a part in determining the direction of art produced in Germany from the past and the present. It is this "identity influence" which has helped to characterize German art more strongly than the tendency towards a homegrown form of art. This can be illustrated by the different forms of art being produced in Germany in 1919. There we find existing together: Expression, an anarchic form of Berlin Dadaism and the founding of the Bauhaus with its clear direction on the uniting of art and society.



These three positions help formulate the important aspects of the identity of being German after the First World War. Each of these positions show the different parts of a German character being expressed in the visual arts. The German identity is only one aspect of the background to the visual arts in twentieth century German history.

Nietzsche, the German philosopher, epitomizes the problems involved in the nature of German art in the twentieth century. They concern themselves not merely with questions of simple beauty of appearance or with formal properties. But, rather, the properties of German Art in this century evoke reflections of great complexity in relation to the specific moment of creation within the social and political history of Germany. The concept of Art and the artist in twentieth century Germany was to make powerful and significant claim for itself. Artists from those such as Kirchner, Kandinsky or Beckmann working at the beginning of this century, to those living and working today such as Beuys, Baselitz or Lüpertz are all concerned with problems of style, but along with these problems there are problems of ideology for which their work acts as a vehicle.

At the base of Expressionism there lies any number of existential questions. Expressionism we will define as an attitude to art and life that was and still is prevalent in artistic literary and intellectual circles, particularly in Germany. Artistic groups such as "Die Brücke" founded in 1903 in Dresden, headed by Kirchner or "Der Blaue Reiter" founded five years later in Munich by Kandinsky and Marc, were attempting in their artistic production to exemplify a new world order as expressed through their own generation. The artists of Der Blaue Reiter and Die Brücke as a group and as individuals produced work of great power and seduction. They also viewed themselves as being largely outside of society which they were in one sense. But art dealer Hirt Walden presented the work of these artists and others to a highly responsive German audience as characteristic of their society and capable of throwing much light on the causes of the catastrophe which befell it. But



the historiography of Expression has sought to emphasize the role of the artist as hero or anti-hero and has tended to detach him from his larger historical and cultural context.

The National Socialists during their years of power forbade and tried to eliminate modern painting, including Expressionism, as part of their attempt to cleanse the German national Culture, to replace it with an art of sentimentality. Expressionist painters and sculptors were subject to the ridicule of the highly successful "Degenerate Art" exhibition which was mounted in Munich in 1937. This show was repeated throughout other parts of Germany in different forms. Many of these expressionist artists fled into Switzerland, Holland and to America, but others stayed and produced work virtually in secret inside Germany and were known as the "inner emigration".

After the defeat of Germany in 1945, they felt compelled to make good again the losses of the museums, which they did with success. German Expressionism was presented once again to an eager public by critics such as Will Grohmann, friend of writer Hurbert Read. Writings of "Die Brücke" and "Der Blaue Reiter"<sup>2</sup> were once again published in the 1950s. In the writing of "Der Blaue Reiter" artists speak of "the extent to which the German painters were able to distance themselves from the art of the French". In France artists took up their position from the art of Cezanne while German artists tended towards a greater expressive strength derived from symbolism, from something mystical, and attempted to give it a metaphysical dimension.

German art history during the course of this century, has, with certain exceptions, separated itself to a large extent from the main body of historical reflection, to form an almost totally independent discipline with its own philosophy and methodology. A modern historian compiling a survey of German history may only devote a paragraph to the question of art as a symptom of historical reality, the



historian may at best add fuel to a general argument. K.D.Bracher in his book, *The German Dictatorship*<sup>3</sup> leaves out visual artists in his perceptive comment on those increasingly irrational tendencies of the German intelligentsia in the first half of this century who took their cue from Nietzsche. But the works of art in exhibitions demonstrate that artists, like any group of individuals, are subject to the "irrational" and often in themselves highly convincing ideologies. Artists can also be perceived as part of that totality of history, as expressed by Hegel who speaks of world history representing "the evolution of the awareness of the spirit of its own freedom...", every step being different from every other one having its own determining principle. In history such a principle becomes the determination of the spirit, a national spirit. It is here that it expresses concretely all aspects of its consciousness and will; it is this that imparts a common stamp to its religion, its political constitution, its social ethic, its legal system, its cultures and also its sciences, its arts and its technical skills."<sup>4</sup>

Such statements are in keeping with passages in Kandinsky's Concerning the Spiritual in Art. In this Kandinsky speaks of three "mystical sources" from which art arises through internal necessity! "What is peculiar to himself, what is peculiar to his own time, what is peculiar to art in general."<sup>5</sup> It is that latter quality, the pure, the eternally artistic, that remains immortal to Kandinsky, but this does not obviate the necessity of the work of art, "...being compounded of the language of the time and the language of the race, as long as the race exists."

By the late 1940s interest was firmly focussed on the art of the Expressionists. Their work was shown individually and in group exhibitions. The tradition of the Bauhaus was then recalled which was centred around the newly



founded "Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm". But it took a little longer for Dada and Surrealism to gradually be rehabilitated for a larger public.

There were other setbacks and disappointments for a new generation of German artists. The world language of Abstraction had generally been accepted and, after the dominance of the Paris School, attention was focussed on individual American Action Painters and the New York School. At the same time other disident influences were perceived which had arisen in parallel to abstract art and which appealed to contemporary taste: Jean Dubuffet, Albertin Giacometti, Francis Bacon.

These artists were viewed to be exceptions who confirmed the rule of Abstraction, as solitary individuals and outsiders. But with the rise of Pop Artists such as Warhol and Lichtenstein caused a radical change in opinion. Although the principal significance of abstract art as a world language did not appear to be compromised, it began to be accepted that other forms of expression could be regarded as equally modern. The word "pluralism" appeared and since then has not been absent from discussions on art.

Only with the idea of pluralism were Dada and Surrealism accepted as modernist movements which German artists had helped to shape. Only when the conflict between Pop Art and world of advertising and consumerism was perceived to signify a general rehabilitation of objectivity, was "Neu Sachlichkeit" conceived as a contribution in its own right rather than a deviation from the true path of the history of art. The conflict surrounding Objectivity and Abstraction had been pursued with bitterness in the first years of post-war Germany. But it was solved with the simple and dubious conclusion - both objectivity and abstraction are right in their way, both have their justifications and can exist side by side.



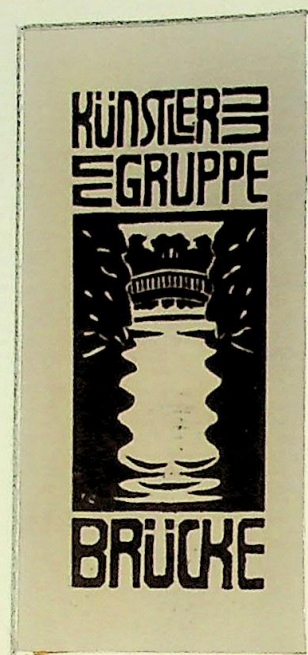
This argument had centred on the problem of how the image of reality can be adequately expressed today, by objective symbols or by pure abstraction. The scientific and physical image of the world conceives reality as a field of force, as space for vibrational energies as electro-magnetic, as the vibration of minute atomic particles. One would have thought that such an image of the world could be adequately expressed only in abstract art. In its "innermost being" the world cannot be depicted, since this "innermost being" escapes our perception and evades our gaze.

These kinds of arguments were repeated in various guises at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of 1950's. Ultimately they all agreed on Abstraction and saw the justification for figurative art only in the past.

In West Germany this has been accentuated since the fifties by an emphatic internationalism which, corresponding to the need to catch up in current art, brought French and American art of the fifties and sixties into the focus of interest.

In Düsseldorf the "Zero" Group attempted at the end of the fifties a new start at the "Zero point" of art with white pictures and light constructions, deriving from everyday art which later lead to analytical and magical ideas for pictures. A return of figurative painting, with its cry back to expressive traditions, had got on its way in West Berlin, in the sixties, in the work of Baselitz, Lüpertz, Hödicke and Penck. This was considered initially as a peripheral phenomenon, a centre of newer German art was emerging here, which again picks up moments of extreme tension of form and content. Baselitz with his "new type" of images, of the "German themes" of Lüpertz tied painting to extreme subjects and often offending taboos.





Covers of Der Blauereiter  
and Die Brucke



Sea Battle

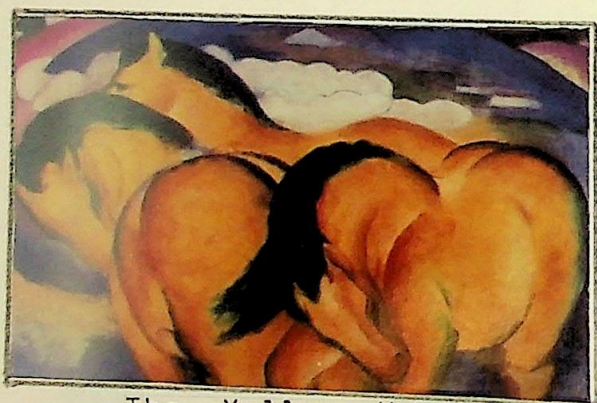
Wassily Kanoinsky 1913





S S on Guard

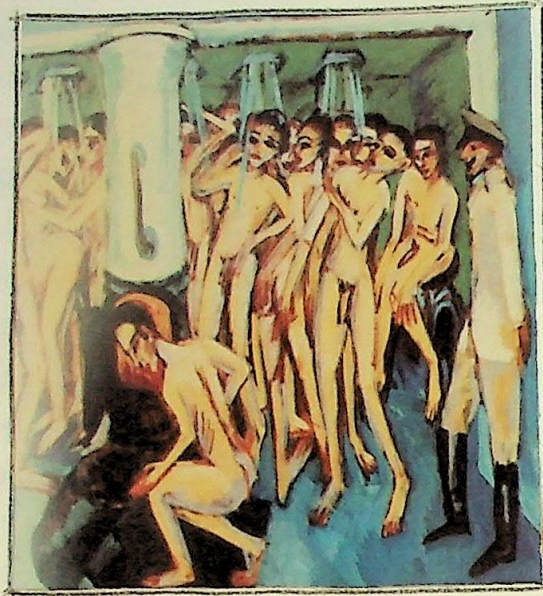
Ferdinand Slaegeer



The Yellow Horse

Franc Marc 1912





Artillery Men in Shower  
Ernst Ludwig Kirchner 1915



Dance of the Cut-Throats  
Max Beckmann 1938



## Dithyrambic Painting

In 1965 American minimalist artist and writer Donald Judd proclaimed that painting was dead; that it along with its traditions seemed played out. The avant-garde was dominated by minimalist work which had rejected the ethos of "Belle peinture". If art wanted to reflect its society artists had to use the new media of video, film and performance or else art should be made of minimalist or conceptional preconceptions. To the intellectuals it appeared obvious that painting had run its course and painting could be left to the "Sunday painters" and street artists. Victor Beirgin, a conceptual artist, spoke for many when he said "I'd given up painting in '65 for the rather crude reason that it was an out moded technology. There were enough paintings and sculptures silting up the basements of museums of the world - why produce more?"

Many artists still remained to paint, but it was no longer the central activity as it had been for the last seven centuries. The general view of painting which was still being produced, that it was formally and spiritually bankrupt and most figurative painters had their heads buried in the sand, making pictures in the old traditional way as if nothing had changed this century. Pop art had come along with its reprocessing of mass media imagery, which was chic but not challenging enough. It was the abstract artists which produced the greatest antagonism to the figurative artists, with Clement Greenburg accenting his formalist criticism, of flatness, shape of support and the properties of pigments. All this however had very little to do with life out on the street or society in general.

Markus Lüpertz was one artist who started painting in the sixties against the background of a minimalist,



conceptual domination. Lüpertz adapted the traditional ground of a painter. He created for himself a theatre in which the absurd objects, emblems, allegories and metaphores are used to reinterpret universals such as the creation and awakening of life, the interaction of natural forces, human emotions and ideologies and the experience of death.

Lüpertz's work of the sixties centred around the word "Dithyrambic", a coherent and large motif, symbolic of psychic wholeness. Any consideration of the historical "Dithyramb" of classical Greece would be unimportant and misleading in this regard. The word dithyrambic for Lüpertz means a symbol of wholeness, emerging from the narrow and restrictive round of daily living and an ecstasy beyond the artistic habit. In this way the notion of the dithyrambic offers the artist the possibility of overcoming and transforming reality. The dithyrambic was a slant to a discovery of a secure form that Lüpertz needed to establish his painting and was a decisive step towards picture objectivity - the outcome of a painting without representational or literary references. The distance from reality signified by the term dithyrambic which is still an important part of Lüpertz's more recent works.

In a poem, in 1973, Lüpertz indicated that the artist is akin to a prophet: "be resigned to me, there is no other way, there is no defence against me. I am like rain, I bring the flower to bloom in you, the earth to life, be glad, for fear is mine." This idea of Lüpertz is that he or the "artist" had taken all the fear and through painting he could bring emotions, natural forces to light in human beings.

Another aspect of Lüpertz's dithyrambic is the anguish at the irreconcilability of antithesis. His painting does not culminate in a demonstration of thick paint - in Bravura painting - but complies with



the Surrealist inspiration which surrounds objects with a mystery; it could be the irresolvability of contradictions. Lüpertz insists on the expressive effect, but at the same time he evokes a reservation which after the powerful and energetic sixties, guarantees the continuance of painting and the preservation of Utopia and essential reality. At the same time Lüpertz in his painting tries to keep a distance from the objective world and to return that objectivity in the shape of threat.

In these early dithyrambics Lüpertz used only abstract shapes as in "Hovering Dithyrambic 1964". This painting is an objective image in the sense of an invention which has to be deciphered into as objective. It has a dark blue background above which there is a spacious horizon and an object is suspended above it, this object is clearly divided into two halves. The representation of this suspended object is determined by the dynamics of its appearance and by the painterly treatment of the frontal prospect. What may be at first sight an illusionistic treatment of an object which obeys the laws of perspective, but on closer inspection it is revealed as a complex piece of painting effected with artistic subtlety. The outlines at the right hand side of the object are distorted and the lower edges of the object supply it with an impression of volume and help the illusion that it is hovering on the picture plane. Along with this three dimensional effect the surface structure forces our attention to the smooth painterly treatment of the front surface of the dithyrambic. This too helps to keep a fine balance between what is concrete objectivity and fantasy which keep the object in illusionary suspension.

Markus Lüpertz found with the dithyrambic a way of bringing together a single form of powerful sculptural effects with a more subtle dialectical pictorial structure. This supplied the painterly equivalent of

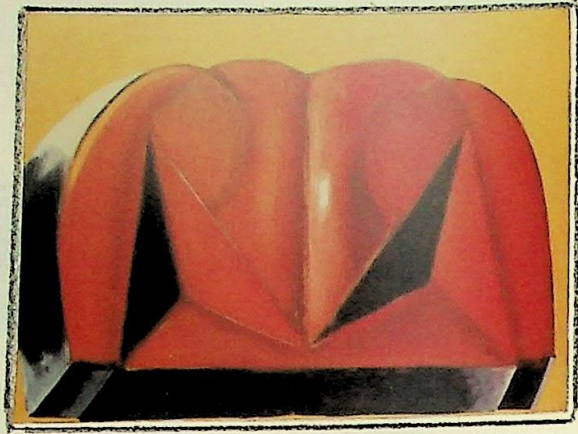


his claim to portray the optimism of the sixties by monumentalising the object and at the same time including the irredeemable experience of the contradictory nature of social forces.

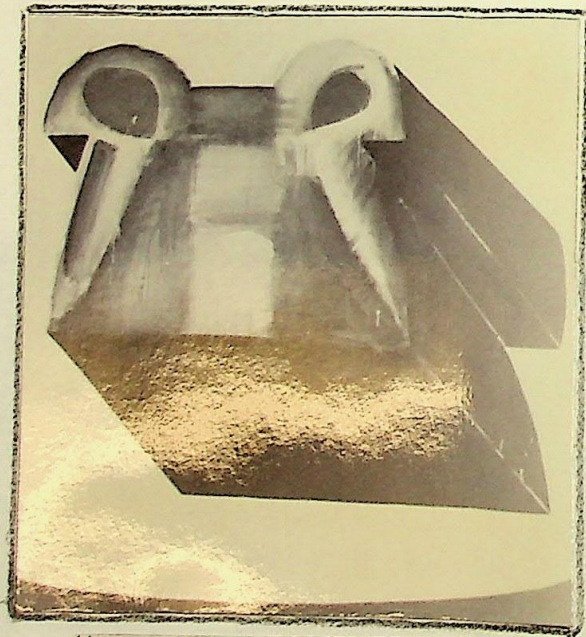
Lüpertz moved away from fictional objects and turns instead to found objects in reality. He then turns these objects into something mysterious and fictional. One example of this is the "Railway-line Dithyrambic 1968". It is a long painting 12.5 metres long and almost impossible to be taken in at one look. In this painting the object becomes closer to reality which forces it to a greater degree of autonomy. The object disappears as an image so that the painting as such has to afford distance and openness. As in this painting and other paintings of this period the drawing power of space is again strongly evident. The space which the railway sleeper occupies is almost identical with the format of the picture. The whole painting reaches an extreme point and its massive size brings it as close as possible to the life size of the real object.

Lüpertz maintains his claim to be a painter while being in accord with the historical situations. The railway line is a railway line, or a gaping row of teeth or something else...or it is a patent apotheosis of painting. The one cannot exist without the other. Lüpertz apotheosis is wrapped up in the word dithyrambic and a dionysian form of intensity either "drunker or inspired" a position Lüpertz claims to occupy. The dithyrambic lives as a new object. If I paint railway lines, Lüpertz said that he would find a new object for the railway lines - a new object in the world of art. The dithyrambic give Lüpertz security, and it first marked his separation from the art of that time. Once this was established Lüpertz looked around for possible ways of abstraction and realism.



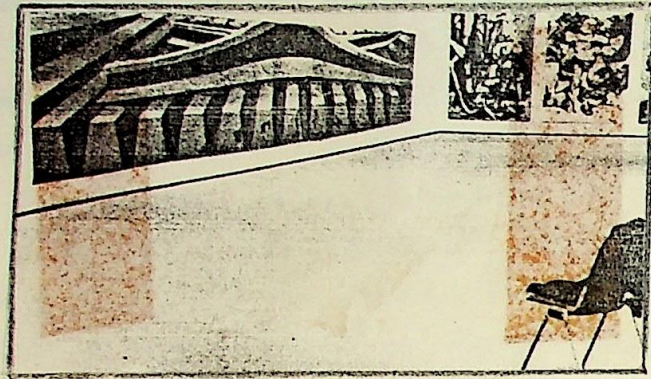


Mexican Dithyrambic  
1964



Hovering Dithyrambic  
1964





Railway Line Dithyrambic  
1968



Apocalypse Dithyrambic  
1973



## Motif Painting

With Lüpertz's free-wheeling approach all things can be the starting points for a painting and in 1970 he entered a phase called "motif painting". Some of the motifs in Lüpertz's work are extremely sensitive as they are heavy "Third Reich" symbols. In the painting their presence is not excused; they are not veiled by soft colours or elegant composition. Lüpertz uses these symbols just as Cezanne used apples. Who ever thought to ask if Cezanne was for or against apples? But these are not apples, they are Third Reich symbols. They are aggressive and create aggressiveness in the work. However Lüpertz does not only paint motifs and these motifs are not what make the work. The motifs only allow the "painting" or direct the "painting". The motif co-ordinates the different aspects of painting, the choice of colour, size, material and treatment into a single purposeful act of painting. Once completed then the "painting" leaves the motifs behind.

This phase of "motif painting" lasted until 1975 in which year Lüpertz undertook a painterly examination and a revaluation of the motif and groups of motifs which were not only heavily Third Reich and German ideology but the form they took also, for example, the triptych, being rooted in German tradition. This was the raw material for his painting, which was characterised by an emphasis on the surface of the picture. Lüpertz surrendered the illusion of perspectival space and the shock effect in favour of a methodological refinement and simultaneously restricted the painting to the treatment of a single motif. Two important works of this phase were "Apocalypse - dithyrambic and Arrangement For a Cap" completed in 1973. It was in the Apocalypse - dithyrambic painting that Lüpertz first used the triptych form. This format occupies an important place in the history of German art in that it's use implies a reference to an



element of German ideology in painting. The triptych formerly a favourite form of altar painting, was rediscovered in the nineteenth century by the historicist movement to which Romanticism gave rise. Subsequently the triptych has served either as a confirmation of- or as a criticism of German ideology. Lüpertz' own analysis of his development logically led him to adapt the triptych in his work and to acknowledge and adjust its ideological context.

In the Apocalypse dithyrambic the similarly painted surfaces of the triptych are a spur to the narrative. A Shell shape is repeated over the three canvases. It is joined in the centre panel by a Homburg hat and coal scuttle helmet, both of which have traditional German associations. Lüpertz' intention is not to glorify these motifs but to show them emptied of meaning in the face of the dynamic force of painting. Nothing happens in his paintings that could discourage a narrative. These motifs are repeated through the three canvases with only small painterly adjustments from one panel to the other, so that it is impossible to speak of identical copies of the same motif. In this triptych the central panel is wider and has a few additional motifs. The narrative in the painting results only from the change that takes place within the painting. There are direct advantages for Lüpertz, he now having access to a greater number of elements, these being interconnected not by means of a single action but by the mode of combination. The principle governing this combination is no longer the addition of artistically equivalent details but the synthesis of formally associated objects. Lüpertz' second aim of painting, the representation of objective alienation, now takes over the motifs and gives rise to a world of irony. The transformation brings about a formal relationship within the newly established conglomerate of objects. Black is used as a painterly and symbolic quality. The power of

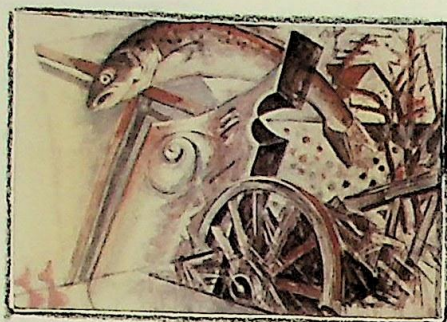


painting is no longer shown within the motif by means of exaggerated use of perspectives and such manipulation as blurring or bisection of objects, but occurs as the transformation of one thing into another.

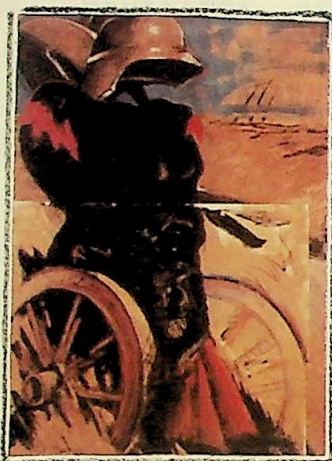
The strength of the painting is its ability to reveal alienation and menace. But the scope of painting, with the picture's surface is now extended as the motif begins to take on its own life. And by means of an aggressive treatment of the actual colour surface Lüpertz is trying to neutralise the element of spatial illusion still to be found in his work. He achieves this by withdrawing colour from the colours of the picture, the entire available surface no longer being covered and in this way the illusion of dramatic space is destroyed. There are now clear and autonomously effective traces of the actual colour imposition. With this revelation of the actual work of painting Lüpertz again ensures distance from the object, and obtains the brilliant effect of a painting which both dazzles and retains aspects of beauty which lie in wait on its frontier with madness. This frontier also runs right society as the broder between reason and unreason. This "Dionysian" ideal used by Lüpertz comes from the Greek and has run through different societies to this present day, and is taken up and expanded by Nietzzyche. Christian ideology was opposed from the start to any kind of Dionysian spirit of experience and in this day and age a "sober analysis" is preferred by critics of a positivistic or Marxist leaning.

Through his use of the Dithyrambic, motifs and the Dionysian spirit/attitude Lüpertz has built up a sensitive repetoire which enables the structure of the paint to make statements and which establishes complexes of forms enabling the powers of form and colour underlying the surface to express themselves.





Legend Dithyrambic  
1975



Arrangement for a Cap  
1973



German Motif  
1972



## Style Painting

Lüpertz moved into another phase of painting around which he called Style painting. In these paintings he continued the analysis of pre-existing iconographical material which at the start of the seventies led to the disestablishment of German Symbols. Thus releasing the mechanism of social psychology, the paintings of this period reflect the closed, impenetrable and immovable situation of society. Lüpertz' art has to be seen against the background of a debate on the authoritarian structures of everyday life. Brutality, vigour, fear, terror, threat all arise not from abnormal but from normal situations. These paintings are rich and assert themselves with immediacy. They also present again to us, the relationship between beauty and terror, eros and death, time honoured themes in art. Their dialectic nourishes the vigour and shape of the formal complex of what Lüpertz calls his "style painting".

Lüpertz followed the same principle which he had used in his triptychs, a series of images to supplant the individual picture. He produced series of images which enabled him to develop and test a specific category of forms. Lüpertz evolved a storehouse of irregular forms to be activated by painterly devices and by the addition of further elements such as curves or arbitrary flecks of colour. Here the forms take effect by virtue of colour, shape and size in relation to the whole. The spectator becomes a witness to a process of artistic alchemy. Since these paintings depend on an investigation of restricted colour combinations, they serve to manifest and preserve the importance of the language of art and its effects.



Lüpertz returned to the architectural pictures in 1977 but removed the remaining elements of perspective and foreshortening. This process can be seen in the "Babylon dithyrambic". Although this painting retained traces of sky, clouds and rows of windows, the orientation is to the pure style-painting: that is, a picture without imitative elements. Associative details of eyes on a body shape occur at most ironically or incidentally, but Lüpertz omits even these illusions. He organises the untitled painting as a synthesis of variables which are designed anew for each part of the series with form, colour and lines taking effect.

In this series of style painting Lüpertz uses references from cubism and early modernism to help create a psychic space for his motifs and ideological symbols to exist in. A psychic space which is a hotch-potch of objects where the paintings still retain their latent dangerousness. So now the external motifs of poetry and stage mythology are discovered as a derivate of human psychic. Lüpertz sees this work as sort of playing with and abstracting of ideas and the repetition of these ideas are a form of solution for him that enables him to create paintings. Lüpertz was also helped to clarify his thoughts by his reading of two poets and then putting their ideas together to form a model of what could be possible for artists. These two poets, Hölderlin and Hiene held two opposite positions in their work. Hölderlin was a romantic poet searching for reality while Hiene was hard-hearted, fighting in reality for poetic people. He was an angry critic and an ironist. Lüpertz acknowledges that his position is somewhere in between these two alternatives. On the one hand we have a classic aggressive form, a positive for art. On the other a positive for life.

Lüpertz continues to play or joke with this series of painting and make another reference in them to classical themes. In the work "Armour and Psychic Legend" 1978/79 Lüpertz plays with the themes of woman, men and his relation-



ship to this theme. Cupid, for example, is featured as a cactus. There is hard and soft - the abstract idea, the line of volume and it occurs throughout his work both in the painting and thematically. Amour could be soft in the painting and Psychic the hard or it could be Psychic the hard-hearted and Amour the opposite, as Lüpertz plays around with these themes. In this painting Lüpertz wanted to use the motif to work out a potential structure of the picture surface and attempt a mediation of space and plane, line and plastic form. Lüpertz chose the square shape of the canvas as a base for the series and the sculptural values in these paintings are withdrawn but are not lost. A system of parallel structures help create a rhythm. Black linear forms which is a play with the form of Cupid's bow ensures the equilibration of those parts of the picture within the square which is intended to associate blending and separating volumes.

Lüpertz is searching for a possible substance in the new works so far as the procedures of painting decide the conditions and relations of form to one another. After a number of experimental paintings of this period Lüpertz produced three monumental pieces of work entitled "Pictures for the creation of the earth" in the course of 1977.

Since Lüpertz introduced the architectural form in his painting in 1973, there has been an evolution towards contrasted groups of forms. At first these differences arose from the task of transforming objects into areas, a problem which was solved in 1978. Perspectival space is no longer a barrier to the birth of pictorial ideas. One characteristic remains, however, in the new works and that is the architectural structure of the picture, the polarity of positive and negative, of volume and area, the known and unknown. These were resolved into a formal polarity and clearly become the determinative factor of the painting itself. The poles of painting, the black lines and the coloured forms are irreconcilably opposed in the picture. It is only the painter's calligraphy which makes possible analogies and associative points and the picture as a



complex statement and association of things.

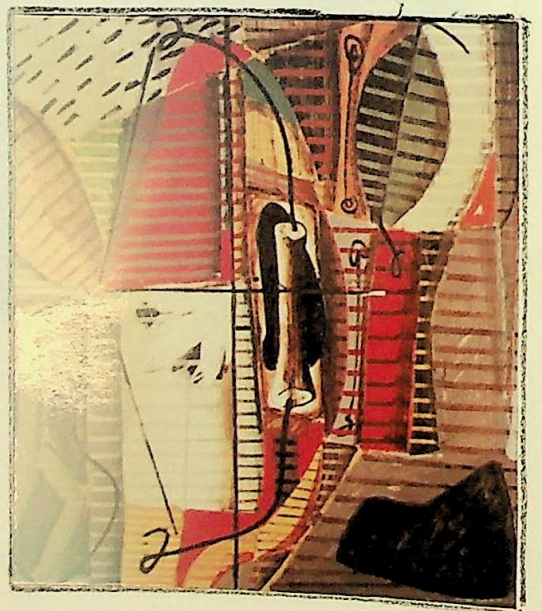
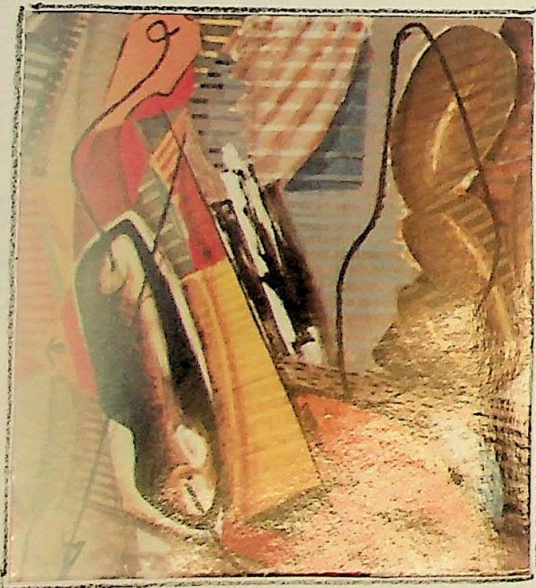
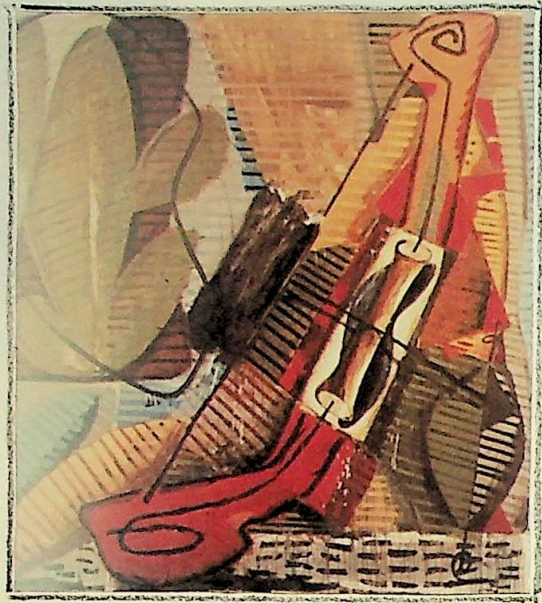
In 1978 Lüpertz painted five pieces of work which had literary theme as points of reference. They also had musical and dramatic elements in their titles but the main themes are the same as opera-love and death. They are called: "Stil: Death and the Singer"; "Stil, Eurydice" "Stil, Death and the Girl with Long Hair"; "Stil, The Actor Death"; "Stil, The Fishermans Death".

In each case two parties are in conflict, as on a stage. Lüpertz nonchalantly mixes traditional and now decorative forms of dramatic art, so that his "Style painting" is associated with the historical iconography of the musical drame. The paraphrases are both ironical and theatrical, superficial at the point where love and death come together, which Lüpertz elicits instinctively from these materials and adapts for his purposes precisely when he is working on exactly the same problems. Lüpertz knows that painting can gain access to those levels of the psyche which produce superficial conflicts.

Lüpertz is looking for a possible substance and support for an alteration of human history into a history of the self-fulfilment of human existence. What Lüpertz has found in his work is a process in which the powers of transformation and transition in the movement from surface and space, that point within painting where the anticipatory power of art has to become, manifest. The themes, ideologies and references which Lüpertz uses in his work gives his pictures a mosaic fragmented quality which the painting assembles in repeated attempts. The salvation of the work from the disasters of its rise by certain interests is the painter's concern.

Lüpertz views this redemption as an anticipation of the human possibility of self-fulfillment. The painting is a symbol of a world without reification or alienation.



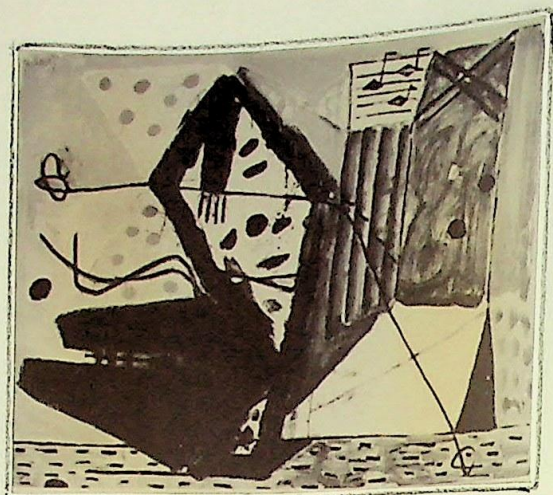


Amour and Psyche Series 1978/79

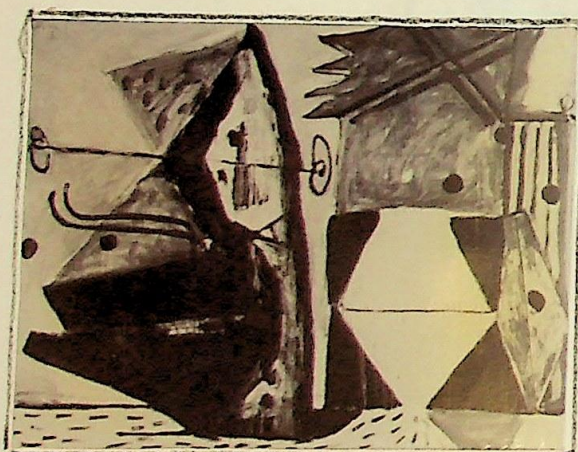




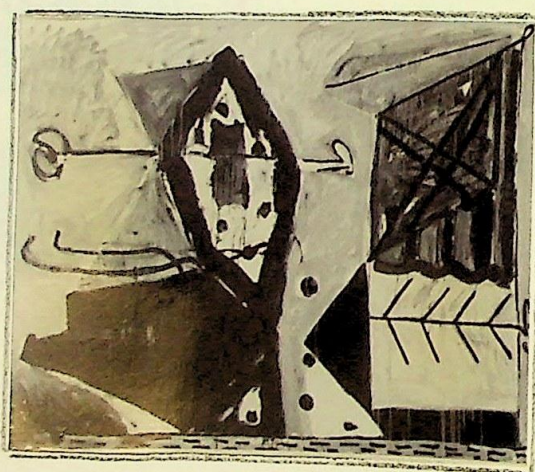
Stil - Eurydice



Stil: Death and  
the Singer



Stil: Death and the Girl  
with Long Hair



Stil: The Fisherman's  
Death





Markus Lüpertz



## CONCLUSION

### Lüpertz' Attitude to his Painting and Life

"Of my generation, I am one of those who set up laws to end pluralism, so that revolution can take Place".

Markus Lüpertz 1983.

Not everyone agrees with Lüpertz's apolitical stance or with his proclamation of the amorality of art. Some have interpreted them as retrogressive products of a genuine, deep-rooted conservatism rather than an irritant anti avant garde pose. But critics for and against Lüpertz must recognise that from the mid-sixties onwards, Lüpertz' theoretical position has rested on a career in painting, a career of dramatic paradoxes. "Picture making is disgusting" said a post conceptual Lüpertz, nevertheless allowing maximum scope virtuosity.

Lüpertz thrives on artistic provocation, and as his career developed it echoed that sense of dialectical manoeuvring which characterises his treatment of thematic devices. This may be from largeness of mind or from sheer flippancy as Lüpertz is never far away from his work, but far enough not to be vulnerable and to offer the alternatives of irony or evasion. His complexity of authorial distance betokens the subtlety of Lüpertz' changing approach to the real, the most available key to his rethinking of abstraction.

Lüpertz presents himself in terms of his actual identity, cultured in the correct dress sense. He is a creature of artifice, and creates his own image. Lüpertz works hard at his looks and in an interview with Oswald Wiener he said, "I work on my beauty. I create my beauty and explore my beauty".<sup>6</sup> this attitude Lüpertz defends aggressively in public.



Lüpertz plays this role well, the genius, cult-artist, leaving most pop-stars far behind when it comes to self-presentation, with shaven head and black suits. He has lasted a lot longer than the average pop-star and earns a lot more money. At the same time Lüpertz is unchallenged in his role as genius.

With financial and cultural recognition, and huge amounts of both while, in the prime of life, they can be enjoyed, it could be argued that there is no longer a need to construct the aura of genius out of a romantic tradition; but under the right collector and gallery owners they could have it tailored made for them. To some critics it is this that makes Lüpertz interesting and turns him in to something which make art history and novels. Gottfried Bern once said that good stories come out of good material and that princes, barons offer richer material than potato peeling. Literature took these subjects and sensationalised them, but because they are fictional and yet they can still be touched, they become mega-individuals. This could illustrate the position taken by Lüpertz and others, aided by collectors and gallery owners.

At first glance the historical cult of the genius is unquestionably reactionary, like any denial of history. But at a closer look, even with the assurances that Lüpertz gives with his dialogues, it is a game. But that is not quite right. For in reality we are dealing with an adapted version of the basic condition that every worthy citizen has an interest in art; and just as priests would be idiotic if they denied the existence of God, or pop-stars who do not want to be stars are idiotic, so an artist would be idiotic to ignore the need felt by his audience to experience a whiff of genius. Or who said, "Yes, I am a genius but only for strategic reasons"?

Lüpertz uses this need felt by his audience and presents himself to them in various guises. One such



guise was when he presented himself to a magazine called *Lui* as a real man. Here we reach a point where we have to forget the idea of the creation of a work of art as something you can talk to. What Lüpertz has to say to us may not get us very far, but what he stands for is a monument to what art can be in this world: to what it can do and what it can bring about: edification. What Lüpertz is edifying in his painting is the Greek Dionysian spirit and the cult surrounding him.

Lüpertz considers the Dionysian spirit as part of himself, a point in his body where he gets his themes and ideas from. It is this spirit that Lüpertz seeks to edify and protect, he never uses drugs to stimulate this spirit as they may destroy that point in his body. "I never use drugs as they would destroy this dark point and I need this and want to use it. I dig into it and see what comes out."<sup>7</sup> Lüpertz wants to create something which is in part unconscious, a style or form to create a different form. As Lüpertz digs into this point in his body for his painting, he does not regard the painting which comes out as some kind of a gift to himself. But what he does expect the painting is to surprise him and to have a certain aesthetic quality, which he calls "Vermuft"<sup>8</sup> If the work does not have this quality Lüpertz would work on until it would work otherwise he destroys the work. "Painting must have a certain weight that goes into the frame and when that does not happen, I work as long as it takes to happen or I destroy it".<sup>9</sup>

Lüpertz' attitude to be his own critic<sup>10</sup> is not limited to his painting, but carries through to his own image. If there was something that he did not like about his image he would try and change it. Lüpertz has a high expectation of himself and works hard on his image almost to the point of being in love with oneself. This attitude belongs to the idea, which Lüpertz has, of



elitism and by controlling his image he projects an elite, provoking image to his audience. An image, which Lüpertz claims, can be used by people to act and speak on their behalf about things which they would not dare to say or do themselves.

The central question about Lüpertz is, is he a "genius"? Some critics think that he is, that as Dali was a genius in his time, so Lüpertz is a "genius" of today. What Lüpertz gives us is an art form which offers material for discussion, art as critique, as delimitation- that which remains the privilege of a small underground of followers. But at the same time art is the overground, State-art, art with a capital "A", art which is full of clichés. When these clichés are revealed in all their glory, they can show us some truth about ourselves and the world around us.



Footnotes:

Introduction to Markus Lüpertz:

1. Dionysius - From the Greek Dionysian spirit. The irrational impulse in humans that accepts and craves life and power. Its opposite is the appolionis spirit. Both concepts were developed in Friedrich Nietzsche "The Birth of Tradity"

Influence on Twentieth century German Art history:

2. Blaue Reiter: Mainly from Kandinsky, Marc and Klee.
3. Karl Dietrich. The German Dictatorship London 1931. P.28
4. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegal: Kerlesung uber die Geschichte der Philosophie. Stuttgart, 1928 .. 62/63, 84
5. Wassily Kandinsky: Complete Writing on Art. ed Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Voga. London 1982 . 173.

Lüpertz attitude to his painting and image:

6. See appendix Page 38
7. See appendix Page 37
8. See appendix Page 38
9. See appendix Page 38
- 10 See appendix Page. 37



APPENDIX

1982 INTERVIEW: "I Paint more than I look at Things."

Markus Lüpertz: Art is elite. An artist is an elitest, but an artist is not as elite today as he deals with a crowd. Maybe only a part for the future, artists want to be understood in their time. Maybe this first generation, that has consciously sculpted this because nobody is there to be reached by us.

Oswald Weiner: What is the medium for Painting?

Markus Lüpertz: Canvas, paint, a form to be fitted to a time, a hopeful form....There is no artistic form only form as such and because it appears in a painting that makes it art. Painting and understanding art is an experience in seeing, sensing of elements which might be intentional but not directly visible and out of that you get a special expression of art. An example: where there is a special red when you see it and you see why it is there, then you have understood the complexity of it through art.  
I Paint more than I look at things.

Some people read a lot before writing themselves and for Lüpertz he paints first then he looks at art.

Oswald Weiner: Do you look at yourself?

Markus Lüpertz: Yes. Always, because an artist is alone in his studio, a self-confrontation; you are your own critic/audience, your own inspiration and motivation and enthusiasm. You are your own love, a reflection ones self/ego. I love my self like a god.

Oswald Weiner: If you see something that displeases this change you?

Markus Lüpertz: I have a special expectation of myself, a theory: what one is/what you are. You are only that really what you are not which means not that what that you are but you are that what you expect from yourself.

Oswald Weiner: Would you change something in yourself?



Markus Lüpertz: That depends on the enthusiasm I have in the thing to change.

Oswald Weiner: In other words you would want to achieve something so that it would reach the idea you had about it, then it would work. But if it did not identify with your idea you would change it. Everyone has a thousand gestures but does not realise it.

Markus Lüpertz: That is exactly the thing to have under total control. People have gestures like scratching their nose out. I am completely aware of this and have it under control, except when I am talking. I am completely identified with my body. The only problem I have with myself is when I look in the mirror sometimes and come to the conclusion that this is me and has to die.

Further on in the interview Lüpertz starts to talk about a dark point or spot in his body which he considers a place where his themes and ideas come from, his unconscious.

Markus Lüpertz: I have painted myself in a steel helmet in Arrangement for a Cap. In this painting I never thought about it, why I did it. It was never planned. I never give this meaning. I am very critical of myself when it comes to self conversion and the tension in myself. (The dark spot) I am not interested in original quotes, it is only important for me, because I never use drugs, as they would destroy this dark point/spot and I need this and want to use it. I dig into it and see what comes out.

Oswald Weiner: In creating something unconsciously?

Markus Lüpertz: Yes and no.

Oswald Weiner: Creating is part by definition that which brings/arises something out in a form which was not there before or in a different form.

Markus Lüpertz: There is also the social form of creating/actively. O.K. Forget about that, but do you know what I mean about the dark spot and the surprise. I am a person who wants to be surprised by my own painting.

Oswald Weiner: Do you think you can learn something by looking at oneself or can one get proud by looking at oneself?

Markus Lüpertz: All need the experience that we can learn something which means you can learn by looking at yourself. That you can see more later than you did at the beginning.



- Oswald Weiner: Do you think something would change in this aspect?
- Markus Lüpertz: No. Concerning oneself, by introversion, which does not mean to be satisfied with myself, (that is to be simple) and work. It is an adventure you have to see, the excitement. It is not like taking milk out of the fridge, but it happens with a beating heart. It has to be aggressive, it is an expectation, a temptation. Which means I am not digging out of my unconscious and giving myself a present, but it is an expectation that is identical with myself. I don't accept everything that comes out. Every painting I see which I think is good has to have a certain Vernunft in the scene, like a gun having a certain weight. Its weight belongs to the way it looks, and its form and the essence of being able to shoot with it, that is Vernunft.
- Oswald Weiner: But it remains a subjective impression. It is not clear that the gun could be light as a feather.
- Markus Lüpertz: Yes. It is clear, that is exactly the point. It is not allowed to be light as a feather. There are for example also sculpture out of plates. Those amazing big things which you can lift up with one finger, those things I have never accepted, a ridiculous thing.
- Oswald Weiner: Artists tend to make jokes on this aspect.
- Markus Lüpertz: Yes. Painting must have a certain weight that goes into the frame and when that does not happen I work as long as it takes to happen or I destroy it.
- Oswald Weiner: Do you want to be honest in your painting?
- Markus Lüpertz: In my painting, I am a genius and it is a realization of my ideas.
- Oswald Weiner: Are you a Dandy?
- Markus Lüpertz: Yes.
- Oswald Weiner: That belongs somehow to being an artist.
- Markus Lüpertz: Yes. It belongs to my idea of elitism. My consciousness. I work on my beauty. I create my beauty and explore my beauty. I control my figure, also my posture. We live in a time of reality where everybody says if they have haemorrhoids or not. There is such an attitude that is somehow aggressive and is understood as aggressive. A Dandy is a provocative figure.
- Oswald Weiner: It has always been like that.



Markus Lüpertz: O.K. But there are times where society loves this provocation.

Oswald Weiner: The Dandy was always a person who talked and acted for others because they did not dare to themselves. That could be true today.

Markus Lüpertz: No. That is not true. He does not exist any more. Whereever you go today there are known rules. (In Germany dress).

Oswald Weiner: They still do exist.

Markus Lüpertz: England. Thats the place, thats where I admire. Only in England can you buy clothes for the gentleman. I hate this appearance of people not caring for themselves. When I call myself a Dandy this is a deep expression of disrespect for all..



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