



Dóra Maurer: Minimal Movements, Shifts, 1970-2020 / Haus Konstruktiv

By Enrico on

The exhibition Dóra Maurer: Minimal Movements, Shifts, 1970-2020 at Haus Konstruktiv is dedicated to the work of Hungarian artist Dóra Maurer. The retrospective, curated by Sabine Schaschl, has been realized in close collaboration with the artist. The show brings together printed graphics, photographs, films and paintings produced between 1970 and 2020. This video provides you with an exhibition walkthrough and an introduction to the artist and her work by Sabine Schaschl (Director and Chief Curator, Haus Konstruktiv).

Dóra Maurer: Minimal Movements, Shifts, 1970-2020 / Haus Konstruktiv, Zürich (Switzerland). Press Preview, June 8, 2021.

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Exhibition text:

Museum Haus Konstruktiv is the first museum in Switzerland to dedicate a solo exhibition to Dóra Maurer of Hungary. This retrospective solo show, realized in close cooperation with the artist, brings together printed graphics, photographs, films and paintings produced between 1970 and 2020. Maurer's oeuvre is multifaceted, but is characterized in its entirety by a conceptual approach that examines processes of movement, displacement and perception in a manner that is as playful as it is systematic.

This overview show in Zurich is, in a way, a home game for Dóra Maurer: Born in 1937 in Budapest, she traveled to Switzerland at the age of just nine, and again as an eleven-year-old, on the so-called children's trains organized by the Red Cross, which enabled her to recover from the hardships of war for three months at a time. According to the artist, these experiences had a lasting impact on her.

Maurer began her artistic career at the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest, where, from 1955 to 1961, she first studied painting, then printmaking. Attending the graphics class in particular allowed her to work more freely and to experiment with new techniques, in parallel to the socialist realism favored by the academy. Thanks to a work grant, she went to Vienna in 1967, where she met the emigrated Hungarian artist and architect Tibor Gáyor, her future husband. Their marriage enabled her to commute between Budapest and Vienna without problems. At the end of the 1960s, she made contact with artists, poets and musicians who were advocating new artistic practices that were not in line with Hungary's official cultural policy. Together, they organized exhibitions and progressive workshops. Ever since then, Dóra Maurer has been considered one of the most important and independent artists on the Hungarian art scene. In her activity as a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest, as founding member and president of Budapest's Open Structures Art Society (OSAS), and also as a freelance curator, she still acts as a role model for many younger artists in Hungary today.

The mostly chronological retrospective at Museum Haus Konstruktiv extends over two floors. It begins in the passerelle on the fifth floor, with a 1972 work from the series Structure of a Thesis, which can be read as a prologue to the show. In rows of white letters on a black background, individual alphabetical characters are interconnected by a white linear structure; the beginning, end, and reading direction are marked. If the observer now follows the line from letter to letter, stringing the characters together, the thesis emerges: The Only Way of Art's Evolution: to Realize Every Third Idea. Apart from this humorous cryptic statement, the work also conveys one of Dóra Maurer's key principles: The focus of her oeuvre is less on the completed work than on the processual visualization of cognitive processes.



The exhibition's first room brings together works from the first half of the 1970s. Among the earliest exhibits are the so-called Pedotypes. These were created by having various people leave traces on the respective ground via the simple act of walking. The five-part photo series KV's 1st of May Parade on Artificial Ground (1971) also has a political dimension inscribed in it: The legs of the young girl Vera Komarik are pictured, as she walks in a circle indoors, on a panel partially covered with crumpled newspapers – in solidarity with the forward-marching workers in the streets on May 1st, but alone and in private. Political connotations are also evident in the photographic piece What Can One Do with a Paving Stone? (1971), in which Dóra Maurer herself is photographed conducting various acts with a paving stone – caressing it, measuring it or lighting a fire on it, for instance. These unspectacular actions can be read as a peaceful counterpoint to acts in which the paving stone is used as a weapon.

Other exhibits show that processes of movement, displacement and change are just as central to Dóra Maurer's oeuvre as her pursuit of systemization. In the photo series Reversible and Changeable Phases of Movements (1972), for example, the artist has arranged small black-and-white photographs in a grid of vertical and horizontal sequences. They all depict different phases of a simple action – hand movements (No. 6), nodding and head-shaking (No. 3), or turning around while walking (No. 5). The ordered series of movements seem almost identical, as the individual photos appear repeatedly in different combinations and thus become interchangeable parts.

In the Quantity Boards, Maurer's penchant for mathematical games becomes apparent. These show a systematic arrangement of objects and materials from nature, which Maurer has shifted within a fixed grid. In the 1972 piece Schautafel 4, Insgesamt 500 Werte, Magisches Quadrat (Quantity Board 4, 500 Values in Total, Magic Square), small twigs are distributed over a surface divided into fields in a 5 x 5 format, whereby the fields are not square, but rectangular, with an aspect ratio of 4:5. Some of the twigs are painted in a color that in turn represents a value, such that the sum of each row is 100.

In the second room, several prints are presented, in which the focus is on transformation of materials, caused by the printing process itself. In Diagonal Folding of a Plate (1975), the folded aluminum plate, which is changed drastically by the act of pressing, becomes an object itself. In Printing till Exhaustion (1979–1981), on the other hand, an aluminum plate, grooved with a dry-point, is used as a printing block until it is completely worn away. In each case, the printing plate's wear depends on the scored grooves' spacing, which at 1, 2, 3, 5 and 8 millimeters, adopts the Fibonacci numerical sequence.

In the six-part piece Seven Twists (1979/2011), the artistic method of displacement is visibly exemplified. The first image shows a portrait shot of the artist holding a square sheet of white paper in front of her, turned on its corner. The empty sheet of paper acts as a placeholder for the second work from the series, in which Dóra Maurer is photographed in the same pose, but instead of white paper, she now holds the first photograph, which consequently appears tilted at a 45° angle. This procedure is repeated five times. The resulting photo series shows a nesting of squares that are always in a certain proportional relationship with each other. The 1979 works in the third room, Proportions, 5 out of 3 and 5 out of 4, are also about size ratios. In Proportions, nine stills show extracts from the video work of the same name, which is presented in the columned hall, whereby the artist's height is used as a reference magnitude, with a quarter of her body length constituting the defining unit for further measurements. Maurer also incorporated her own physique into the video work Timing, which can be seen in the columned hall as well. Here, the width of a piece of cloth, folded up to seven times, corresponds to her arm span. In turn, the multi-part works 5 to 4 and 5 to 3 show Maurer playing with the relationship between image fields arranged next to or below one another and the spaces between them on the wall.

The fourth room unites different varieties of the so-called Displacements, which emerged from the Quantity Boards in 1972 and still play a central role in Maurer's oeuvre today. The basis of this group of works is again a grid, now made up of fields arranged in a 10 x 10 format, where eight differently colored rectangles marked with diagonal stripes are systematically shifted – the warm hues horizontally, the cold ones diagonally, producing multi-layered overlappings. In 1976, Maurer began to concentrate on individual details of the Displacements, calling the resulting



works Quasi-Images. In 1982, she started to spatialize these two-dimensional works. To this end, Maurer realized a key project in 1982/1983 inside Austria's Buchberg Castle, where she painted diagonal and orthogonal colored lines on all the surfaces of a vaulted tower room. The production process is documented in the film *Space Painting Buchberg* (1983).

In the two exhibition rooms on the fourth floor, early video works are presented alongside geometric paintings from three different groups of works, which Dóra Maurer developed from the Quasi-Images and titled *Quod Libets*, *Overlappings*, *IXEKs* (the plural form of the Hungarian X) and *Stages*. These works are also based on the principle of systematic displacement, but demonstrate a much freer way of handling it. Inspired by the color theory *Interaction of Color* by Josef Albers, Maurer constructs seemingly weightless image segments with distortion of perspective, their overlapping and mutually interpenetrating color fields giving rise to irritating quasi-kinetic effects. Four film works that Maurer realized between 1973 and 1981 bear witness to an approach that is as analytical as it is experimental. In *Timing* (1973/1980) and *Proportions* (1976), simple repeating sequences of actions and movements are systematically linked. In contrast, the films *Kalah* (1980) and *Triolets* (1981) present a much more complex concept. *Triolets* is a montage of three horizontal strips of images. The individual shots were captured using different lenses in the artist's studio and each consists of a camera pan lasting a few seconds. Each shot is accompanied by a soundtrack, a simple chant that follows the rhythm of the panning motion. Here, the dynamic superimpositions of moving image and sound create a dizzying visual and auditory experience. The film *Kalah*, with colors and sounds changing according to the rules of the ancient board game *Kalah*, in which there are 72 moves, also has a hypnotic effect. This experimental film was produced in cooperation with composer Zoltán Jeney and develops impressive interplay between sound and image. Jeney created a score with 72 notes, corresponding to the 72 moves in the game, whereas Maurer translated the moves into different colors and shapes. While the sounds are played in rapid succession, the color fields flash as concentric rectangles, resulting in moments of harmony and dissonance.

By juxtaposing film and painting, the exhibition at Museum Haus Konstruktiv clearly demonstrates that Maurer's cinematic way of thinking in sequences and series, which characterizes her early work, is still evident in her painted work as well. Although Dóra Maurer's oeuvre is strongly influenced by conceptual practice, she feels connected to constructivist-concrete art. In this regard, she said the following in 2015: "Well, I am certainly not an artist who works dogmatically according to constructivist-concrete principles. Nevertheless, I feel most at home in the context of concrete art. In my view, it would not be right to classify me as a conceptual artist – despite my conceptual works. Moreover, the concept of concrete art is defined very broadly today by many leading experts and art scholars, and no longer limited to extremely stringent and systematic art. A certain rethinking has certainly taken place there, not least in order to avoid having to exclude borderline cases like me."