

15.09.2018 – 04.11.2018

**Abs**traction

**as**

**an** experiment

**LE**xperiment

TALLINNA KUNSTIHOONE  
TALLIN ART HALL

## Introduction

Central to *Abstraction as an Open Experiment* is an interest in the implementation and interpretation of abstractionism, which starting from the 1960s attempted to rethink the relationships between modernist art, the individual and (mass) society. Accordingly, the focus of this exhibition is on artworks that are fundamentally open and inclusive. By using very different media, these works can become the basis for generalisations concerning the relation between people and things as well as wider processes in society.

The idea for the exhibition stems from a fascination with Sirje Runge's (born 1950) mid-1970s drawings and paintings, in which she experimented with simple geometric forms and abundant possibilities of colour. Today, when the interest in the experimental part of formal aesthetics is once again widespread among art circles, Runge's drawings, paintings and design projects not only become topical but also take their place in processes ongoing in art on an international level. At this exhibition, her pieces will enter into a dialogue with works by Zofia Kulik (born 1947), Dóra Maurer (born 1936) and Falke Pisano (born 1978).

*Abstraction as an Open Experiment* is not an all-encompassing art historical overview but rather an attempt to make sense of a discourse of international importance in the local, Soviet context of that time. In the post-World War II atmosphere of the Cold War, a notion emerged of the autonomy and self-sufficiency of abstract art, which also had a resonance in the Eastern Europe of restricted liberties. Art history has subsequently provided an epic interpretation of abstractionism, according to which it is a radical denial of reality and a prerequisite for a creator's expression of personal freedom. For artists on both sides of the Iron Curtain, immersing themselves in playing around with form became an opportunity to take an ethical stance.

The artworks featured at this exhibition are opposed to interpreting abstractionism as escapism. In order to assert this belief, the artists look to cybernetics and information theory, relationship studies inspired by phenomenology, and treatments of perception and communication problems. From this, they find opportunities to inject some dynamism into the "rigid and limited" nature of modern aesthetics. By looking for ways to rethink the relation between the individual and the collective without the authoritarianism typical of modernism, Dóra Maurer, Zofia Kulik as well as Sirje Runge come to a conclusion about the important role of the aesthetic experience in creating societal space, in enforcing the individual, and also in forming democratic communities.

Falke Pisano's pieces allow us to view the legacy of her senior colleagues not only as a historical episode but also as a contemporary art practice.

## The open form, exercises in creativity

One of the keywords throughout the exhibition is "openness". Traceable back to the 1960s, the idea of openness was a basis for innovative art<sup>1</sup> as well as for radical schools of architecture and design. It was driven by the need to respond to the strict authoritarianism of modernism with a more flexible practice that would allow to take individual preferences into consideration and would create a more evenly balanced relationship between viewers and art. The essence of openness was the necessary condition that a work of art is born during the creative process itself, and that it is extremely important to include the viewer in that process. Both these aspects can be observed in the works of Dóra Maurer and Sirje Runge. Maurer, whose starting point for creating any artwork is a predetermined system, proceeds to disrupt that system until every last line, layer of paint or artistic move has been carried out and presented to the audience. In Runge's "spaces of colour", combinations of colours and forms result in an illusionism that forces visitors to constantly turn back to their perceptual experience in order to grasp the piece as a whole, to conclude it for themselves.

*Creativity Exercises*, an art course led by Maurer and Miklós Erdély, was based on creating new, surprising or simply inspiring situations, which helped students to break free from established frameworks, included them in shaping the study process and gave them the means to relate to their surroundings.

The open form is also key to understanding the work of Zofia Kulik. In line with the philosophy of her teacher, Polish architect Oskar Hansen, Kulik treated the visual-aesthetic art sphere as a space of interaction that determines the relationships between individuals. By remaining open to disruptions and changes, the forms of art and action that develop in this space are simultaneously the impetus to and the result of complex processes of communication. The participants in these processes are both the senders and the receivers of signals, and they learn about the responsibility that goes with operating in a societal space and how to take that responsibility.<sup>2</sup> The goal of creating the open form was not to undermine the art world but to create an opportunity to influence the social and political reality through art, to make it the basis for a "non-authoritarian society of free and responsible individuals"<sup>3</sup>.

## Interaction and conflict

An important part of the communication between the individual and the collective was the space where the communication took place. Thus, forming a space aesthetically was to be regarded as forming societal relations. The use of elementary, geometrical forms and the modular systems derived from them contained its own ideology: geometrical simplicity meant taking an economical, rational approach to resources, while the flexibility of the modules allowed for individuality. Symbolically, the definiteness of the geometrical

forms signified order and harmony, in which chaos and randomness were out of the question.<sup>4</sup> It is telling that Runge's first project as a designer was a children's playground. This project, which she worked on in parallel with her geometrical paintings, was based on simple geometrical elements and primary colours – yellow and red. Yet in this case the application of geometry was less about striving for order and more about enabling freedom. These multifunctional and abstract constructions, which left a lot of room for the children's imagination, seemingly fulfilled the avant-garde wish for art to disrupt life and succeeded in the attempt to build a new, creatively inclusive public space.<sup>5</sup> "Using all the means of technology and art"<sup>6</sup> to create an environment that encourages participation was also one of the topics of Runge's thesis – the project to transform the milieu of Tallinn's City Centre.

Space as a medium was central to both *A Game on Morel's Hill* (1971), which was initiated by KwieKulik, and to the collective happening by Estonian architects and artists on the former Lasnamäe airfield (1974). Both events experimented with different ways of relating to space and explored the notion of the environment being a result of constant negotiations and disruptions in which there was always a potential for conflict.

One way or the other, all of Dóra Maurer's works dealt with the recording and studying of movement. Although the execution followed a strict set of rules, adjustments and divergencies had a natural part to play. These aberrations, deviations and disruptions sprang up inside the system and it was precisely this to which Maurer devoted special attention. A fine example would be *Displacements* (1972–1982), a lengthy, seventy-page graphic series represented here, or the structuralist film *Timing* (1973/1980). Maurer did not expand her art practices directly into political or societal systems, "but the hidden concern in those works was all the more urgent"<sup>7</sup>.

At the core of Falke Pisano's work are the changes taking place in the process of perceiving and making sense of reality and the objects in it. *Organon*, a mobile sculpture designed in collaboration with Benoît Maire, looks for the possibility of dialogue in the creative act. It cannot be guaranteed, says the artist, that the artwork nor the viewer will not lose their autonomy during that dialogue.

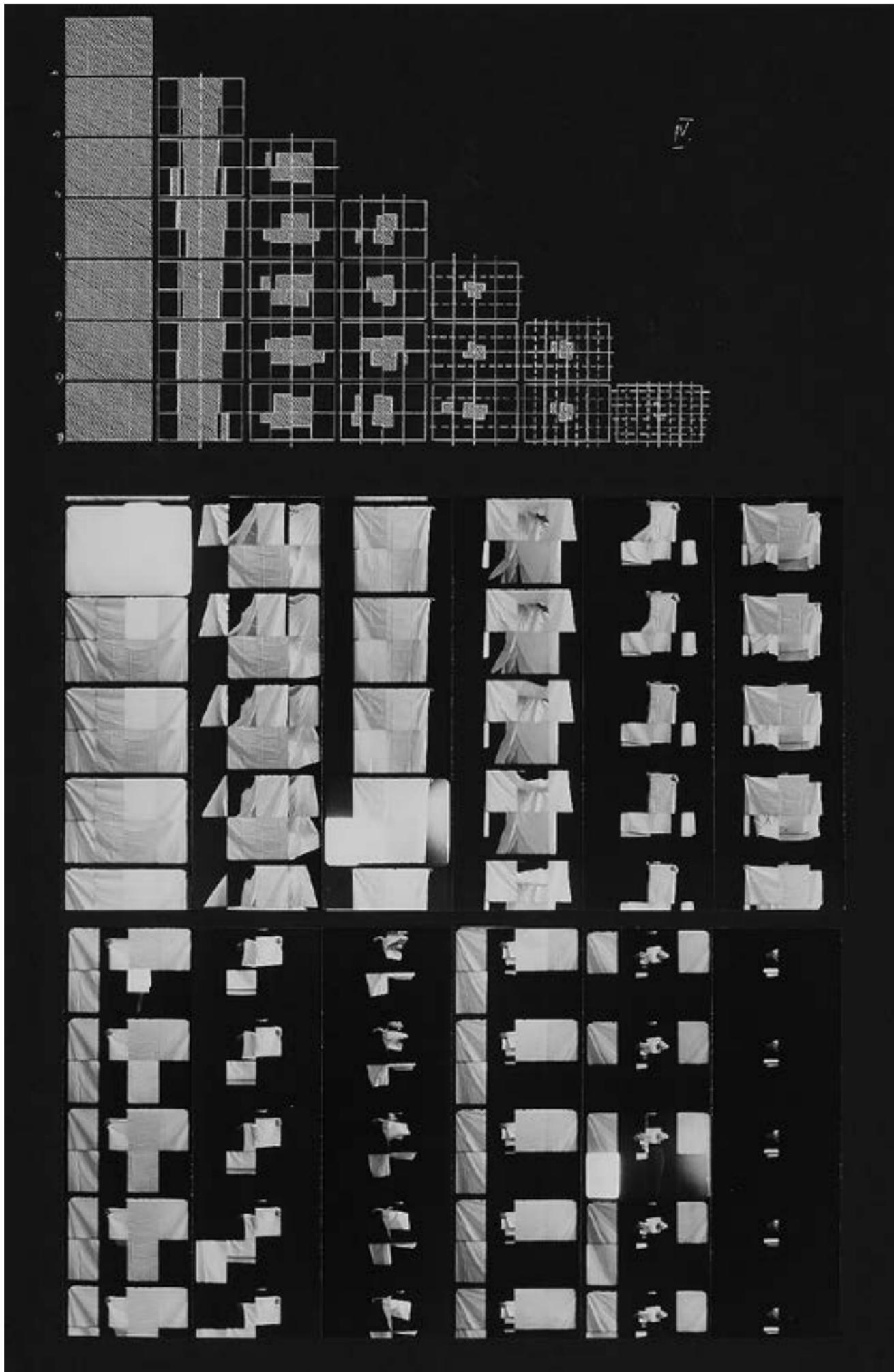
Finally, another recurrent theme in the works of the artists exhibited here that certainly deserves attention is the conveying of a human presence in artworks that strive to be abstract, rational and objective. Having analysed photographs of Chillida's sculptures, Falke Pisano comes to the conclusion that the existence of abstract objects is always dependent on the person and their reality. Similarly, the performances captured by Dóra Maurer's film camera, which document simple, even monotonous activities, make movements made with a routine generality into something touchingly physical – the effect of the room she painted in Buchberg is unexpectedly emotional, even beautiful.

## Conclusion

A high-modernist theory sanctifying the autonomy of art, which also held a special meaning for the authoritarian societies of Eastern Europe, saw abstract art as an expression of an individualistic burst of creativity. The inventive and intelligent art-works by Dóra Maurer, Zofia Kulik, Falke Pisano and Sirje Runge – four female artists from Central and Eastern Europe who have been left out of the canon of abstractionism history – provide a somewhat different perspective on the autonomy and freedom of the individual. The focus of these pieces is not on self-expression but on expression and the attempt to understand its various manifestations. The artists do not aspire to create a masterpiece, but are instead curious and eager to experiment and explore the possibilities for rethinking art and society at large.

— Mari Laanemets

- 1 U. Eco's 1962 essay *Opera Aperta* (The Open Work) is one of the first to attempt to sketch the poetics of the openness of contemporary art. An open work is ambiguous and emerges from an interpretive dialogue with the receiver. - Eco, *Das offene Kunstwerk*, 1973, p. 41.
- 2 Luckasz Rondula, Michal Wolinski and Axel John Wieder. "Games, Actions and Interactions. Film and the Tradition of Oskar Hansen's Open Form" – 1,2,3 ... *Avant-Gardes. Film/Art between Experiment and Archive*. L. Rondula, F.Zeyfang (eds.), Warsaw, Berlin, 2007, p. 97.
- 3 Ibid., p. 98.
- 4 Udo Ivask. *Kunst ja Kodu 3* (41), 1973, p. 20.
- 5 After World War II, focusing attention on the design of spaces and items specifically meant for children was big global trend and went hand in hand with the changed concept of childhood – developing children's creativity and freedom was supposed to raise responsible and independent-minded individuals who would know how to avoid global conflicts and disasters.
- 6 Sirje Lapin [Runge]. *Tallinna Kesklinna miljöö kujundamise võimalusi. Seletuskiri*. (Possibilities for Transforming the Milieu of Tallinn's City Centre. An explanation). Department of Industrial Art. 1975, p. 5.
- 7 Judit Király, "Mathematische Bezüge in der Kunst von Dóra Maurer". – *Maurer Dóra*. Exhibition catalogue. Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest, 2008, p. 46. For Király, this "concern" manifests in Maurer's almost compulsive fascination with "the dropouts of the system".



Dóra Maurer. TIMING ANALYSIS. 1980. Photographs from an enlarged 16 mm film negative and drawing on cardboard. 100 x 70 cm. Photo: Miklós Sütyök. Courtesy: artist

## Dóra Maurer TIMING 1973/1980

Black and white, no sound, 16 mm transferred to DVD.  
Prod. SUMUS, Vienna  
10 min

Since the 1970s, Dóra Maurer, alongside conceptual photography, has created several experimental films centred around movement and the analysis of the changes it brings about, structures and their hidden inner variations, and later on also the parameters of the medium itself. The films are constructed on simple everyday activities, repetition and multiplication, like reading a book in *Learned Spontaneous Movements*, 1973 or folding a sheet, as in *Timing*. The temporal structure, composition of imagery, but also the rhythm of activities is usually determined by a mathematical rule or numerical relation.

The four-part *Timing* strictly follows a script. A white sheet is being folded against a black background. The proportions of the sheet correspond to the presentation format of 16 mm film and an almost monochrome colour field refers to a screen and/or canvas. The longer side of the sheet is the same length as the artist's stretched out arm. With every movement of the arm a new fold is added. That happens seven times. Then half of the frame is covered with a mask placed in front of the camera lens and the procedure is repeated; the film is rewound and the other half of the frame is covered up. This procedure is repeated four more times while a quarter and finally an eighth of the frame is covered. The film is a single-cut piece.

The temporal irregularity of the takes creates shifts and makes time literally visible. The organisation of minimal activity into a structure through repetition instigates a process of abstraction. Maurer's aesthetic aim is making differences and variations visible in order to enhance the viewer's sensitivity and test their senses.

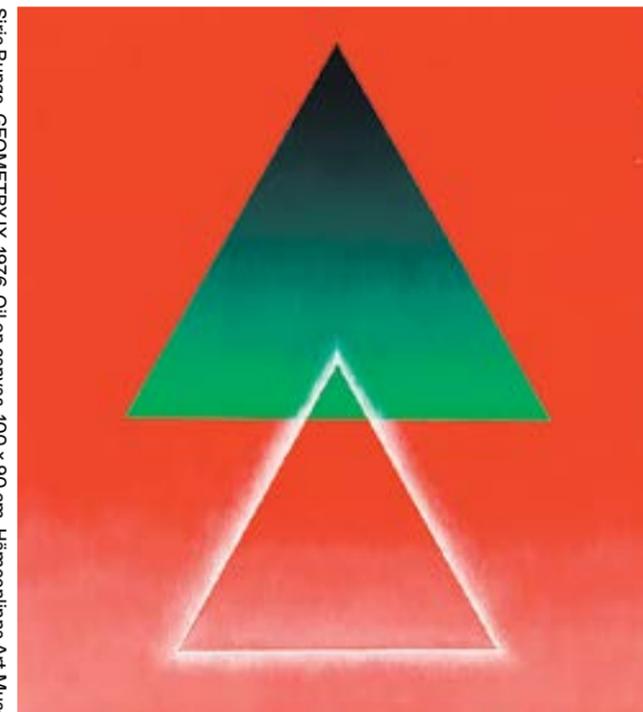
## Sirje Runge GEOMETRY series 1976–1977

In 1976, Sirje Runge starts work on the *Geometry* series of paintings, which she continues into 1977. She exhibits twelve of these paintings at a solo exhibition in the second floor exhibition space of Tallinn Art Hall in late 1976. In all, Runge paints seventeen *Geometry* paintings.

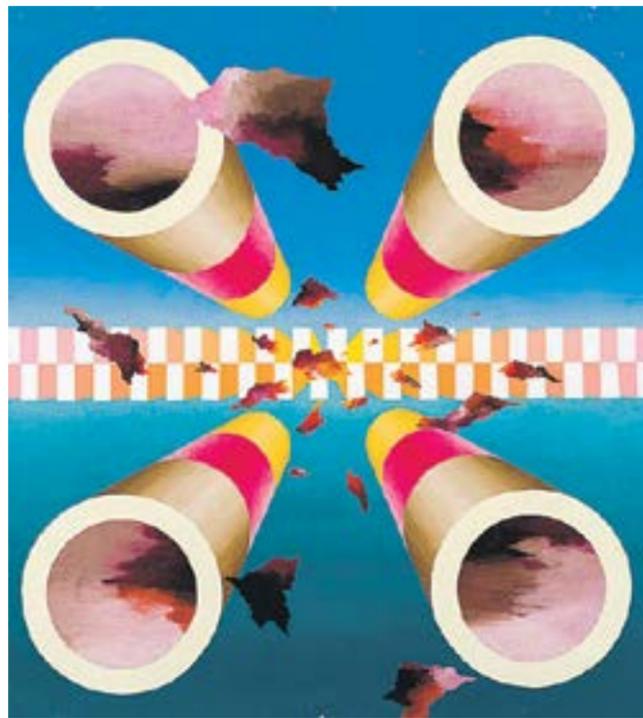
More than any other Estonian artist, Runge has systematically explored the limits of using primary geometrical forms and the constructive possibilities of painting. Analysing the means of expression and the working process is the theme of the *Geometries* as well. On the one hand, these paintings are an indication of the artist's studies at the department of industrial art, where one of the basic exercises was architectonics, which was derived, amongst other things, from the pedagogical models of Bauhaus. It meant combining things in a given structure in order to explore the relations between various forms on a plane and then in space. Exercises like this were an opportunity to analyse the visual and spatial effects of forms and colours, the effects of rhythms and different geometrical combinations. Runge's second source of inspiration was the Soviet Russian avant-garde – in 1975, she visited George Costakis's collection in Moscow. Shortly after that trip, in late 1975, she created the pop-art-like *Altar*, which was exhibited at the legendary *Harku '75. Objects, Concepts* exhibition at the Harku Institute of Experimental Biology. The object featured wings covered with a brightly-coloured geometrical pattern and could be seen as a precursor to the *Geometries*\*.

In the *Geometry* series, the theme of which is "interaction and conflict", Runge tries out different possibilities for organising (the painting's) space, demonstrating her skill at combining colours and forms. It is precisely colour that plays a central role in the *Geometry* paintings. However, unlike technocratic rational abstractionism and the way it was applied to control and order the chaos in design, Runge's *Geometries* are indeed playful and ambivalent. They have not been "programmed", but are the result of sensuous thought, and therein lies their human dimension. It is quite telling that at that same exhibition in 1976, side by side with the geometrical paintings, Runge exhibited a set of portraits and drawings of her family, friends and acquaintances.

\* The object, which for a long time stood in the lobby of the Pärnu KEK dormitory, has not survived.



Sirje Runge. GEOMETRY IX. 1976. Oil on canvas, 100 x 90 cm. Hämeelilina Art Museum



**Sirje Runge**  
**KINETIC LANDSCAPE**  
**1975**

Oil on canvas, 100.5 x 90 cm  
University of Tartu Art Museum

*Kinetic Landscape* visualises the concept of a new society, which is pierced by various flows of information and where everything is in constant, interconnected movement. The pipes heading beyond the horizon could just as well be part of a sewerage system as a worldwide information system.

**Sirje Runge**  
**DRAWINGS**  
**1972-1975**

These graphite drawings, made in the first half of the 1970s, mainly in the years 1972-1973, still show the figurativeness and surreality that were characteristic of Runge's early works, even though the main emphasis is obviously on analysing space, expressing various spacial relations and creating imaginary, more and more abstract architectural situations. Central to this are questions about the mutual relationship between natural and artificial environments, the opposition between order and the elements. Flying leaflets or ribbons cut into the strict structure of an architectural space, columns and windows are overgrown with some kind of flora, orbs float chaotically above a chequered piece of land – all symbolising the various possibilities within order.

In 1975, Runge does the coloured pencil drawings *Square*, *Circle* and *Triangle*, which mark a move from landscapes to now completely abstract spaces, heralding the imminent arrival of whole series of geometrical paintings. A single geometric shape forms the basis of these paintings, which the artist repeats and combines in different ways, creating an ordered pictorial space. However, it is no longer the space itself that is in the foreground, but the relations between the objects inside it.



Photo: Installation view Croy Nielsen, Berlin, 2008

**Falke Pisano, Benoît Maire**  
**ORGANON (AND THE AUDIENCE PERCEPTION)**  
**2008**

Six tables, various objects made of cardboard, mirrors, plexiglass, wood and clay, text printed on four posters, presenter. Dimensions variable  
Croy Nielsen, Vienna; Cortex Athletico, Paris; Hollybush Gardens, London; Ellen de Bruijne Projects, Amsterdam and with permission from the artists

*Organon (and the Audience Perception)*\* is an installation with varying dimensions created in collaboration between Falke Pisano and the French artist Benoît Maire, which looks for opportunities for dialogue in creative processes, while tackling the construction of objects and the receptive mechanisms of the viewer.

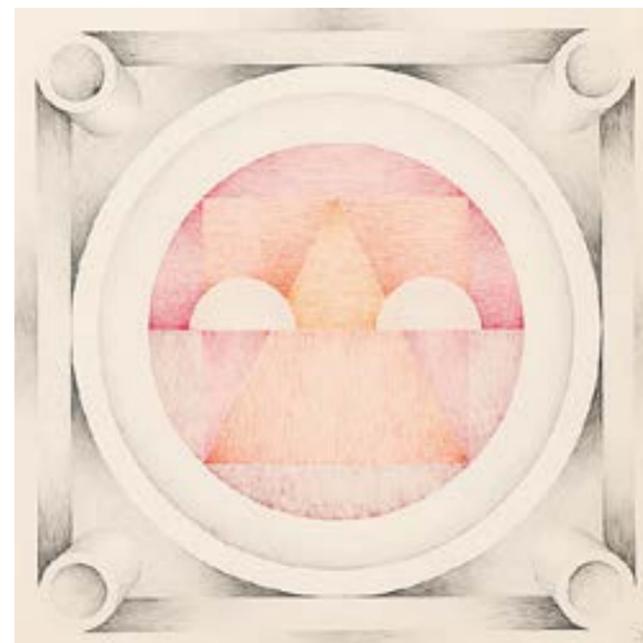
Being a mobile sculpture, which consists of specifically and irregularly shaped tables with wheels, it has, in addition to its variable form, the ability to blur the borders between sculpture, performance and text, thereby connecting them. By moving the objects and materials on the tables – clay and wood pieces, plexiglass sheets and mirrors, felt, broken vases and spheres – the work changes during the exhibition as a result of alternating “moves” by the artists. The text, created in parallel to the described manoeuvres, is foremost a set of guidelines for the presenter, but also a description of the events, which introduces the possibilities of the creative game taking place.

*Organon* reflects the re-emergence of an interest in formalist modernism, which arose in the 2000s. Expressing passion, curiosity, an enthusiasm for formal games and an interest in systems of communication and meaning on one side, it tries to pose the following critical question on the other: how would it be possible to create something out of formal elements.

\* *Organon* (ὄργανον in Greek) means “tool”, an organ. Aristotle's collection of works on logic had such a title. For Aristotle, logic was a tool for all the other sciences, the programme and the ideal, a device for sensing truth.



Sirje Runge. UNTITLED, 1973. Graphite, 50 x 50 cm. Private collection



Sirje Runge. CIRCLE, 1975. Graphite and coloured pencil, 50 x 50 cm. Author



**KwieKulik (Zofia Kulik, Przemysław Kwiek)  
GAME ON MOREL'S HILL  
(GROUP ACTION)  
1971/2006**

Digitalised slide show  
15.23 min

*Game on Morel's Hill* documents the action which took place in December 1971 at the Elbląg sculpture seminar. KwieKulik invited students and recent alumni of the Sculpture Department of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw to participate. Based on the 'open form' concept of his teacher, the Polish architect Oskar Hansen (1922–2005), the action (in which Hansen also participated) studied the environment as an intersubjective space whose form is born collectively in the negotiations between different individuals and where visual register plays an important role.

Seeking an escape from the modernist architecture crisis, Hansen used 'open form' to reformulate the relationship between the individual and the collective, putting a lot of emphasis on the aesthetic sphere – art and architecture –, to which he attached an important role in the reorganisation of social relations. He demanded the creation of forms favouring participation that will only be completed after they have been hijacked by viewers/users. 'Open form' is the result of a complex communication process between participants who are transmitters and receivers at the same time.

*Game on Morel's Hill* represents one of these open forms of expression which the authors themselves called the 'visual game'. The participants in the game were divided into two teams: the blacks (representing a rational approach) and the whites (representing an emotional approach). Later, the reds (realists) were spontaneously added to the game, causing unexpected interruption. The task of a separate group was to document the activities.

The game was structured by successive 'moves' – the activity of one group changed the game environment in a way that made intervention possible for the other group. This established a communication chain where words were replaced by visual means, such as white or red pieces of fabric, 1.5-metre sticks, clothes, but also the bodies of the participants themselves. Fourteen moves were made in three hours. Later, Kulik and Kwiek prepared a slideshow of the action with comments, in which they described and analysed the moves.

**Dóra Maurer, Miklós Erdély  
CREATIVITY – VISUALITY  
1975–1977 (1987)**

Black-and-white, 16 mm transferred to DVD. Béla Balázs Studio  
25 min

In 1975, Dóra Maurer was invited to teach drawing at the cultural centre of the Hungarian State Railway Machine Factory, which offered preparatory courses for applicants to the University of Fine Arts. Together with Miklós Erdély, who ran the sculpture class there, they radically changed the system of teaching at the time, developing an experimental study programme, which connected various disciplines. Although it consisted of a fair share of practice and exercises, it also considered the wishes and suggestions of the participants. In addition to democracy and openness, the process of collective learning was important.

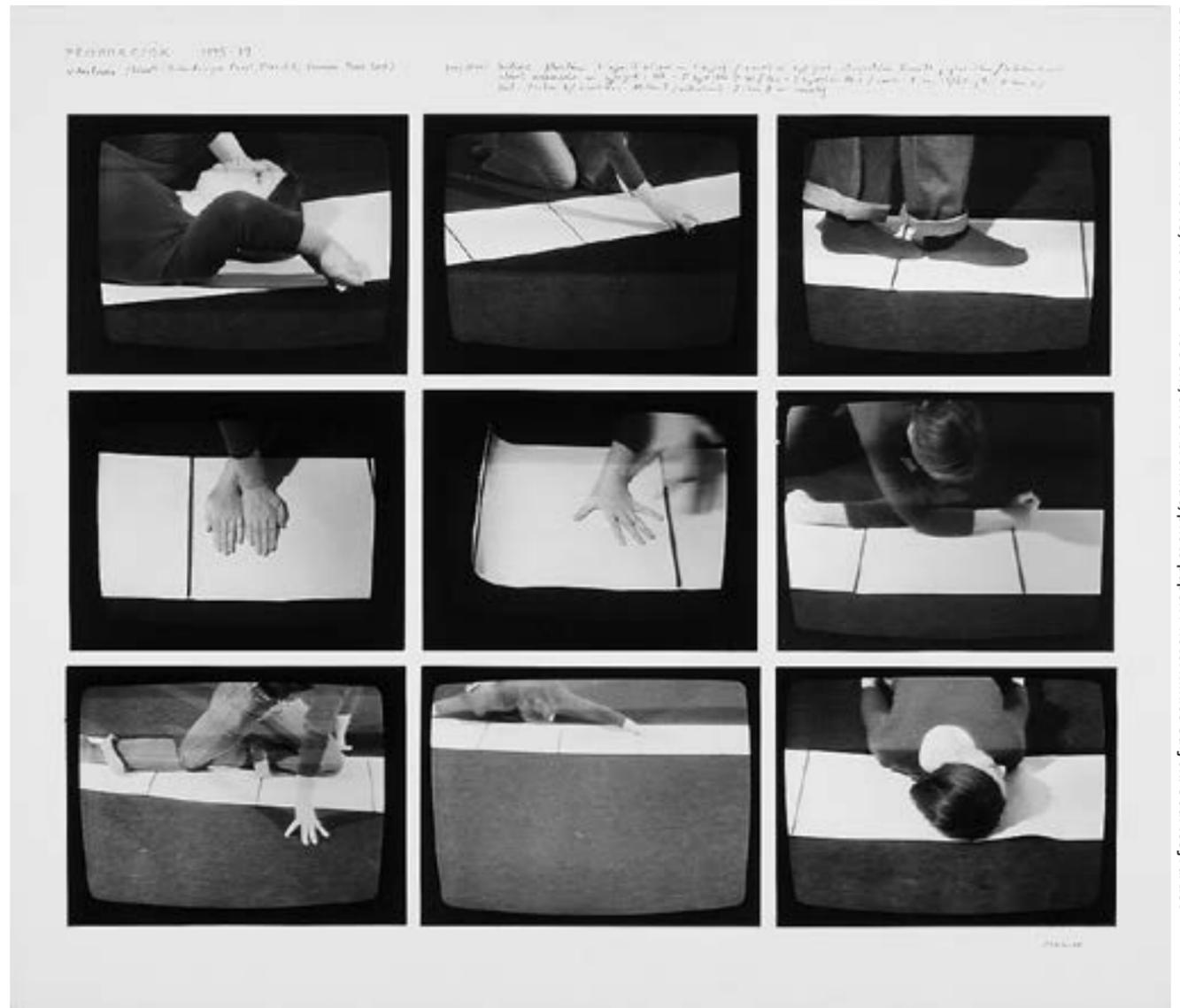
The name of the course, which at first was *Motion Planning and Execution Actions*, was later changed simply to *Creativity Exercises*. The study programme combined the traditional "artist and model" teaching situations with contemporary methods, which incorporated movement, reacting to the activities of other participants and the development of a general creative preparedness. The addition of video technology a bit later allowed for the recording of materials and processes.

The aim of the "exercises" was to incorporate new and unexpected moments into the study process, which directed the participants to think creatively and to reject the entrenched patterns of perception and depiction. Learning did not mean a passive acquiring of knowledge and techniques, but the strengthening and forming of individuals and their mutual relations, the development of their ability to critique and their sense of responsibility. Such study formats, which widened the imagination, were open and incorporating, saw creativity as an active connection to one's environment, were meant to support the creation of politically engaged subjects and a democratic collective.

The film *Creativity – Visuality*, produced at Béla Balázs Studio in 1987, was put together from photographs and video recordings taken some ten years before.



Acknowledging the spatial situation through points marked and linked to each other.



**Dóra Maurer  
PROPORTIONS  
1979**

Black-and-white, without sound, 16mm transferred to DVD  
10 min

In *Proportions* Dóra Maurer presents to the camera a simple action based on repetition: first she unrolls a piece of white paper on the floor, lies down on it and draws a black line above her head using a ruler. Then she folds the paper in half and in half again. By marking the folded lines with a black pencil, she creates an abstract system of measurement based on her own body. Then, using the same system of measurement she correlates the body to its parts – with the length of the foot, width of spread fingers, width of the palm, length of the ulna, width of the shoulders ... The body of the artist becomes the mediator of divergences and differences; the measuring that unfolds before our eyes in the film determines the rhythm of the film. That which seems like a simple measuring exercise, allows us not only to observe the ratios in the measurements of various body parts, but also the physicality of the conceptual system itself.

Portrait drawing mediated by video and television screen.



**Sirje Runge**  
**PAINTING SERIES 'SPACE'**  
 1977–1978

The geometric paintings, traced back to basic elements, belonged to the abstractionism tradition after the Second World War, which was accompanied by an interest inherent in the era in cybernetics and information technology, as well as non-verbal forms of communication.

The series *Space*, smaller in its volume, explores modelling processes and the possibilities of creating space. Moving away from the structure of colour effects in *Geometry*, she now focuses on the analysis of the time experience and the dynamic relationship of the viewer and the art object. The paintings of the *Space* series are designed with striking forethought. The artist has used a much more playful approach within the seemingly rigorous design: conscious ambivalence and the inconsistency of visual information is inclusive and her unexpected perspectives and shifts animate the viewer's sensing capacities. Unlike the restraint in the name of harmony, which design pursued with a strict use of colours and forms, Runge's paintings create insecurity and excitement. Although they can be considered a reflection of the flexible organisation of the modern technocratic society, they are clearly different from the rationalised and formalised solutions of the design. Instead, they seem to be disrupting it. Their structure seems to be a result of sensual experience, not a pre-established concept. The artist herself has aptly described her *Space* series as a study on 'diversity and unity in the world'. Compared to the historical self-awareness of geometric art, these works by Sirje Runge refer rather to the complex relation-ship between the individual and the collective, as well as the constant negotiation process between them.

In 1976–1977, Runge designed playgrounds for Toomas Rein's Pärnu KEK construction company kindergarten, where geometric solutions have clear parallels with the paintings completed by Runge at the same time. One fascinating example of the painting ideas taken to the real environment is the maze created from concrete walls on the playground, which impeded and divided the space and was permeable and open at the same time. Such space allowed separation, but also remained connected and playful.



Sirje Runge. Pärnu KEK construction company kindergarten playgrounds, 1977. Display board. Gouache on cardboard, 100 x 100 cm. Private collection

**THE HAPPENING ON THE FORMER LASNAMÄE AIRFIELD**  
 1974

Participants: Tiit Kaljundi, Liivi Künnapu, Vilen Künnapu, Leonhard Lapin, Avo-Himm Looveer, Kristin-Mari Looveer, Jüri Okas, Margarita Okas, Jaan Ollik, Sirje Runge.  
 Photography: Jüri Okas

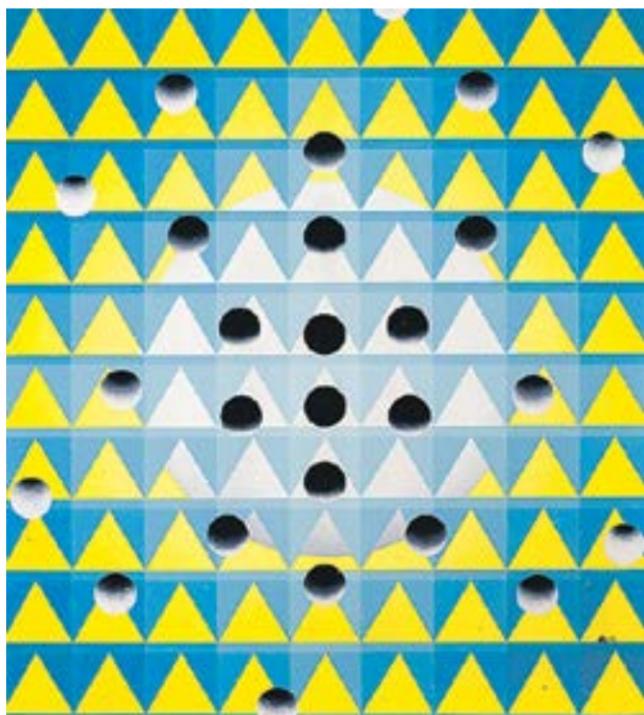
Collective strolls around the city, mostly to its various waste-lands, early industrial areas and abandoned or forgotten locales, were one of the typical activities for the circle of young artists and architects active in Tallinn in the 1970s. They were driven by an interest towards their surroundings, particularly towards the places rejected by the modernist side of the city: non-functional areas that offered a different kind of spatial experience, yet at the same time were open to a multitude of activities.

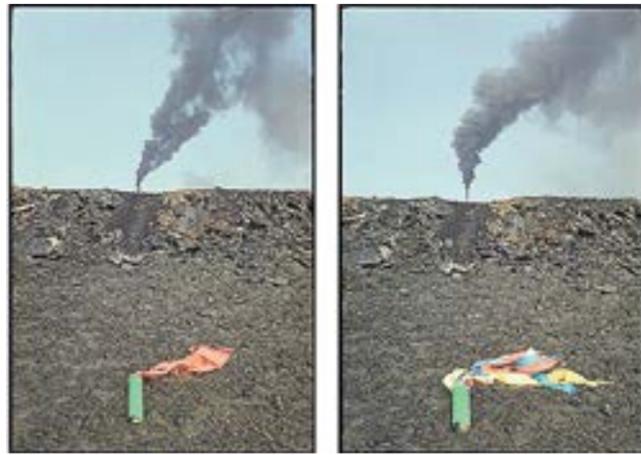
The happening on Lasnamäe's newly abandoned military airfield is one of the few initiatives of its kind that has been documented on photograph. The initial concept of the happening can be credited to Jüri Okas, who was already familiar with the area before, and to Jaan Ollik. Part prearranged, part spontaneous, each act emerged as a reaction to the surrounding environment. At the core of these actions was space; the immediate and mediated aspects of spatial perception, the relationship between improvised activities and the environment, as well as others' and one's own behaviour in it. On one occasion, they came across an iron structure and wrapped strands of white toilet paper around it, thus producing a closed space and in a way creating the most elementary architectural object. On another occasion, pieces of hardwood were thrown into the air, forming a disorderly, anthill-like entity...

Happenings, including the happening on Lasnamäe airfield, combined location-specific scenarios, collective action, architecture, performance and photography in an effort to acknowledge and map ways of existing in spaces, as well as creating them. These practices could ultimately be considered unusual and ephemeral experiments of organising one's surroundings, working within the confines of art rather than architecture, so as to criticise institutionalised architecture and to reinterpret its meaning.



Sirje Runge. SPACE I, 1977. Oil on canvas, 100 x 90 cm. Private collection





## Zofia Kulik INSTEAD OF SCULPTURE 1968–1971

Digitised slide installation in three video channels, black-and-white and colour  
27m 10s

Comprising nearly 500 black-and-white and colour slides that are projected simultaneously onto three screens, this installation is one of Zofia Kulik's lesser known pieces, yet central to her early work. It covers almost all the topics that are important to her later on. The slide show, which she created as her thesis at the sculpture department of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, consists of photos and slides produced in the years 1968–1971. These images have been thematically organised into five chapters in a three-part narrative that follows a very precise choreography. The photos were taken in the school ateliers or nearby, documenting the work and activities of Kulik herself and of her fellow students, items and situations found on various outings, but also architectural objects such as Warsaw's grandiose Stalinist-style Palace of Culture and Science or the mundane New Bródno district. Several of the photos have later been altered by the artist, either by painting on them with colours, inks or pencils, cutting, crumpling or collaging them, or adding plasticine, plaster or other materials. Beside the compositions found in reality, a big part was played by spatial assemblages put together specially for the camera – playful stagings with different materials, such as fabrics, newspapers, etc., which made up various forms and surfaces.

*Instead of Sculpture* explores the logic of the development of visual forms. Equipped with a photographer's eye, Kulik demonstrates the creation process of form from as many different perspectives as possible. On the one hand, she documents and orders visual information found in the real world, the formal (not psychological) aspects of reality, directing the viewer's attention to them. On the other hand, she is dissecting the forming process of sculpture and of environment in general – the relations between shapes, forms and colours. In the tradition of the open form, it is precisely these points that could become the basis for reorganising societal spaces.

With her work, Kulik proposed a wider definition of a sculpture, radically expanding its formal possibilities. Instead of a static object of chiselwork, she was interested in the performative aspect and temporal dimension of sculpture – the dynamic of the viewer-object relationship as well as the subjectiveness and ephemerality of the sculptor's sensibility. Film was the most appropriate medium to convey all of this.

In 2015, Kulik remade the original slideshow as a projectable film.

## Zofia Kulik LEGNICA 1971/2018

In 1971, Zofia Kulik, who had just graduated from art academy, was invited to take part in an open-air workshop, organised by the Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław in collaboration with the metallurgical plant Legmet. The seminar aimed to create sculptures for the public space of the city of Legnica.

Instead of completing another closed form, a new steel sculpture, Kulik decided to create an open cube from iron bars for the park in downtown Legnica: an ephemeral monument from scrap iron collected from a factory site, to which she gave the name *Home*. This abstract cube, which only marked the shape of a house, was a commentary on (mass) housing construction, but also on the idea of the sculpture workshop itself. Using steel to create a 'useless' artistic object seemed as a waste to the artist because the material had become deficient.

At the same time, Kulik had requested and received permission to take pictures of the plant and landfill site. Walks to find unusual materials had already become a part of her art practice, but instead of collecting the findings, she documented them with a camera. These photographs depict a wide range of industrial residues, such as black tar reservoirs, which took various shapes as they fossilised. The centrepiece of Kulik's work was to analyse the visual material found and an attempt to organise this material – for example, by bringing out existing structures with coloured stripes or pieces of fabric.

With the exception of one postcard, the serial photographs are made from the material captured in 1971 as late as in the 2000s. The three-part series *Working Chimney* (2018) has been produced specially for this exhibition.



## Sirje Runge PROPOSALS FOR DESIGNING THE MILIEU OF TALLINN CITY CENTRE 1975

Diploma thesis. Estonian State Art Institute,  
Department of Industrial Art  
7 display boards. Gouache, cardboard 100 x 100 cm.  
Museum of Estonian Architecture

The graduation thesis, which was defended in the Department of Industrial Art of the Estonian State Art Institute in 1975, addresses the urban environment in Tallinn and the possibilities for its reorganisation in accordance with the multi-layered functions of a modern city. The thesis consists of eight proposals which were created for specific places in the centre of Tallinn (for example, Freedom Square (Victory Square at the time), but also abandoned industrial areas around it.

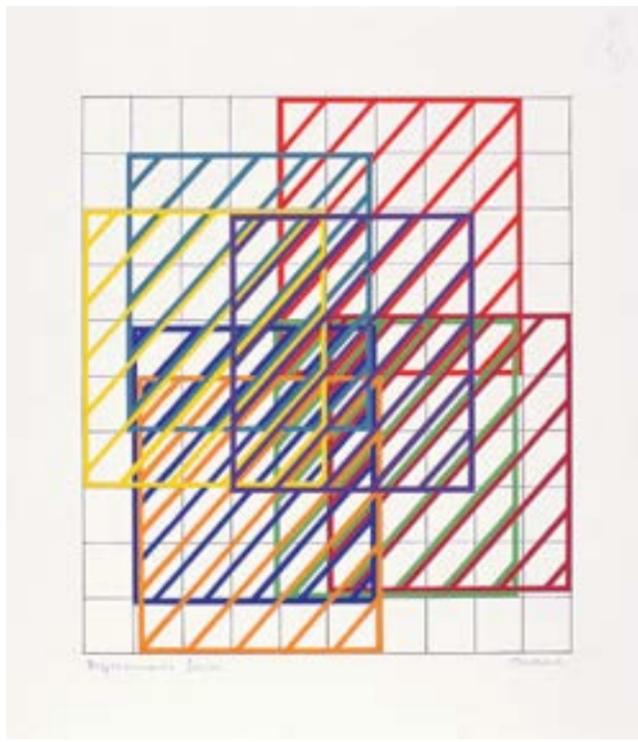
The proposals included simple, easy-to-realise designs (such as repainting buildings) as well as environmental fantasies which expressed more general, abstract ideas. The latter were bound to neither technical feasibility nor practical prescriptions. For example, the cylinders on one board, which resemble chimneys, were supposed to distribute 'colourless, harmless, and pleasantly scented' steam periodically and with a certain rhythm instead of factory fumes. The proposals also included two more complex, up to six-storey constructions with cinema and TV screens, music machines, information boards, and kiosks. These systems combined the experiments of Russian constructivists with the fantasies of Archigram's future cities<sup>1</sup> and were meant to turn empty and unused areas into unique communication centres. By replacing, among other things, classical monuments that had lost their function for the present, the assembled elements of the new constructions allowed to modify different building structures, thus gaining more and more mobility. Runge's graduation thesis did not only suggest a new urban aesthetic, but also intervened in the social space. The author did not interpret the city as a static, completed composition, but as a constantly changing and changeable structure. Moving along the stairs and levels which enabled different activities, created open spaces, which, in turn, provided for engagement and offered a variety of ways to relate to the surroundings.

The graduation thesis included a show of 80 slides. Although slides were used at that time in the department of industrial art (for example, to demonstrate the models to the committee), Runge's approach was unique. Using the slideshow as a part of the graduation thesis was not only a tool for documenting and communicating information, but also a separate and independent form of work. The slides, which depicted extracts from the map cases that turned into geometric patterns at times, represented the aesthetics of abstract paintings as a contemporary fragmented and mosaic worldview. In a way, they were created for the viewer who is used to 'pulsating television screens' and who perceives the world from a 'speeding car'.<sup>2</sup> The slideshow added a temporal dimension to the graduation thesis.



1 Archigram is a group of architects in England formed in the 1960s and 1970s whose idea of architecture was enriched with utopian, pop culture elements and focused on mobility. Contrary to the notion of architecture as something constant or stationary, they designed capsules that met the wishes and desires of the inhabitants, as well as migratory cities that flew from one area to another to take the entertainment and education from metropolises to small settlements. The effects of Archigram were not based on buildings actually constructed by its members, but on their futuristic architectural drawings.

2 This is how Leonhard Lapin describes the perception of the world of a contemporary person: 'The image of a romantic childhood spent in a garden, listening to the wind brushing through the birch leaves, is forgotten. A child born in the 70s grows up in a speeding car and on the background of a pulsating television screen.' Leonhard Lapin, "Masinaajastu ja kunst" – *Kultuur ja Elu* No. 9, 1973, page 56.



**Dóra Maurer**  
**DISPLACEMENTS**  
 1972–1982

Ink, gouache, pencil, 1–70 and 7 phase images, each 36 x 41 cm  
 New Museum. State Museum for Art and Design Nürnberg

Since the end of the 1960s, Dóra Maurer has been exploring the consequences that the movement or shifting of two or more entwined groupings brings about in her process-based print experiments, conceptual images, photo series and structuralist films.

The first sheets of the large-scale series entitled *Displacements*, consisting of 70 sheets and seven phase drawings were completed in 1972, the last in 1982. A great example of Maurer's work, the conceptualism and concrete art influenced series is based on a strict set of rules centred around change or movement. It is open to interpretation and that leaves room for numerous variations. The seven sketches or phase drawings reveal the rules to the viewers.

The system is based on a 10x10 raster with layers of diagonal stripes placed on top of them. Each layer of color is divided into four equal size fields that can be re-arranged according to pre-set principles. One after another, all fields step left to right; "move" horizontally and vertically or diagonally. These shifts create unexpected colour and form combinations, overlaps and crossovers, here and there generating surprising spatial effects.

The grid structure has become emblematic of Modernism. Its function, as the American art historian Rosalind E. Krauss has written, is to declare the modern nature of Modernist art, simultaneously rigid and resistant to change and, according to Krauss, less original than any other artistic approach. Maurer is, above all, interested in deviations, unpredictable spatial situations and arising constellations that break the closed aesthetic system apart. Despite the integrity of the set structure by which the artist wants to, among other things, avoid subjective interventions, she is intrigued by the possibilities provided by displacements. The effect of a rational system based on mathematical method and strict logic is, just as in many other of Maurer's works, inexplicably captivating.



**Dóra Maurer**  
**SPACE PAINTING, PROJECT BUCHBERG**  
 1982–1983

Colour film, 16 mm transferred to DVD  
 31 min

The film documents the creation of the space painting at Buchberg Castle in Austria in 1982 at the invitation of the collectors Gertraud and Dieter Bogner. The basis of the painting was Maurer's research into the effect and perception of colour, which she utilised in the 14 square metre vaulted room in a Romanesque castle, creating a unique total environment.

The artist started using the system of mutually shifting colour fields at the beginning of the 1970s (these include, for example, the series *Displacements*). Maurer fixed the planar blueprint of the space, using the floor, walls and ceiling, onto a geometrical structure constructed according to a strict set of rules. The contrast created by bringing together the two systems produces a special, at times dislocated, at times interrupted, sensory experience.

It took one month to create the space painting, and Maurer has described it as a period of being temporarily detached from the world. She photographed various phases of the work or recorded the creation process using an 8 mm film camera. *Space Painting* is, in fact, a collage of material, where shots from the planning of the painting to the finished piece alternate with views of the local landscape – cloudy sky, running water, a thicket of blades of grass. Nature, representing the versatility of the world and the elements, contrasts with the raster, symbolising observation and order, which the artist fills with orderly stripes of colour that she brings into the space.

Geometry has for a long time been a tool for depicting cosmic relationships, for presenting the invisible order in the visible chaos. One-point perspective, invented in the Renaissance, utilised geometry to organise the "multitude" into a uniform pattern, thereby announcing the new perception of reality with the human placed at the centre of the world. The raster gives Maurer a point of reference for an artistic experiment, a test of the borders of perception and sensory ability. Her collection of lines does not have a single centre; the intertwining lines and colours with different effects create in the viewer the confusion and uncertainty of an unexpected spatial illusion.

The film ends with a symbolic staged whitewashing of the room; that is, an undoing of the process.



**Falke Pisano**  
**CHILLIDA (FORMS AND FEELINGS)**  
 2006

Two channel video, black and white, with sound  
 14 min  
 Ellen de Bruijne Projects, Amsterdam; Hollybush Gardens, London and courtesy of the artist

Falke Pisano's artistic practice centres on her interest in the reshaping potential of aesthetic experience, the relationship between art and the viewer, and the context of viewing. She is interested in abstraction as process, shifts created in dissemination and exchange, and alterations in the perception of form. Mapping and organising all of this is a repetitive theme in the artist's lecture-performances, texts and diagrammatic drawings, sculptures and videos. These are often inspired by a Modernist, mostly abstract sculpture (like Barnett Newman's *Broken obelisk* (1963) or Constantin Brâncuși's *The Newborn* (1920)) that the artist then analyses from many aspects. By highlighting the symbiosis of the subject and object, Pisano points to the role of discourse and context that have an effect on how objects are perceived, and then relativises the ambition for autonomy in Modernist works of art.

The two-channel video *Chillida (Forms and feelings)* is inspired by an album dedicated to the sculptures of the Basque sculptor Eduardo Chillida by David Finn, a British photographer at the end of the 1990s. In the film, we see Falke Pisano flicking through the book, describing her feelings and looking for an explanation as to why she is suddenly so moved by seeing reproductions of Chillida's steel objects. A reflection on her own reaction spreads out into a multi-layered contemplation on cognition, the entwining of feeling and word in aesthetic perception. The artist concludes that conclusively all forms we relate to are dependent on the person and his reality.

Falke Pisano has said that she is fascinated by abstract art's ability to make the viewer perceive their surroundings (in a new way), to inspire them to think and contemplate existence. Even though Pisano's work is riddled with references to the Bauhaus, de Stijl and the social utopias of Russian Constructivism, her approach is considerably more ambivalent than the historic avant-garde's desire to rearrange the relationship between subject based on aesthetics.

The continuous "destabilising", rethinking and rearranging in Pisano's work is linked to her conviction that objects need not subjugate the viewer but rather encourage to think with them. This is the reason her art often resembles sketches that do not aspire to find a completed form but rather try out different options and to reconstruct things from various points of view.



# PUBLIC PROGRAMME

## Open Form

Ages 5 to 12

**Focus:** abstract art games, geometric form  
**Concepts:** abstraction, experiment, form, structure  
**Universal competencies:** cognitive and learning skills, game skills; culture and value competency; communication competency

Why do artists return time and again to simple geometric shapes – circles, squares and triangles? What is the appeal of abstract art? What do artists engage with and how? Together we will explore works that depict the relationship between space and ancient abstract shapes. We will create our own rules and conduct a playful art experiment!

Age: 13+

**Focus:** self-expression and relating to one's surroundings, abstract and geometric forms, public perception  
**Concepts:** experiment, form, abstraction, geometry, composition, process  
**Universal competencies:** culture and value competency; communication competency

The artists participating in the exhibition use the concept of 'open form' as a way of getting involved in one's surroundings and rethinking the relationship between individuals and their surroundings. At the same time, the relationship is not political, but is rather the active creation of one's own world. Inspired by the works of **Sirje Runge** and **Dóra Maurer**, we will seek adventure together in the transitional areas between abstraction and form. We will establish the rules and also discover the freedom to simply go along with the process. And although usually, nothing in an exhibition should be touched, this time we will accept **Falke Pisano's** suggestion to alter the exhibition space.

## Tours

Saturdays at 2 p.m. (except for October 20<sup>th</sup>) and  
Wednesdays at 5:30 p.m.

For young people and adults, pre-registration not required

On the guided tour, we will discover the rich world contained in the meaningful layers of the works. And if they wish, the participants can also contribute their own interpretations. In the course of the discussion, we will create a diverse field of meaning and delve more deeply into the author's position of the various artists. Maybe, in the course of the open process, a new happening, or one already exhibited at the exhibition, will be born ;)

## Happening and Space

Age: 14+ and secondary school; adaptable for 10-13-year-olds

**Focus:** happening, a person's relationship with him/herself, others and space, creating together  
**Vocabulary:** happening, process, abstract art  
**Universal competencies:** culture and value competency, self-definition competency, communication competency

The programme, which is meant for secondary school students and adaptable for those between the ages of 10 and 13, is focused on action art. We examine how artists relate to space and each other, and follow their example! In the video shown at the exhibition called *Creativity*, we see various experiments conducted by Miklós Erdély and Dóra Maurer in the 1970s to release their students' creativity. We will recreate some of them and discover our relationships with our companions and space. The programme, which is focused on action art, is summarised by a happening, that is characteristic of the specific group and will be born on the spot.

## On Sally's Tail

(20 October 2018)

For 4- to 8-year-olds, pre-registration not required

All the youngest visitors to the exhibition (ca 4- to 8-year-olds) can climb on the tail of Sally, a large, hairy and friendly dog, and take a playful tour, which will introduce the exhibition to both the parents and the children. The programme, like a good family movie, provides both viewing pleasure and the joy of discovery to both old and young art lovers. And this time, everyone can play more than usual on Sally's tail!

## #kh\_raamat

The guestbook of the Tallinn Art Hall's public programmes in Instagram!

Take a picture of a work from a viewpoint that speaks to you, and makes you think about something, raises a question! Post it on Instagram and start an active dialogue with the work, other visitors or maybe even the artist! In the caption, share your thoughts, ask the artist or curator a question! Don't forget to add the hashtag **#kh\_raamat** to your post to get the dialogue started!

All the educational and public programmes are free with an exhibition ticket (€6/€3), as are the tours and gallery hours! Pre-schooler are also admitted free. Register on our website [www.kunstihoone.ee/haridus](http://www.kunstihoone.ee/haridus) or send an email to: [publik@kunstihoone.ee](mailto:publik@kunstihoone.ee).

Gallery hours take place from Wednesday to Friday from 12 noon to 7 p.m.  
The minimum number of participants is four.

ABSTRACTION AS AN OPEN EXPERIMENT. 15.09–04.11.2018. **Curator:** Mari Laanemets. **Artists:** Sirje Runge (EE), Zofia Kulik (PL), Dóra Maurer (HU), Falke Pisano (NL) with Jüri Okas (EE), Benoît Maire (FR), and Przemysław Kwiek (PL). **Exhibition team:** Tamara Luuk, Sirli Oot. **Texts:** Mari Laanemets. **Translations:** Priit Silm, Avatar OÜ, Refiner OÜ. **Graphic Design:** Indrek Sirkel & Ott Kagovere. **Photos:** Paul Kuimet, Stanislav Stepaško, Tiit Veermäe, Miklós Sulyok. **Public programme:** Annely Köster, Minny Moyle, Gerttu Juhkam & Sally Stúdio; Darja Nikitina. **Installation:** Valge Kuup OÜ. **Art technics:** Henri Piiroja, Kirill Tulin. **The exhibition is supported by** the Hungarian Institute and the Mondriaan Fund. **Thank you:** Art Museum of Estonia, Museum of Estonian Architecture, University of Tartu Art Museum, Hämeenlinna Art Museum, Neues Museum Nürnberg, Galerie Thomas Bernard, Järsi OÜ, Sveta Grigorjeva and private collectors. The research of this exhibition was supported by IUT32-1