



**rudi  
stanzel**

**event  
horizon**

**details**





























## The Formula of Elegance

### Rudi Stanzel and His Passion for Simplicity

What if an artist's paintings were just like the artist? What character would the works of Rudi Stanzel display? Certainly a mixture of delicate intellect and reserve, of control and mystery. And those who know Rudi Stanzel, experience him as a person who does not pretend to be anything other than himself. Everything about him is real. There is nothing ostentatious. He is one who has found himself. Someone, who for the last 25 years, has thoroughly devoted himself to a very special section of the world; to art. And within this section, an even smaller segment has captured his fascination; painting. And even in painting, he has decided to draw clear lines: black, white, horizontal, vertical. These are the parameters for Rudi Stanzel's work.

Art is the possibility to create something from nothing. Since man is overburdened by the variety of actual possibilities, there are certain rules, styles and boundaries. This is how Rudi Stanzel sees it. Such constraints are important for him as well. "I believe that one can make essentially fundamental statements with very little means. I do not need to have 256 different colors in order to express something. Two are enough. And a rectangle is also sufficient: vertical and horizontal. Like the ideal mathematical formula. It must be relatively simple. Elegant. Not until then is it truly a great accomplishment." A simple concept. Something that is entirely a unified whole, and even if it should fracture, it will certainly leave a lasting impression. For scientists, the epitome of intellectual freedom can be found in the simple expression of a complex concept. If one succeeds in packing the world into the most beautiful formula possible, it is recognized as masterpiece.

Stanzel's paintings first take form in the mind. According to the artist, his feelings and emotions have no place in a picture. After all, the quality of the work must go beyond a momentary mood. It is not about emotions, but about a particular vocabulary that, much like a test arrangement, is improved over the decades. Originally he wanted to become a professional dancer, but a crucial experience in his younger years led him down another path. He was residing in New York at Merce Cunningham and decided to try a pantomime course in Vienna under Sami Molcho. One day in class they were asked to portray abstract concepts. At the time Stanzel was feeling a bit lonely, so he decided to act out "loneliness". So he simply stood there and was lonely, until a puzzled Molcho asked him: "Well Rudi, when are you going to finally start?" It was at that moment that he realized it isn't enough to just simply want to express "something". Without the proper vocabulary, without the right means, you can't reach anyone. And so, over the years Stanzel set about developing his own method, that very special pictorial language and style that he still follows to this day.

Since Rudi Stanzel is not a true painter, he has never been interested in the classical questions and problems of painting: depth, perspective or balance. For him, it has always been about materials and textures as well as their composition in a given framework, and about coincidence, which is also an element of his intention. Experimenting and constantly exploring the given space anew and the characteristics of different materials in connection with black, white and every shade of grey are what fascinate him. Picture sculptures emerge that leave the constants of classic painting behind, and yet never leave the horizontal and vertical boundaries.

“In time you learn how far the material will follow your own intentions or not, if it works in the painting,” explains Stanzel. In order to avoid the deliberate, the mannerism, and to keep everything new, it is extremely important for him to constantly seek out new materials. Up till now Stanzel has gone through phases with soap, tracing paper, aluminum, graphite, bitumen, plastic, right up to the recently created “China pictures” that were exhibited at the Ulysses gallery in Vienna at the beginning of the year. He does not shy away from any material. Pebbles can be just as interesting as trash bags for him. The way black plastic reflects the light, the tone of grey you get from covering tin foil with tracing paper, how bubbles form in bitumen – until a new-found material has been tested to its fullest, until it completely fulfills its requirements, this is an inspiring and exciting experience for the artist every time.

His most recent works, “China pictures”, were created during an extended stay in Ningbo and are a return to a previous explored material. Stanzel was however simply making a virtue out of necessity because in Ningbo, a by Chinese standards relatively small village with only 3.5 million inhabitants located south of Shanghai, the language barrier kept him from getting the materials he wanted. Anybody who has ever asked for water insoluble putty in China will understand. So Stanzel resorted to a familiar method that marked the beginning of his artistic career. When he was studying under Peter Weibel in the 80’s, he began experimenting with a can of white and a can of black on a canvas. And today we once again see these lines, rectangles and shades of grey. Inspired by the Chinese tradition of calligraphy, Stanzel glues razor thin rice paper or paper from Chinese school exercise books directly to the canvas with acrylic. The contrast of the black ink and the still geographical lines form a unity with Stanzel’s organic shapes. For despite its conceptual strictness, Rudi Stanzel’s minimalism is never hard and geometric. Quite the opposite in fact. Every one of his pictures is alive with corners, tears, cuts, sighs from the material, dust and the sweat that drips from the artist’s brow as he works at his creation. “All I need to do is take a piece of paper and tear it into a square. When you look for example at how the corners are frayed, that alone is so incredibly interesting and complex that I don’t need anything else.” The enthusiasm with which Rudi Stanzel talks about such things make it immediately clear what this is all about. Feeling your way towards the big questions in life with the simplest of means. Looking closely. Always reducing things to get a clear view. After all, most of the time happiness is something quite small yet




fine. And realizing something is not always enlightenment. These are works that don't give everything away at first glance, whose brittle grace also challenge the beholder to reflect similarly on themselves and then, in the apparent simplicity, to discover a secret. "At the moment, an awful lot of energy is being spent around the world to destroy consciousness. My pictures are in direct response to this... I want to create consciousness."

Elisabeth Krimbacher

(Translated from German by Paul Kingsbury)







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