

Colin Ardley

Transition I – Of Decoys. Elegies and Tenebrae

September 6 – October 12, 2024

Extroversion – Introversion

Making art is known to be a solitary activity in the secrecy and privacy of the studio, unless you are such a successful conceptual artist on the art market that a studio production team is constantly busy.

For Colin Ardley, known for his highly fragile and precisely pondered wall objects, which extend into the space through thin wooden struts, geometric surfaces made of cardboard, plywood, Depafit and other materials – sometimes colored or monochrome – studio silence is a prerequisite. Highly concentrated, and sometimes working on very complex works for several years, peace and seclusion is a must. The work emerges – slowly – one part docks onto the other, expands into the space and becomes a parable of time.

The past corona years, which we will all remember for their leaden, never-ending oppressiveness and the loss of our social contacts, coupled with individual, diverse challenges, have also opened doors for us that we might otherwise have overlooked in everyday life. We were able to take advantage of opportunities that we would never or hardly ever have encountered. Time, which is otherwise so precious, was suddenly available in abundance. For some it became a problem, they were suddenly thrown back on themselves with all the (intrapsychic) consequences. For others, it was a welcome gift; they were finally able to tackle something that was otherwise not possible and had been waiting for them for a long time.

Studio practice can be goal-oriented, such as creating works of art for an exhibition, usually associated with deadlines for completion. Creating art just for the sake of it is – l'art pour l'art – often stunted in everyday artistic life. The time factor is a luxury. The exceptional corona situation, however, banished the artists to their studios, as it were, and allowed the muse to show herself more often again.

For Colin Ardley, this meant that he was able to engage particularly intensively with his own art and allow himself the luxury of working undirected to see where the journey would take him.

And indeed, what may sound like a metaphor for the coronavirus era, in a new group of works the development of the space turns inwards or concentrates on the dimension of receding depth. To make this possible, Colin Ardley has built idiosyncratic pedestals that make introversion possible in the first place. You stand in front of the plinth as an onlooker, walk around it and look inwards from above. However, this group of works will only unfold

for the viewer in November in *Transition II* in the Werkstättengalerie der Deutschen Werkstätten. It is not part of *Transition I* at Semjon Contemporary, but other groups of works, were also created in parallel: *Monument* and *Tenebrae*. *Monument* refers to the classical pedestal sculpture. Occasionally, the artist has created models for large-scale urban or natural sculptures based on the ground (without a plinth) and was once able to realize one (*Fragmented Folly*, 2016 in a private park near Wasserburg).

What is actually new is the development of his sculpture *Monument*, which extends into the space around a reduced architectural construction that serves as an abutment of a physical nature, but also formally as a large-format contrapposto in terms of proportion and composition. The group of *Tenebrae* made of black, light-absorbing Depafit (incidentally, the funnel-shaped plinth sculptures that develop inwards and downwards are also called *Tenebrae**) develops in a circle, like a Rotunda or Corona. Light and shadow take on a very special meaning here.

The large outdoor sculpture *Genius Loci*, which has linked the historical ensemble of Deutsche Werkstätten with a new building since 2010, a circle in a triangle, is the inspiration for this series of works. As in a centrifuge, the individual parts drift outwards, but without neglecting the strict measure of Ardley's ponderation, or in the case of the funnel-shaped works, the 'suction' of the individual parts into the funnel (the thought of the black hole is not unintentional on the part of the artist).

The large plinth work *Transition*, which diagonally traverses the gallery space and is made of white-stained Okumi plywood, is autonomous as a work of art, but also refers to the possibility of being an accurate scale model for a large sculptural ensemble crossing an urban or park space. This applies to almost every one of his sculptural works.

The other large and space-defining work, *Decoy/ Timelapse*, was developed by the artist over a period of seven years as a wall sculpture, which we now consider to be a classic. But it is different: the two sculptural bodies of concentrated yet balanced clusters of countless colored individual parts, placed on top of each other, are connected by two diagonally positioned wooden struts. The upper cluster is offset to the right and smaller. The artist has been struggling for years with the sculptural connection of the two clusters to form a whole. How can the two be stringently and credibly connected in accordance with Ardley's system of proportions without becoming pleasing or generating unwarranted frills? The alignment of the two volumes to each other results in an acute angle pointing downwards to the right. The two connecting structural supports, which run upwards at different angles, brace the two clusters, simultaneously holding and slowing down the strong downward movement of the smaller corpus. The lower cluster, bursting with concentrated energy, which expands emphatically to the left and right, is the foundation for its smaller sister, but is not grounded in the horizontal as an earthen base, but is tilted slightly to the lower right. This creates a dynamic that could suggest floating in front of the wall.

The years of struggle have come to an end and are a parable for life, which often brings together incompatible things to form a whole.

The second part of the exhibition, *Transition II*, in the Werkstättengalerie at Deutsche Werkstätten Hellerau from November 7 to January 28, 2025 (opening on November 6) will be much more extensive and at the same time provide a broad overview of his work to date. You could also call the exhibition retrospective. Incidentally, the artist will be celebrating his 70th birthday in November.

His association with Deutsche Werkstätten Hellerau goes back 30 years. Following his love, the Scotsman Colin Ardley settled in Dresden and has since curated countless, always astonishing exhibitions in Hellerau. But that's not all. The artist also designed the entrance to the new workshops, separated only by Moritzburger Weg. Like an extended drawer, the transverse entrance bar is closed off by a mighty wall of contrasting Macassar wood veneered all the way around. Naturally, it was produced in the Deutsche Werkstätten themselves, the sensitive wood has to withstand all weathers and is protected by countless UV-resistant layers of varnish, and at the same time bears witness to the superb expertise of this company.

Colin Ardley would be unthinkable without the Deutsche Werkstätten. And vice versa. For the Deutsche Werkstätten, revitalized by Fritz Straub in a visionary way, art is still at the center alongside work production. The parquet exhibition space in the center of the new large hall, in which numerous architects, designers, construction engineers, carpenters etc. work in parallel, shows this very clearly. What other corporate culture besides Würth Company so radically characterizes the coexistence of art and production? In the meantime, some of the gallery's artists have made their appearance there and became part of the company's collection. And the curator is the artist Colin Ardley.

*Tenebrae, Latin for darkness, eclipse; in the liturgy, this deals with the fading of light through the daily extinguishing of one of the 15 candles that follow in a ritual (11 apostles, the three Marys and Christ. At the end, the divine light remains: Christ).

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