

Aldo Walker

Exhibition in Lucerne: 2.9.–28.10.2017
Opening: Saturday, September 2, 2017, 5–7pm

Working closely with the family of Aldo Walker (* November 6, 1938 in Winterthur, Switzerland; † March 17, 2000 in Lucerne, Switzerland), Galerie Urs Meile is overseeing the care of the artist's estate. To mark this occasion, we are showing a selection of Walker's works from the 1980s in our Lucerne gallery.

Until his early death in 2000, the conceptual artist Aldo Walker was a great influence on both the local and national art scenes in Switzerland in the 1980s and 1990s. After training as an electrician, Walker took over his father's business in 1964 and ran it as a one-man operation until 1979. He began producing his conceptual works of art in the 1960s. After finishing his regular workday, he would go home to the apartment he shared with his wife, Mathilde, and their two daughters, and spend his evenings making art and studying the philosophical theories of the day. Aldo Walker took his second job as an artist seriously, and in 1960 he exhibited for the first time in public, in the *Annual Exhibition* at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in London. This was followed by more group shows in Switzerland and abroad. Worth special mention was his participation in Harald Szeemann's now-legendary show, *When Attitudes become Form* at the Kunsthalle Bern in 1969, as well as in the 1986 Venice Biennial, where Walker represented Switzerland in company with John Armleder. After completing a residency in New York in 1984-5, the autodidact artist and philosopher took up a position in the department of Visual Design at the Höhere Schule für Gestaltung Zürich, where he taught until 1998 with the passionate conviction that art must always reach its audience.

The exhibition at the Galerie Urs Meile focuses on the paintings Walker called *Piktogramme* (Pictograms), which he began working on in the 1980s. Putting pencil to paper, he practiced first, making meticulous drawings. Later, with confident brushstrokes, Walker would paint the lines of his pictograms directly onto monochromatic backgrounds, most of them white on black, or vice-versa. The brushstrokes render visible previously unseen constellations of human and animal outlines. They are not necessarily depicted in familiar frontal views or cross-sections, but instead are twisted, intertwined, dissected, and reassembled. It is the knowledge of perspective that first makes it possible to perceive them in two dimensions. The visible bodies are reduced; most are nude, hairless, sightless, the eyes apparently closed or depicted only as circles without pupils. In reducing the lines, Walker does not aim for a style that aestheticizes, but rather, one that makes it possible to see visual experiments. Supposedly familiar motifs can suddenly tip over an edge to become something else; in observing them, the spontaneous switch from one certainty to another clarifies how our perception functions.

Walker conceived of his works as controlled experiments that would answer questions and test theories. Through his figurative images he experimented with how content is generated and interpreted via observation—although he is not at all concerned with the content itself, just as he is not concerned with the notion of art as an intrinsic, self-referential system, or with the idea of the artist as a genius. Despite his austere concept of art, Walker's parodying, self-ironic attitude toward the environment he lived in resulted in titles such as *Education Suisse (Herr Ober, wir verändern die Welt)* (Swiss Education [Waiter! We are going to change the world], 1982) or *Ohne Titel (Standbein-Spielbein)* (Untitled [Support Leg-Free Leg], 1985–1986). Sometimes his figures smoke or pee; next to the nudes stand folkloric characters like the yodeler and the monk; the common man's Sunday dinner—chicken—joins the farm animals and others that every child has seen at the zoo.

Preceding the *Piktogramme* in Walker's oeuvre were installations and performances, consequential ways of continuing to examine the issues that concerned him as a conceptual artist. Walker made text-images and wrote theoretical texts; besides his paintings, his largest group of works is the *Logotypen*, object-like things of mechanical precision and absurd function. His legendary exhibition *Lettre d'images par Aldo Walker* at the Helmhaus in Zurich in 1989, and its accompanying catalogue, form an overall work of art, whose theme was the operational system of art, which he investigated by exhibiting many works of art—none of them his.

Mentally incorruptible, Walker tested concepts without withdrawing into dryness. His works are also never decorative or narcissistic, but in their absurd intimacy and ridiculous freshness they continue to inspire.

Aldo Walker (* November 6, 1938, in Winterthur; † March 17, 2000, Lucerne), 1984/85: residency at the Institute for Art and Urban Resources in New York. 1987 on: Teacher at the Höhere Schule für Gestaltung Zürich; department head from 1991 to 1998. Selected group shows: *Annual Exhibition* at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), London (1960); *Operationen: Realisation von Ideen, Programmen und Konzeptionen in Raum, Environment, Objekt, Licht, Film, Kinetik, Bild, Ton, Spielkarten* at the Museum Fridericianum Kassel (1969); *When Attitudes become Form*, Kunsthalle Bern and Museum Haus Lange Krefeld (1969), curated by Harald Szeemann; *Visualisierte Denkprozesse*, Kunstmuseum Luzern (1970), curated by Jean-Christophe Ammann; *Pläne und Projekte*, Kunsthalle Bern, Kunstraum München and Kunsthaus Hamburg (1970); *A Head Museum*, Archiva Museet Lund and Moderna Museet Stockholm (1974); *The Seventies*, CAYC Buenos Aires, Museu de Arte Moderna Sao Paolo and Universita de Mexico City (1976); *Schweizer Kunst '70-'80*, Kunstmuseum Luzern, Galleria civila Bologna, Palazzo Bianco Genova, Landesmuseum Bonn, Landesmuseum am Johanneum Graz (1981); *In Residence*, PSI, New York (1984); *Prospekt 86*, Kunsthalle, Frankfurt am Main (1986); *Vater und Sohn: Roesch und Walker und Winnewisser*, Kulturpanorama am Löwenplatz, Lucerne (1988); *Transit: New Art from Switzerland*, The National Museum of Contemporary Art, Oslo (1993); *Hugo Suter–Aldo Walker–Rolf Winnewisser*, Helmhaus Zürich (1999); *Heute ist morgen: Über die Zukunft von Erfahrung und Konstruktion*, Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn (2000); *Beyond Borders: Kunst zu Grenzsituationen*, Conix Museum, Zurich (2000); *Prospekt! Zu einer Sammlung für Gegenwartskunst*, Aargauer Kunsthaus Aarau (2001); *Die Möglichkeit nicht mehr haben, sich weniger ähnlich zu sein: Yves Netzhammer – 2 Animationen & 1 Bild von Aldo Walker*, Erfrischungsraum, Galerie der HGK Luzern (2004). Selected solo shows: Galerie Toni Gerber, Berne (1971); Galerie Raeber, Lucerne (1971); *Beryll Cristallo*, Kunstmuseum Luzern (1975); Galerie Stähli, Zurich (1976); Kunstmuseum Luzern (1977); *Stromern im Bild*, Mannheimer Kunstverein (1982); *Biennale Venedig*, Swiss Pavilion (with John Armleder) (1986); *Arbeiten seit 1964*, Aargauer Kunsthaus Aarau (1986); Kunsthalle Basel (1987); *Lettre d'images par Aldo Walker*, Helmhaus Zürich (1989); *Früher oder später*, Kunstmuseum Luzern (1989); *Kunst überfordern. Aldo Walker (1938 – 2000): Retrospektive*, Kunsthaus Luzern (2006).