



East and West, contemplation and meditation in contemporary art

The collection of the Dr. Christiane Hackerodt Arts and Culture Foundation

It is intriguing and surprising to realise that while digitisation rapidly transcends the limits of space and knowledge, and the Internet shrinks the world to a digital village, we can simultaneously observe a growing desire for orientation, self-assurance, and deceleration. Superficial images of the self, displayed on Pinterest or Instagram, exist side-by-side with a need for authenticity and credibility. Parallel with the renaissance of narrative and the social rehabilitation of myth, people are seeking the clarity and simplicity of personal centredness.

In a field marked by opposing poles of East and West, speed and deceleration, extroversion and inwardness, the Dr. Christiane Hackerodt Arts and Culture Foundation has chosen “meditation” and “contemplation” as twin concepts to describe how works in the collection are selected.

In everyday language meditation tends to be associated with the Eastern spiritual tradition of Buddhism, while contemplation is more often related to mysticism of Western and mostly Christian provenance. But both have something essential in common, serving to describe the spiritual practice of immersion, the search for a centre, and a return inwards, towards the core of one's own existence. What both phenomena have in common is a turning away from quotidian superficiality and a move towards an inner essence. Both forms of spiritual exercise aim at inner liberation, at locating the filled void (Buddhism) and the vision of the divine (Christianity). In other words, enlightenment or the expansion of consciousness. If one separates contemplation and meditation from religious modes of interpretation, what remains are the elements of renunciation, the abandonment of external habits and status markers, and the discovery of one's own centre. This inner centre is the place from which worthwhile living serenely emanates. Anyone who has experienced this inner path will, on returning to quotidian life, discover that they live and experience everyday reality in a very different way.

In earlier times and societies, this transcendent truth was revealed through the lives of self-denial practiced by monks, nuns, hermits and mystics, who questioned existing assumptions and acted as a thorn in the flesh of the societies in which they lived. Particularly after the catastrophes of the 20th century, this role has been taken over by artists and intellectuals. Their artworks and general artistic perspectives, to which they often devote their entire lives, interrogate what exists, challenging the spectator to reorient their own existence, urging them to question what is essential in their lives. After 1945, this perspective went hand in hand with a turning away from figuration in artistic representation. Artists no longer believed in their capacity to depict the world, which was no longer considered as adequately representable in any way, and was experienced as fundamentally broken in its civilisational structure. The questioning of previous ideas of the artist as creative genius went hand in hand with abstraction, minimalism, the painting of the *informe*, the rejection of established formats, and the discovery of new materials and modes of expression, which ranged from performance to the use of everyday objects. This perspective was supported by modes of autopoiesis – forms of production in which chance or natural processes co-determine creation – as well as by the creation of artistic collectives.



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Choosing *meditation* and *contemplation* as a selection criteria for the acquisition of contemporary art does not mean buying works of religious art. Instead, these themes bring into view artists who undertake to radically – i.e. from the root – interrogate and infuse reality in their work, inviting the viewer to leave behind the familiar and approach experience anew. In short, their work asks the spectator to define what matters to them. Above all, the work of the artists of the Zero and Gutai groups corresponds closely to the collection's thematic preoccupations.

For all the aesthetic discourses and discussions in the arts pages about what makes art special, the true quality of art is revealed precisely when something is moved within a viewer who is confronted by it. A human being has had an enduring experience of art when they feel purified, inspired or questioned by it, when it leads them to something essential. Or, to put it simply, when they come out of an exhibition different to how they went in. The wish and the ambition of the Dr. Christiane Hackerodt Arts and Culture Foundation is to create a collection of artworks which have just that effect.

Herzlichst,
Dr. Christiane Hackerodt

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