

Got to get something started: art and science meet at Kunsthalle Kiel

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Dopplereffekt, Bilder in Kunst und Wissenschaft
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SEE History 2010. Art & Science.
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Kiel has it good. Real good. For almost the first half of 2010, the Kunsthalle in Kiel had a specific focus on what happens when you bring visual art and science together, a focus that was materialised, not in one, but two significant exhibitions. With *Dopplereffekt* as the leader of the duo, there was a proper survey of the points of connections and departure. Secondly, with *SEE history 2010. Art & Science* the Kunsthalle managed to do more than expected by inviting scientist to act as curators, something that really deserves to be called innovation this time.

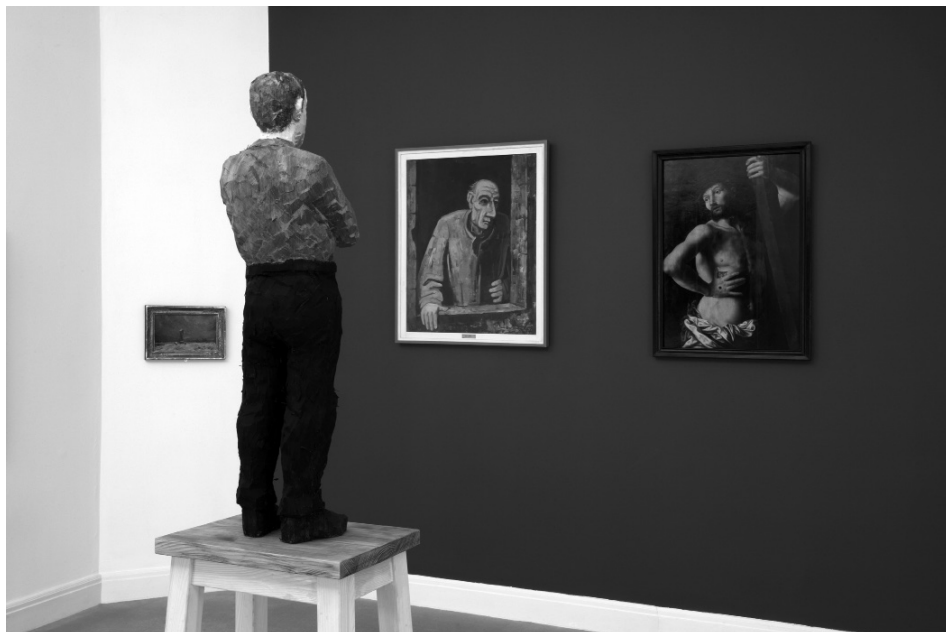
Strangely enough, the latter proved to be the one that achieved that rare act: it changed our perspective, and it allowed us to think differently. It is an exhibition, as well as an argument, for the opportunities and challenges of inter-disciplinary collaborations, which does not scream or shout, but trusts the simple and silent connections made through the experiences of an open-ended and self-critical practice.

The main attraction, to cite its full name *Dopplereffekt. Bilder in Kunst und Wissenschaft* did exactly what it promised. It created a composition where examples of how works of art deal with issues coming from the sciences, and how scientists use visual means of communication (and what importance it has to their core practice). *Dopplereffekt* was an exhibition that promised us a meeting. What it did not explicitly schematise was what kind of art, and equally important, what kind of science it was interested in placing next to each other.

The event in Kiel was not about what has become known as artistic research (as a practice based enterprise). What art stood for here was that art does not sneak itself into the structures of Academia. This is art as works that discuss and collide with the means and ends of so-called science. A notion that calls our attention to the version of science that the exhibition underlined. It was the natural sciences, not the humanities or political sciences, a telling precision. Here the various worlds, the various *Weltanschauungen* meet.



Dopplereffekt:
BORIS HARS-TSCHACHOTIN
Lurch. Reise in eine bizarre Welt, 1999-2000
Film: Besitz des Künstlers
Foto: Sven Grüß, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2010



SEE history 2010. Art & Science
Exhibitionview 2010
Photo: Martin Frommhagen, Kiel

They might hurriedly shake hands, but they do not create something of a third space, of an organic interaction between each side.

The inherent shortcoming of *Dopplereffekt* was its inability to make the best use of qualitative research. Instead of narrowing down and editing vigorously for a particular point of view, the curators went for the very typical and established route. They constructed an inclusive time frame. The show was pedagogically divided into four sections: These were, in the original German, *Kodex der Körper*, *Triebkraft der Natur*, *Mikrokosmos/Makrokosmos*, and *Der Intellectuelle Blick*.

The exhibition brought together works and visions from way back when, with its all-encompassing format, starting with Galileo Galilei (a book in a vitrine) and Hans Vredemann de Vries (exemplary drawings of architecture), then moved on to display samples collected by Ernst Mach and Otto Croy (an entertaining 160 times enlargement of nothing less important than vitamin C). What they all shared was their use of visual means to do their own research, and that they were very conscious of the role and weight of the visual, a fact already known.

From the artist's side, the survey went from sad to bad via funny and rigorous. The problem was that all we got was the usual suspects, suspects that went deep enough for their own interests, but did not present committed collaborations, just mere interventions or flirts. There was the sadness of the once cutting-edge technology, now grown horrendously old, of the installation by Nam June Paik; the sheer silliness of a large format painting of the roundness of an eye by Marc Quinn; the not so deep, but still effective, long scarf of Mark Wallinger that showed the entwined figure of the human dna and was titled as *Man United*. And then there was Carsten Höller, who did what he is good at: he made us laugh with the morbid and hybrid constellations of new types of mushrooms, each was made of two halves, a poisonous and an edible species.

The trouble with this type of survey is that unfortunately nothing much happens. Not in the show and not in the well-done and consciously conservative catalogue, with its encyclopaedic touch which ends up where it perhaps ought to have started. Instead of a broad background, it might have better served the purposes of the meeting of art and science with more of an experimental touch on tackling the chances and conflicts of the near future.

The project set next to it managed to do something more. It was a collaboration made possible by the fact that Kunsthalle is part of Christian Albrecht's University. The connections were there, now they were being activated.

The activation was done by inviting a set of scientists to work with the institution's collection, to collectively curate an exhibition based on their expertise and experiences. They even had a sort of a dogma that guided them; a useful list of questions that someone somewhere should steal and use again. In German, they read:

- 1) Was bedeutet das Bild in Ihrer Disziplin?;
- 2) Was bedeutet Subjektivität bzw. Objektivität in Ihrem Forschungsgebiet?
- 3) Wo sehen Sie zukunftsweisende Verbindungen von Kunst und Wissenschaft?
- 4) Gibt es in Ihrem Fact eine Methodenreflektion?
- 5) Welche Rolle spielt das Bild dabei?

It was a set-up that grew out of the very physical fact of bringing together images of the same or similar theme from different views. It makes no sense to claim that the scientists were able to produce 'better' results with their excursion to the world of curating. The point is that the scientists were able to shake the bag. They did not produce something static, but something on the move.

Practically, the project was realised in thematic rooms, or corners, where the scientists (ranging from biology to chemistry to neuro-surgery to ethnology and history) connected their own work, with materials from their fields, with works from the collection that were interesting and challenging to them. This arrangement functioned because they did not try to re-invent the logic of an exhibition. Not surprisingly, we had a stuffed animal and a sculpture of an animal. They (a taxidermal tiger meeting a bronze tiger) did not illustrate, undermine or underline their differences. They added up, made the act of comparing and going back and forth visually and intellectually pleasurable. In another room, we had a fabulous painting by Peter Doig, that touch of the brutto-real (so close to the sensibility of the early Gabriel Garcia Marques novels), but with a tentative and teasing touch, that played along with constructivist work and presentations of so-called exact science. Or we had the subtle horror of the small black and white painting by Marlene Dumas that was situated in a room dealing with neuroscience. All examples emphasised the inherent logic of any comparison and collaboration: they can't be forced, they have to grow slowly, and need to be treated with care.

It was a setup that cherished our ability and wish to see differently, with a new connection and collaborative touch. It had the chance to affect how, from one side, professionals from the natural sciences see, comprehend and use visual means and images. On the other hand, it affects how people involved in contemporary art might learn how to break the patterns of the established visual order and learn how to see and feel with an alternative frame of a mind.

And remember what this is called, it is learning by doing, and learning by having the ability to change roles and to listen to one's self and others. Neither separately nor completely simultaneously, but next to one another, one thing leading to something else.