

Knut Eckstein at Kunsthalle Gießen

KNUT ECKSTEIN – ontheway

Curated by Marcel Baumgartner and Markus Lepper

Opening reception: Friday March 4th 2016, 6 pm
at Kunsthalle Gießen

welcome: Dietlind Grabe-Bolz, mayor of the city of Gießen
Introduction: Marcel Baumgartner and Markus Lepper

PRESSTEXT

In June 2009, for the final exhibition in the old Kunsthalle in Giessen, a building designed by Swedish architect Sven Markelius in 1966, Knut Eckstein created a sculptural installation that drew on a complex system of references and associations . (I am guessing a bit here as I'm not sure what komplex Bezüge means - complex conjunctions didn't seem to work as well as it felt it should)

As an ending to the exhibition series *Art History and Contemporary Art* the piece was titled *détournement (constructing situation)*, a reference to the Situationist International movement of 1960s Paris and a formal nod to Théodore Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* (1818-19), suggesting an allegorical response to the state of risk between disaster and emergency. (found this a bit tricky not sure if it works for you?)

Those who viewed it as a comment on the cultural and political situation in Gießen in general and more specifically in reference to the exhibition Heiner Meyer: *déjà vu* (2009), that opened exactly the same time at the new Kunsthalle directly across the street in the city's new "Kultur"-town hall, were certainly not incorrect.

Now, as Knut Eckstein returns to Gießen, putting an end to the so called *Zwischenzeit* or interims period, it is clear that traditional terminologies such as *display* or *installation* do not provide useful keys to interpreting what he is presenting at the Kunsthalle, on its façade and on the rooftop of the City Hall.

The most fitting term, to offer an idea of what is on display, might be *installation* (didn't really get the use of installation here as above states this term is not "the right way to understand..." ?)

Suspended by a framework of bamboo canes on the eaves of the Town Hall roof, ropelights simulate the ascending flame of the Statue of Liberty. This is reflected below in the Kunsthalle window display, overlooking Berliner Platz, by the installation *theflag*, consisting of rope lights shaped into the contours of a flag moved by the wind. It reiterates an impression of the famous snapshot taken by Joe Rosenthal on February 23rd 1945 of the American flag being hoisted up by Marines at Mount Suribachi on the Japanese Pacific island of Iwo Jima.

In the Kunsthalle itself Knut Eckstein creates, by inverting the outside inward, no more, no less than the sensation - the sensory impression - of a monumental three-dimensional walk-in landscape-painting. In fact, the traditional generic term *painting*, is perhaps the most appropriate way to offer visitors a first idea of what to expect from this undoubtedly unusual work from Knut Eckstein. (not sure if I am getting this last bit right but it flows this way?)

On entering the room itself, the visitor finds no *familiar terrain* on which to tread. The sensation is, of course, intentional: though you may not entirely lose your footing, you will likely feel quite unsure of the surface you are moving across.

On a dark green plastic sheet covering the entire floor, streaks of films in lighter green appear to float while a top layer of transparent tarp is stretched over its entire surface, visually binding these elements whilst simultaneously creating an impression of indefinite depth.

Here and there, objects emerge on the surface, highlighting individual color accents -- objects sparsely distributed across the space; a delicate golden chain, fastened tightly between floor and ceiling; a bench inviting the viewer to stop and linger; black tires reminiscent of minimalist forms and an additional two precarious sculptures made of used, partly painted cardboard attached to the long opposing walls that provide the eyes a precise position on which to stop. Finally, the entire wall facing the window overlooking Berliner Platz is filled with a video projection of youths playing ball in a fenced New York City playground (still not sure if playground is right but suspect now it is more of a *court* - very slow internet at the Funkhaus today so I can't download the clip!) and accompanied by its original looped (looped instead of revolving?) soundtrack.

Scattered around, here and there are technical devices -- present but not operational: a fan, a smoke machine. They refer to originally opulent plans that have since waived their realization. Knut Eckstein favors the concentration and consolidation of artistic means.

Marcel Baumgartner