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Susanne Rennert

Susanne Rennert is an art historian and curator based in Dusseldorf. Currently, Rennert is working on a book on Jean-Pierre Wilhelm and Gallery 22 in Düsseldorf where Nam June Paik first showed his *Hommage à John Cage* (1959). Additionally, Rennert is working on several curatorial projects including the Nam June Paik-Retrospective (together with Sook-Kyung Lee, Liverpool) to open at museum kunst palast, Düsseldorf and Tate Liverpool in 2010.

“If you play a game and you don't know the rule of the game you cannot play the game”. _ Nam June Paik

1

I like the work of the Rumanian artist Dan Perjovschi who transforms drawing into information and political commentary. His ironic and sharp comments on economy and socio-cultural structures show an interesting way to leave the narrow, market-determined art space and to find new (old) direct ways of communicating in a world (through the Internet/email) of highly accelerated communication processes – which destroy communication somehow.

Other contemporary artists who like Dan Perjovschi go beyond the framework of Nicolas Bourriaud's “relational aesthetics” are Yael Bartana, Danica Dakic, Haegue Yang, or Ceal Floyer. Brigitte Franzen showed a remarkable exhibition at “Ludwig Forum für internationale Kunst” in Aachen this spring, where she combined works from the permanent collection – among them Paik, Beuys and Warhol – with contemporary positions – including the named artists except Ceal Floyer.

Yael Bartana's film *Summer Camp*, for example, documents the (now deconstructed) reconstruction of a destroyed house near Jerusalem by members of the fourth “Summer Camp” of the “Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions” in July 2006. But the documentary character of the film is interlaced with music and editing styles derived from Zionist propaganda films of the 1930s

and 1940s and their glorification of the depicted. Thus, **Summer Camp** shows very intensely the tragedy and absurdness of political reality in Israel.

In **Construction**, Ceal Floyer, whose conceptual-minimalist works often resist a “material” level, makes a vast exhibition space be sounded and defined by construction work noise. In her work **Ink on Paper**, she lets felt markers bleed on paper and displays them arranged by color on the wall.

2

I have always been interested in Paik as a philosopher and conceptual artist. - He got a lot of conceptual input through Fluxus in the early 1960s. - But his conceptual and philosophical side is still overlaid by the fast cuts of his colorful, kaleidoscopic videotapes. This is what the general public associates with Paik. Today, the image of Nam June Paik as video artist and charismatic father of media art is dominant and the hardware-laden video installations, walls and sculptures are at the center of attention of the art public.

Our Paik retrospective – a collaboration of Tate Liverpool (Sook-Kyung Lee) and museum kunst palast, Düsseldorf – which is due in 2010 – will prove how Paik combined seemingly contradictory elements and expanded the boundaries of art on multiple levels, destroying and breaking them down, constantly initiating “new states of consciousness” (Mary Bauermeister). In each of his works, Paik clearly demonstrates on many levels how critical consciousness can be materialized, regardless whether it is music, Fluxus, action, performance, video, (media-) sculpture or drawing. The freedom he used to link different points of views, the liberty he demonstrated when dealing with medium, material and technique is highly inventive. On the leaflet accompanying the invitation poster to his legendary first exposition **Exposition of Music – Electronic Television** in 1963 at Parnass Gallery in Wuppertal, he used the words **EXISTENTIA IS ESSENTIA**, to unite thoughts derived from Heidegger, Sartre, Montaigne, Cage, Laotse, Chen-Chu and others and to yield an inspiring collage of ideas. In an introductory text in the same leaflet, Jean-Pierre Wilhelm - the early mentor, who had discovered Paik - wrote about

his dialectical method “in one stroke, everything fits together.”

“The basic idea for museum kunst palast is to give the large and high space to the large and most impressive works. The height of the space will allow to create an emotional display of the art works. Within this display, the chronological or semantic order has to step behind. The second space which has a lower ceiling will display works and documents. In this space, we categorized the works as “Music and Action Music”, “Fluxus”, “Exposition of Music – Electronic Television”, “24 hours”, “Paik and Moorman”, “Paik and Beuys” and finally “Robots”. In order to take advantage of the given architecture in Düsseldorf, the chronology will be reversed for the second space. Visitors walk through the “Robots” into the historical sections. Rarely or never seen documents and photographs will take a major part in the presentation of the early sections of the exhibition. We believe that this way of composing the show will guide the visitor from the large and very colorful works to the detailed and more ephemeral documents – in order to understand the importance of Paik's philosophy and conceptual basis.” (Susanne Rennert)

3

In 1996 Stephan von Wiese and I curated the show *Mixed Pixels, Students of Paik, 1978-95* at former Kunstmuseum – today's museum kunst palast, Düsseldorf - on the occasion of Paik's retirement from the Düsseldorf Art Academy. For the catalogue we wanted to interview him about his experience as a Video Art teacher (1979-95). He proposed to meet at a restaurant in Düsseldorf's main station. (This was my second interview with Paik – the first one together with René Block in 1992, mainly about Joseph Beuys and Addi Kõpcke.) In this second conversation he spoke about teaching and not teaching, EXISTENTIA AND ESSENTIA – and about the art market.

Paik said, “I think I constantly ridiculed all art museums and curators, gallerists, art snobs, in order to become a successful artist. Because there is no fair play in the art world. There are no objective criteria in the art world. If you play a game and you don't know the rule of the game you cannot play the game. But in the art world

you can always change the rule of the game over night. If you are about to lose your game you can change the rules. I just speak of art politics. It is not anything you can read in art magazines. Don't buy art magazines. That makes you crazy. You have the ideal to become Bob Morris, but it is impossible. I never looked in art magazines because they are too expensive and all game is set. (...) One of my teaching philosophies is: The most important thing about art is not to become a bartender, a waitress or a taxi driver. Although, being a bartender is, I think, a very interesting job, since it is about performance and communication.”



Photos of Nam June Paik's Performance of *Hommage à Jean-Pierre Wilhelm* by Manfred Leve, 1978.
Nam June Paik Art Center Collection