

LOTHAR GÖTZ
PAS DE TROIS

SARAH KELLEHER

Two free-standing walls float from the corner of the gallery, defying the gravity of enclosure. Gently chamfered at their upper edge they are less supports for paintings than harlequin patterned stage flats. Silver blinds block the natural light. Walk through the room to the curtains of the silver screen... This space though, is less filmic than theatrical. Shallow birch ply vitrines on trestle tables are deployed in a zigzag, as provisional as trays, ready to be moved to their next position. *Pas de Trois* is an installation that evokes a stage plan, or perhaps a prop room. The effect is a vivid, almost suspenseful articulation of space, imparting a sense of imminent motion, like a dance frozen in a moment, or a pose held for a breath before release.

Lothar Götz practices a type of installational painting that marks a departure from pictorial to phenomenological space. One might be tempted to chart the historical lineage of his mural painting to El Lissitzky's *Proun Room* (1923) and onward to the type of 'wall painting' that becomes prominent in the late 1960s work of Sol Lewitt and Elsworth Kelly. Instead Götz's twin interests stem from the Rococo, specifically that iteration of the Rococo particular to the region north of the Alps, and to the Bauhaus.

The ecclesiastic architecture of this Rococo had a particular relation to pleasure and to the decorative; in a German Rococo interior there is no single focus, nothing is static, everything is moving, pulsing – a myriad of points expressed elliptically in a single line, intoxicating the eye. The Rococo and the Bauhaus seem unlikely aesthetic bedfellows; one exuberantly decorative, the other celebrated for its pared down machine aesthetic, but the Bauhaus was similarly famed for the seductive surfaces of its industrial designs and their smooth chrome curves. Further, play, movement and costume parties were a vital part of the Bauhaus experience, enshrined by Walter Gropius in the 1919 curriculum. Stage was central to the Bauhaus and theatre proved an art form that unified all others, so much so that a

1922 drawing by Paul Klee of the idea and structure of the Bauhaus shows the '*Bau und Bühne*', or building and stage, united at its core.^[i] Bauhaus and the Baroque then are linked by the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* – a total work of art, immersive, embracing the viewer bodily.

For *Pas de Trois*, Lothar Götz has presented an exhibition of drawings and works on linen that likewise immerses us in a totalising, vividly sculptural environment. This body of work stems from a long-standing dialogue with Bauhaus master Oskar Schlemmer's *Triadic Ballett*, which was first performed in its entirety in Stuttgart in 1922. Schlemmer's striking costume designs abstracted the body into brightly coloured geometrical shapes; spheres and cones, lances, spirals and interlocking circles which transformed the dancer's body into 'an environment of basic mathematical shapes.'^[ii] These stiff, padded shells insisted on a certain choreography; deliberate, syncopated, striking graphic shapes against the sbackdrops. Looking back at Schlemmer's œuvre, one can see how the forms of his costumes evolved from his figurative painting, the body increasingly rationalised into pure irreducible geometries. Schlemmer regarded this as an endeavour to be admired, 'the abstraction of the human form [...] creates an image in a higher sense, it does not create a natural human being but an artificial one.'^[iii] As the *Bauhausler's* concept evolved from two dimensions to three, from static configuration to choreography, so Götz reverses this process, re-imagining the dancer's pose as an abstract composition, re-articulating an abstract sculptural garment as a linear motif.

Particular geometric shapes occur and re-occur, such as the interlocking circles or the striped cone shape which recalls Schlemmer's *Diver* costume. Certain works obliquely evoke the architecture of theatre; the rhombus of a stage seen from an oblique angle, a proscenium arch,

stepped lines as if delimiting a receding plane, a sun ray of alternating black and blue or black and pink lines, as if defining an expanding cone of projected light. Paintings are populated with dynamic devices; diagonals, arrows, spears, wheeling segmented circles or shafts of lines telescoping out from a still centre. Works on paper describe crisp accordion pleats, with spear sharp points against a pink ground, or dazzling pin wheels of red and blue or purple and green against black, the armature of the linear design extending out from the areas of colour. Götz's drawings are made in coloured pencil and there is a satisfying tension between the dazzling vibrancy of his palette and the particularity of that dry, softly friable texture. The subtle modulations of tone achieved when filling in an area of colour, the almost pixelated softness of a rounded pencil point on thick toothed paper play against the taut precision of his geometric compositions.

John Berger's nuanced explanation of the art of translation pertains here. Berger argues that triangulation is the more apt term and describes the third point of the triangle as being that which lies behind the original work, the vision or experience that prompted it. 'One then gathers up what one has found there and takes this quivering almost wordless "thing" and places it behind the language it needs to be translated into.'^[iv] Götz refracts Schlemmer's conceptualisation of the body through his own aesthetic, making a home for it in his own visual idiom, filtering it through his holistic conception of architecture and the body. Trained as a dancer, Götz is acutely attentive to the ways in which composition and choreography map or delineate space. Similarly, his wall painting process involves the artist physically relating to the geometry of an architectural space 'like a snail in its shell', articulating a kind of empathy or *Einfühlung* (literally a 'feeling into') that relates strongly to Schlemmer's practice.^[v]

There is an intriguing tension in Schlemmer's work between the colourful, gently rounded, almost sexless shapes of his costumes and their impingement on the body of the wearer – they were, by all accounts difficult to move in, let alone dance in.^[vi] Schlemmer was working in Weimar Germany in the aftermath of the First World War, during which he had served as an infantryman and was wounded twice on the battlefield. His sculptural costumes both protect and hinder the body in its movement, translating the soft, all too vulnerable body into pure, irreducible geometries. Although initially whimsical, these strange armatures belie a frisson of disquiet – in the context of the Weimar Republic, the body was fraught territory. This suppressed anxiety in Schlemmer's work is modulated in *Pas de Trois* and manifests instead as a suspenseful stillness and an almost haptic tension created by intensities of juxtaposed colour and the complex interplay of angular shapes. Götz's installation takes on the character of a performance space and any gesture in space, for Schlemmer, was sculpting space.^[vii]

Schlemmer's shell-like costumes also remind us of the origin of costume as a form of architecture. As the nineteenth century German art and architectural historian Gottfried Semper showed, walls have an origin in textiles, as hanging cloths or woven mats.^[viii] In speaking of dressing walls, Semper fashioned a textural theory of space, activating the vital connection between surface and ornament.^[ix] Further, when establishing the link between ornament and mobility, he termed the wall a *Wand*, that is, a partition or screen and set it in relation to *Gewand*, meaning garment or clothing. With *Pas de Trois* we experience precisely this textural form of space: the activation of mobile, complexly layered and interwoven surfaces – paintings hang on floating partition walls, which are themselves painted with vividly contrasted colour; intricately linear drawings rest on coloured baize; silver blinds further redefine the space of the gallery and filter the light.

Art melts into architecture and converges as surface tension. Walter Gropius said of Schlemmer in 1961 that Schlemmer, 'experienced space not only through vision but with the whole body, with the sense of touch, of the dancer and the actor.[...] With empathy, he would sense the directions and dynamics of a given space and make them integral parts of his mural compositions.' Götz's drawings and paintings are conceived as an element of an immersive spatial construction to be activated by bodily movement. In order to experience this work one must move through it; *Pas de Trois* functions as a performative, immersive environment, which engenders a complex chromatic bliss and comes to life in mobile, architectural reception.

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[i] Juliet Koss, 'Bauhaus Theatre of Human Dolls', *The Art Bulletin*, 85.4 (2003); 724.

[ii] *ibid*, 736.

[iii] *ibid*, 731.

[iv] John Berger, 'Writing is an Offshoot of Something Deeper', *The Guardian*, 12 September 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/dec/12/john-berger-writing-is-an-off-shoot-of-something-deeper>. Accessed, 03 August 2016.

[v] In conversation with the artist

[vi] D. S. Moynihan and Leigh George Odom, 'Oscar Schlemmer's "Bauhaus Dances": Debra McCall's Reconstructions', *The Drama Review*, 28.3 (1984), 55.

[vii] *ibid*, 52.

[viii] Giuliana Bruno, *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality and Media*, (University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London, 2014), 48.

[ix] *ibid*.

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