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## ***Günther Förg: multiple forms in the transformation of space***

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There exists an ideally uninterrupted sequence in the history of painting which, to me, seems to sum up its 2500 years of tension, to reflect its destiny in the most extraordinary fashion. The moments which unite this are of time refer to three images in particular.

The first may be observed in that rare composition of Greek painting in Italy which decorates the Diver's Tomb in Paestum. A scene in one of the paintings shows the profile of a male nude about to dive from a board. Many experts, interpreting the figure from an extranaturalistic viewpoint, hence symbolically, have taken it to be depicted in an ultramundane dimension; that is, at the boundary of life, towards death, in the afterlife.

With the same decorum as this small figure painted in the V century B.C., Yves Klein has handed us down a photograph, taken in 1960, of the painter as he hurls himself «dans le vide». It portrays him in civilian clothes outside the window opening of a house, at gutter-level, whence, ascending like the roof, his ecstatic upwards dive aims for the sky. Whereas there is no epistemological certainty as to the meanings of the antique painting, Klein leaves the observer in no doubt about his picture: it states and declares, eloquently and also symbolically, the painter's longing for self-destruction amidst the immateriality of the blue space of the sky with which the whole work vibrates...

The third, strictly contemporary image is by Günther Förg and is a photograph, taken from above, of the artist lying face downwards, with his face and stomach to the ground, at the bottom of a stairwell. Unlike the previous two images, Förg's has no symbolic value or, rather, has a different significance inasmuch as the photograph evokes an accident which had actually occurred to the artist a few years before.

Yet the three images, each charged with a different ethos, seem, in a certain way, to include and conclude the contrasting tensions between the absolute and the relative towards which the entire existence and essence of art extends. And if the function of the first image is decorative and rhetoric, the second is, iconographically, the manifesto which exemplifies an action, which in Klein has found pictorial expression through the continued frequency of pure colour up to the creation of the painter's new identity under the pseudonym of «Yves le monochrome». With the photograph, which is also a representation of an event which really happened, Förg for his part seems to embody the condition of someone who has consciously crossed the void of all the space painting has conceded as tension towards the Sublime and the Absolute; of someone who has - physically and conceptually - arrived at the *cui de sac* of the last possible picture or representation, the one which Ad Reinhardt *tao* seemed to have offered painting theologically, by wielding again - ultimately, with greater synthesis and austerity - the already ventilated idea of the spectre of the death of Art itself.

Chance, nonetheless, saved the then youthful Förg from a dramatic end. Unscathed by this lethal «fall», yet preserving consciousness of it, he transformed all his subsequent action into resurrectional vigour: by his own survival, he sustained, and consequently witnessed that of art

itself. The vision displayed by Förg's work, alongside that of other artists such as Pistoletto - who, having crossed the threshold of the «ultimate picture», and set out towards the new perspective of «art-into-life», have revealed an anthropologically more complex and wide spatial dimension - is an affirmative one, opening up new possibilities in the exploration of space in the name of the fourth and ulterior dimensions.

For Förg seems to have access to a new notion of space which his work too helps to determine. Here, for example, the formulation of space takes place as a result of successive acts of acceptance of the context offered, and of the intervention and interaction therein of a number of motifs, techniques and mediums, each endowed with different qualities and capable all of «simultaneously» soliciting and suggesting several types of perception-conception in the observer. Förg's repertoire currently extends to drawing, painting and sculpture, and also photography and bas-relief. Characteristic of his drawings are the linearity of his graphic media (pencil, pastel, charcoal) and the background-colour he spreads on the surface of the paper. Just as, in his paintings, he uses coloured signs and backgrounds to cover canvas, lead, wood, aluminium and glass surfaces and support-materials, and also, right from his earliest works, whole walls.

Space for Förg is not «a priori», but rather the product of a number of systems of relationship between the elements within an environment. It is now becoming more complex as the individual actions and perceptions which encompass many different objects and realities, by means of more frequent movements of body and of psyche, grow swifter. Yet the space Förg tends towards and arrives at is never inflated with objects and images. On the contrary, his work unfolds with economy of effort, inasmuch as every painting or work involving sculpture strives invariably to create a space within which equilibrium of composition - the product of zones of colour painted on walls, and of the physical presence of his photographs and paintings and all his other work - encounters the perception and thought of the onlooker at differing levels of synchrony.

Just as essential in his work is the temporal dimension. Which stems from the sheer variety of media used (representative of a variety of qualities that demand alternating intervals of interpretation and perception) and from Förg's speed in completing paintings, drawings or also, of course, photographs, documents of an instant and of a particular moment in time, sometimes subjective, sometimes objective. Yet the construction of space-temporality in the work of Förg is highly specific, given the artist's clear flair for a dynamics of being which, in an indissolubly simultaneous fashion, invests his interiority and his exterior appearance. Space-time in his work continuously brings out the value of the subject, but also that of the survivor and his objectivity. His work, like the thought behind it, is constantly the meeting-point of reality and language. This is why Förg, a lover of the films of Godard and E. van Stroheim, frequently captures their narrative invention and the real possibility of their details to create a sort of «montage» in his work.

Of course his is the connecting of different signs, natures or dimensions such as colour, support-materials, images and also the very make-up of the environment. But, in his work, even when his use of pure colour is a philological evocation of the tradition of monochrome, his vocation for the latter seems relative, and he seems to combine its two historical souls - the metaphysical and the materialist - contemporarily. Whereas the first contemplates transcendence towards the Absolute and the Sublime, and liberation by self-destruction in the infinity of a nudity which alludes to eschatological finality, the second seeks to play an active role in the multiform scheme of life. Between Malevič and Rodčenko, between «pure» sensation and «compromise», or between uses of monochrome colour in an idealist, formalist or conceptual sense, Förg paves a new way, the ensuing order of which is part of both the absolute and the relative, with the ambiguity and the consciousness typical of the infinite logic of the living. Förg's is not so much a totalising reduction of art as a measured consideration - economic and possible - of media employed at the very limits

of their classical essence.

That his conception of artistic production is neither mystical nor austere, neither pragmatic nor romantic, but highly «direct», gauged and tuned in to those features of perception which change from one instant to another, from person to person, in the face of diverse things and places, emerges immediately in his work. In the late-seventies and early-eighties, just an instant before monochrome painting's lengthy journey progressed from suprematist premise to «pits» of parody and conceptualized irony, as has been written<sup>1</sup>, Günther Förg, with the utmost simplicity, had already inherited the legacy essential for a painter - the objective quality of luminous appearance and its potential suggestion of emotion and mood. Although the final clashes between minimalism, poor art and conceptual art continued to tinger at his back, Förg, nevertheless, refused to plunge once more into nascent German neo-expressionism and into all the prefixes of the European neo-academic painting that was in vogue in the late-seventies. Instead, he endowed his work with the qualities and media which he had inherited, in their different aspects and separately, from given experiences and figures in contemporary art.

If we observe the first works he completed as a student from 1973 to 1979 in his time at the Munich Academy of Fine Arts, where he developed his visual alphabet, we note his interest for the regularity of his own *Bilder*, and for his choice of support-materials and the colours he painted onto them. The *12 Bilder*, almost square in shape (cm 100 x 90) and painted in oils on sheets of aluminium, were exhibited at the Academy in 1977. Together with the successive *Wandmalereien* (1978), a series of murals in his atelier and at Herbert Kopp's, they evoke the same pictorial direction as the works of Robert Ryman and Blinky Palermo respectively.

As in the work of the American artist, who uses aluminium support-materials that are never perfectly square<sup>2</sup>, in Förg's too we feel stability, silence and calm together with a light, dematerialized sense of the physical quality of objects. Likewise, following Palermo's death, his uniform monochrome wall-paintings of 1978-79 re-echo the surface decoration and conception of luminous spatiality which Palermo himself had characterized with pure bright colours. However, whereas Ryman uses the layer of colour, white particularly, to define precisely, yet without emphasis, the aesthetic objectivity of the painting's surface by subtly differentiating the coats of paint; and whereas Palermo's wall-painting is married to the old spatial opposition between positive and negative, and to the confrontation between constructivist and suprematist painting, Förg already embodies different potentialities of conception and development of certain positions. For he exploits his media and the propriety of their use in the most effective combinations to create a space that is integrated and in conformity with the relativity and complexity of the common individual perceptions of everyday life.

Thus, after experiments which *Stoffbilder* (1980), or fabric pictures, which Kelly, Castellani and Palermo had carried out with varying results, and which Förg, for memorable personal reasons<sup>3</sup>, undertook during a trip to Italy, an initial breakaway from the univocity of the inner functions of the object depicted came with the introduction within the *Stoffbild* itself of a photograph of a piece of architecture (1980). Thanks to this intuition, which opened a gap in the uniformly coloured surface of the picture of red fabric and hence introduced a different visual and spatial-temporal unity, Förg set off a process of spatial construction in which the deployment of diverse elements of phenomenological activation engages perception simultaneously on various frequencies. It becomes evident in *Wandmalerei mit Farbfoto Petra* (1981) that, since the mural encloses a photograph, the latter must have the function of a «window» in the colour of the overall spatiality. The painted wall and the photo suggest, at one and the same time, indistinct perception of colour and thought as to the «private» reality of the portrait-photograph. In the works that follow in the same period it may

be observed that the paint which is spread on the walls often fails to cover the whole surface, but only a well-defined zone thereof, within which or beside which Förg places either a portrait-photograph or an architectural photograph. In the Galerie van Krimpen in Amsterdam (1981), there are numerous examples of the elementary typologies Förg has suggested for the formation of this new spatiality, and which engage the gaze, perception and concept-formation of any onlooker. Förg invariably «tests» the environment in which he is working, capturing its «peculiar features» and developing and stressing the data already existing within it. Hence his work with Rüdiger Schöttle (1981) and Wim van Krimpen (1981) appears to fit the different backgrounds and the different environments.

When, throughout 1982, Förg resumed use of aluminium sheets as a support-material for new multimedial creations, an ulterior element of spatial dynamization emerged. The *Alubilder* (1982), mostly horizontally rectangular opaque metal surfaces, contain portrait-photographs which occupy but a part of the whole surface, whereas the remainder is often embellished with occasional bands of colour, or line-grids or chess-board effects. They thus put different qualities of figurative and geometrical, or privately intimate and abstract image onto the same plane. Albeit to a minor degree, the *Alubilder* also reflect the light and anything standing in front of them. Like Pistoletto's «mirror pictures» (1961-62), they function partly as dynamically active spatial opening devices, capable of containing in their bare zones - side by side with the photograph or the painted section the virtuality of the reflected image of the observer and the space of the environment opposite. They are thus spatial-temporal «multipliers», the luminosity of which is not only the result of their abundant colour, but also of the propriety of the support-materials used. With the superimposition of the *Alubilder* on the *Wandmalerei* (1982-83), the different spatial-temporal unities achieved and properties of light-absorption and reflection soon contribute to new spatial articulations and to enriched visual complexity for perception-conception. At the same time, the appearance of the linguistic motif in strips in the *Alubilder* or in the murals augments, both internally and perspectively, the decorative importance of colour: it introduces a new rhythm a distant echo of which may be sought in pre-Renaissance architecture in Italy, in terms of the alternate use of different-coloured stone, or in the rationalist structure, again of Italian architecture, between the two wars. However, Förg is ready to point out that, as a motif, it may also be found simply in the patterns of striped T-shirts - as in *Gabi* (1982) - or in the rhythmic scanning of flights of stairs.

In his studies Förg has devoted singular attention to these specific architectural forms and infrastructures. He is concerned with their peculiar spatial qualities, with their function as a link between facing, yet distant levels within the same building and with the marriage between the void in which they are constructed and the solidity of walls. Thanks to their recurring appearance in the work of Duchamp, Schlemmer, Richter and Palermo, as in the German neo-expressionist cinema of Fritz Lang, G. W. Pabst, Paul Wegener, Robert Wiene and finally Leopold Jessner with his curious *Hintertreppe* (1921)<sup>4</sup>, Förg has also seen stairways as a spatial «constant» to be reckoned with, at times as a premonition of his *Sturz* (1984).

With his photographic work *Treppe, Villa Malaparte, Capri* (1982), one of the first in which he declares an interest for the architecture of Adalberto Libera, and with *Wandmalerei Treppenhaus* (1983), which seems to continue a dialogue with Blinky Palermo's *Treppenhaus* (1970 and 1972) at Düsseldorf and Kassel, the artist introduces into his spatial syntax a visual term that is loaded with implications. The formation of *Skulptur Villa Malaparte* may be ascribed to this faculty for dissociation. This double-faced, ambivalent structure, based on the profile of Libera's design, consists of one yellow side and one red side enclosing a photograph of a simple flight of stairs up which a female figure is running: a striped cylindrical section clearly resumes the rhythm of the stairway. Finally, four flags, alternately red and blue, seem to integrate the wooden structure

spatially and chromatically. After 1983, however, like veritable icons of spatial vertigo, up-turning perspective and smashing the zenith, the photographs of *Treppen*, now protected by glass and surrounded by solid frames, seem to reveal «windows» from within the walls of Förg's installations. Furthermore, the large-scale portrait photographs of female faces, such as *Micha* (1983) or *Eva* (1983), or the photographs of rationalist architecture and of the Foro Italico, or of the Città Universitaria in Rome (1983), represent new ways of transforming space. Their outsize format, their sheer body stressed by glass and frames, their glassy, transparent mirror-effect which, as in the *Alubilder* but more so, evokes, albeit in a different way, some of the phenomenological characteristics of Pistoletto's mirror pictures, all constitute the virtual doors and windows of a new spatial-temporal visual system. As he makes out the images, the observer sees himself vaguely reflected in the pictures. In Förg's words, «what is most important of all for me is the way in which an image is looked at. The photographs hanging on a gallery wall or anywhere else reflect the space in which the spectator moves. The idea of moving around the room with the constant sensation that you are at the window seems to me to be most suggestive»<sup>5</sup>. The deployment of this mirror-effect as a means of amplifying space and multiplying the mirror-effect (hence in a different way from Pistoletto and Richter, although they too used it chromatically) subsequently involves the setting of real mirror-pictures by or in front of photographs or within the *Wandmalerei*. In this respect, a good example of Förg's new spatial dynamics is the exhibition he held with Jeff Wall at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (1985). However, his photographs of the stairways or details of the Italian rationalist architecture of Adalberto Libera or Giuseppe Terragni, portrayed both externally and internally, reveal, from Förg's angle of vision, the extent to which he is concerned with the simplicity of devices of internal-external spatial structure and with their supporting features of fullness-void and light-shadow. *Casa del Fascio, Como* (1985-86) or *Asilo d'infanzia Sant'Elia, Como* (1986) are images which illustrate Terragni's architecture. While stressing its spatial qualities, they also gain ideas from it, thanks to the clearness of the structural frameworks and the transparency of the volumes, horizontal lines and the «human line» prevailing in both cases<sup>6</sup>.

This interest of Förg's for the space revealed by the works of the Como architect and of other Italian rationalists has moved some people to accuse him - wrongly, of course - of fascism. Nonetheless, the shrewdest, most authoritative art historians have been at pains to point out the extent to which Terragni and his works are revolutionary as compared with the architecture of fascist propaganda, and to which, «thanks to the linguistic and ethical legacy of Terragni it is possible to progress towards an organic, intrinsically democratic style of architecture»<sup>7</sup>. Förg is excited then by the comparison between masses, volumes and lights, and these soon enrich the very declension of the various *Wandmalereien* installed in museums. See, for example, his mural decoration (cm 435x2250) at the Westfälischer Kunstverein in Münster (1986) with its five walls, white, red, yellow, black and blue, and the horizontal green band at the top which serves as a common register to the alternating chromatic succession of the surfaces.

For more exhaustive confirmation of this translation of architectural motifs to painting, it may suffice to observe carefully the paging of Förg's catalogues: here the artist, who actually writes them himself, clearly describes the various phases of his work and its connections with the binomials, oriented towards simplicity, which structure space - horizontal-vertical, interior-exterior, concave-convex, high-low.

Förg's attempts to corroborate the essentiality of some of the «constant» coordinates of his work assumed didactic pregnancy when, in the exhibition at the Haus Lange (1987) in Kreield, built by Miës van der Rohe, on the ground-floor of the villa, amidst bronze bas-reliefs, he arranged a series of photographic works reproducing the window-doors of the Haus Wittgenstein in Vienna, designed and built by the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein for his sister Margaret. In these pictures Förg's

attention is focused on the elevation of the interlacements, the sheer verticality of the glass-doors, whence a bright light penetrates the ambiances, illuminating them. This is because, on the contrary, in the Haus Lange, Miës van der Rohe's windows stress horizontality their function being similar to that of a colour picture - you look through them at the nature of the garden outside. And Förg had already touched upon these aspects previously in his *Farbfotografien* of the Haus Esters (again by van der Rohe) and the Haus Lange in 1984-85. The properties of the Haus Lange were thus highlighted in the dialectics of interior-exterior and horizontal-vertical. The other works which Förg situated there in 1987 were evidently intended to reflect that the owner of the house had been an art-collector.

Förg's installation for «Chambres d'amis» (1986) was expressly conceived to reify such sensibility, which puts people, and the places they live in, on the same plane as space. I have a very vivid personal memory of this work: I recall the symmetry of the design (two adjacent walls painted yellow, two black, two doors equidistant from the passage between the rooms, the two photographs of the two twinsisters on facing walls, the photograph of the *Baume* and the mirror): I remember it also because that was my first direct experience of Förg's work.

In the same year Förg also began to paint on lead (*Bleibilder*), on wood and on aluminium (*Farbfelder*), besides casting his first bronze bas-reliefs (*Bronzereliefs*). The paint on lead of the *Bleibilder* (1986), first oil then acrylic, sometimes covers the entire surface, but sometimes one or more bands of varying width are left unpainted round the borders of the picture. In these *Bleibilder* there is a strong contrast between the solidity of the lead and Förg's sensibility in laying the paint, although the changing colours of the material used often seem to guide him in his use of chromatic «nuances». Moreover, despite the uniformity of the brush-strokes, the darkness of the background emerges to deaden the tones and reduce the luminous intensity of the colours. These effects are deliberate, however, and are an allusion to the component parts of the picture-object, the essence of the latter revealing the ambiguity of appurtenance to the ontological and metaphysical sphere. This is most striking when the whole surface of the *Bleibild* is divided into equal sections, and the unpainted lead part and the painted part are balanced as in a portion of a horizontal landscape where sky and sea touch.

Besides revealing Förg's sensibility in actually laying the paint, the *Bleibild* also reveal his swiftness of application. This aspect has always been of fundamental importance in his work. Förg himself says that he prefers to complete each work as quickly as possible. This connotation of speed refers to the act of painting itself, and hence to time-space. In this dimension the partial painting of the lead base introduces not only the idea of the work as a fragment, but also the possibility that both the support-material and the coloured zone may be imagined as being infinitely wider, and hence permits the reappearance of a *Stimmung* of the sublime which is typical of the unity of monochrome and its metaphysical tradition: this, in turn, is accompanied by an articulation of space which stems from the multimedial complexity of the work. In this respect, it is possible to appreciate the appropriateness of Bonnie Clearwater's evocation of the work of Barnett Newman in her critique of the large-scale *Bleibilder*, some of which were completed by Förg in 1988 and exhibited at the Newport Harbour Art Museum at the start of this year.

It must be added, however, that the closeness between the reductionist temperaments of the two artists becomes even more accentuated if we observe and compare Förg's recent, and not as yet exhibited monotypes, *Stations of the cross* (1989) in black and white, with some of Newman's twenty two *Untitled* ink-on-paper drawings (1960), completed virtually in the same period as his first paintings for *Stations of the cross* (1958-66). Albeit only formally, it is also possible to liken Förg's *Bleibilder*, *Untitled* 1988 (\*177 and \*178), to Newman's «zip» works such as *Eve* (1950) and *Primordial light* (1954). Nevertheless, as Bonnie Clearwater concludes, «Unlike Rothko and

Newman, who aspired to clarity in their work, Förg embraces ambiguity»<sup>8</sup>.

And, indeed, new evidence of Förg's flair for introducing new aspects to his work so that it becomes capable of conveying numerous contradictory meanings often all within the same work - comes with *Bronzereliefs* (1986). The latter represent not only the most eloquent «test» possible of the bivalence or plurivalence of a work, but veritable «natures» of plastic-pictorial art. Förg hangs his bronze bas-reliefs on the wall like pictures, and they are also shaped like pictures. The modelling, which pervades and animates them in all their dark gravity, gives the same effect as painting, except, in certain cases, when the light grazes them to reveal their metallic solidity, as in the *Bleibilder*. Their chromatic «monotony», comparable to a symphony by Yves Klein or Mallarmé's blank page, contrasts with signs of manual dexterity which almost approach expressionism. There are, however, sudden bursts of line reminiscent of the late Monet, Giverny or Turner; or rather, the impression of something which changes ineluctably, like water and air. Whereas the physical act of making the reliefs remains as evidence of the time it took to complete them, its traces are, nonetheless, static. There is nothing Rodinesque about all this: it would be more apt to invoke Medardo Rosso and Fontana! Förg also reveals the reasons behind these signs of manual dexterity, and hence dissipates some of the misunderstandings which have arisen as to the realization of his work. He models the damp chalky material with his bare hands, and since it solidifies very quickly, he must work with great speed. Liquidity thus turns into solidity. The reliefs, therefore, are not, as has been erroneously written, mere hand-drawings in the sand. Bronze-casting and the technical procedures it entails then endow these creatures born fragile from chalk with an immobility and solidity which are capable of passing through time. Their supreme semantic expression materializes when Förg places them in the same ambience as his *Bleibilder* or his designs on paper in which the surface has been painted in the same manner.

With *Stelen* (1988) Förg's sculptures in bronze carry the sensitiveness of the signs and the painting of the reliefs into a realm of total spatiality. The regular volumes, which taper upwards to bestow a sense of archaic severity on the place where the sculptures are situated, are not, however, monolithically static. The workmanship on each face differentiates the inertia of the material, as in the bas-reliefs, allowing the light to shimmer, like colour running in a painting on paper, across the great bronze pages. The surfaces of these sculptures bear the same signs as some of the bas-reliefs and the lithograph-cycle entitled *Raum* (1987) and the etchings, *Linien* (1988) and *Strukturen* (1988).

In the sculptures too, Förg manages to de-materialise his work thanks to his continuous «shifts in sensibility» or his reversals of the conventional use of materials. The *Stelen*, together with the *Bronzereliefs*, the *Bleibilder* and the coloured backgrounds of the acrylic-on-wood of the *Farbfelder* thus constitute an ulterior development of Förg's spatial system.

At the Museo di Rivoli the artist has chosen to exhibit the typological arc of virtually all his work. The succession of rooms allotted to him lead from the large-scale *Bleibilder* (or leadpaintings) to the acrylics-on-canvas, to the photographic pictures, to the *Bronzereliefs*, to the acrylics on linen-paper up to the *Stelen*. The exhibition also offers the opportunity to observe some of the new works completed especially for the occasion.

In the large-scale *Bleibilder* the acrylic paint is laid with the usual speed, while the lead bands used to create the base have an unifying function. The dialectics of background (lead) - sign (paint) may be sensed from the transparency of the colour which, albeit covering the surfaces entirely, allows glimpses of the lead. Sometimes it is also stated openly in the vast zones left bare to reveal their glossy, iridescent materiality alongside the paint. The curved edges of the lead, stretched on wooden frames, give the works a corporeity which is reminiscent of the objectivity of the work in space.

Typical example of this collection is the *Bleibild* divided into two halves, the lower painted in cadmium yellow-orange and the upper consisting solely of lead (cm. 400x 300), or the one divided into three parts, in which, between two zones of lead, a third is defined in all its horizontality by sweeping brush-strokes which highlight the mixing of light ochre yellow with Paolo Veronese green (cm 240 x160). Others are the painting entirely of lead with a single vertical red stripe (cm 240 x160) or the one in which the lead background is entirely painted over, one horizontal half in ochre yellow, the other in dioxidine purple.

Conspicuous among the acrylics on canvas are the works in which the different colours clash, in which the paint allows the backgrounds and the combinations of colours to peer through: as there is no actual perspective, they give a sense of «foreground» and «background», of «near» and «far». In the most effective examples, ultramarine blue borders with hooker or heliogen green (cm 265 x 175), cadmium yellow-orange with white (cm 220 x 138) and dark cadmium yellow with ultramarine blue which, darkening at that point, runs into the vertical band of background-colour.

In the photographic pictures, however, the centrality of the conception of the picture as a window also returns. The large-scale *Farbfotografien* (cm 270 x 180) exhibited at Rivoli virtually add a double-opening to space. Förg's picture reproduce the windows of Libera's Villa Malaparte at Capri from the interior as they frame various views of the island. The interior shade, which inscribes the cliffs, the sea and the trees, accentuates the luminosity of the external views. The black and white of photographic picture *Ika* (1989, cm. 270 x 120) and a mirror-picture bring to the unity of the «musical» sequence different spatial-temporal entities which, however, stimulate multiple perceptions.

With his *Untitled* designs (1989), which are also all large-scale (cm 262 x 150), Förg links *Bleibilder*, *Bronzereliefs* and *Stelen*. He thus completes his journey, in the course of which it is possible to appreciate how, despite the ambiguity of the single statements, the adventure of his reinvention of space is guided by his consistent method of working and a certain univocal tension. Of the ten versions on display at the exhibition - a megadiary which, in its immediateness, is almost akin to a daily sketchbook - certain ones stand out by virtue of the synthesis they reveal between the ideation of colours and signs and methods of execution. One sheet in particular, dated 1 July 1989 with the title «Capri» written in graphite pencil in the top left-hand corner under the paint, is full of pictorial lyricism. The design is a «fabric» with its lemon-yellow background over which a subsequent wash of diluted blue gives the whole surface a greenish mood. Over the verticality of half a dozen zones of a brighter yellow, the result of removing paint with a sponge or something similar, the artist has used his bare fingers to trace long wavy horizontal lines which cut off the layers of paint at varying heights: what emerges is a zig-zag effect similar to the reflections created by rippling waves. It is a work of outstanding luminosity and suggestive transparency. As the dates marked on the designs again show, another three were completed in mid-July of this year. Two of them include, in capital letters, on the upper left-hand side, the vertical title «IKAS TEARS». Here wide veins of dark ochre have been hastily painted in with a flatbrush, the scraping and dripping of the paint also revealing the speed with which the work was completed. Once more Förg has used his fingers to remove paint and sketch in half-closed, pendulous shapes similar to large teardrops.

Finally, another two of his more recent designs, dated November and December 1988 respectively, show a more basic concern with signs. The images they present show that they are part of a series of coloured-chalk and charcoal sketches which the artist completed that year for the exhibition at the Gemeentemuseum in the Hague.

Following the brief appearances of Förg's work in Ravenna (1985), at the Galleria Rumma in Naples (with Kiecol, Mucha and Schütte, 1987) and Milan (1988), and the more complete personal



exhibition dedicated to him the Galleria Pieroni in Rome (March 1988), the present exhibition is clearly of outstanding importance. But more significant still, now that this young German artist's variegated linguistic inventions seem to have reached a certain maturity of expression, this is the moment to view them actively. In this way it is possible to become part of the dynamics of the remarkable system of perception-conception which the devices of his work turn into reality. For, in discovering that part of Förg's linguistic ambiguity belong to the doubts and manifold logics of the contemporary, we shall realize how, by opposing self-destruction in the sublimity of nihilist thought of the «last picture possible», he has moved towards a dimension that is perhaps less idealist, but certainly more arduous. And he has thus found inside and outside himself the complex spatial continuity to reflect the sensibility of the present age.

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- <sup>1</sup> T. McEvilley, *La peinture monochrome*, in *La couleur seule*, Musée St-Pierre, Lyon 1988.
  - <sup>2</sup> In an interview granted to Phillis Tuchman and published in «Artforum», May 1971, Ryman declares: «Not all my paintings are perfectly square [...]. Sometimes they are 29x30. They look square, but actually they aren't the fact that they've come out like this depends on the material. It's important: I don't tend to keep them square» (cfr. Barbara Reise, in «Data», spring 1974, n. 11, pp. 33-34).
  - <sup>3</sup> In an interview to Martin Heuschel for «Neue Kunst in Europa», May-July 1985, Förg declares: «In my fabric pictures, the most important thing is that the fabric comes from an Italian flag with a history behind it [...]. I saw these flags by chance, during a demonstration while I was in Italy. I thought that, in that particular light, they were really beautiful, and then I had the idea of doing some fabric pictures reproducing that light-effect» (cfr. *Un'altra obiectività*, Museo d'arte contemporanea Luigi Pecci, Prato, June-August 1989, p. 120).
  - <sup>4</sup> Cfr. Siegfried Kracauer, *Cinema tedesco*, Mondadori, Milano 1977, p. 100; Lotte H. Eisner, *Lo schermo demoniaco*, Bianco e Nero editori, Roma 1955, pp. 32-33.
  - <sup>5</sup> *Un'altra obiectività cit.*, pp. 117-20.
  - <sup>6</sup> Bruno Zevi, *Giuseppe Terragni*, Zanichelli, Bologna 1980, p. 70.
  - <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.
  - <sup>8</sup> Bonnie Clearwater, *Günther Förg: beyond painting*, in *Günther Förg painting/sculpture/installation*, Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach (Cal.) 1989, p. 23.