

Christine Wetzlinger-Grundnig:
VACUUMINATION

Nika Špan's artistic work developed in the context of the re-politicised art of the 1990s which connects directly to the achievements of the 20th-century avant-garde - in the endeavour to link art and life, extending their effect far beyond the boundaries of the defined field of visual arts - she adapts committed, critical, emancipatory practices and updates them according to contemporary relevant discourses. Nika Špan uses a critical analytical method, works with diverse media, especially installations and video, and develops conceptual, performative, occasionally interventionist, situational and participatory processes in which she combines her sphere of artistic activity with the reality of (her own) life and her (political, social, cultural, economic and structural) circumstances.

In the installation in question, the artist works with industrial products and articles of daily use, establishing a durable work beyond classic categories. A multi-coloured "microcosm" (Nika Špan) - consisting of differently-coloured circles of fine granulate - is scattered directly onto the floor of the exhibition room. On the wall there is a recharging station for a cordless robot vacuum cleaner which moves around once a day, sucking in the coloured granulate and leaving a more or less random track. After that the machine is emptied and the multi-coloured granulate, which has been mixed into a new shade representing all the colours of collected granules, are scattered around the room again. Through the ritual repetition of this procedure, the process advances and the pattern changes from day to day, until at some point all the granulate has been sucked in and scattered out again, so that the entire quantity has been mixed evenly into a consistent shade~ This process - which in many respects is governed by chance and subject to indeterminable components, making it unpredictable in time and space - develops its own momentum and goes on independently of artist and audience. The artist, the initiator, develops the concept, determines the constants and gives the necessary instructions. The procedure takes place within the parameters, but the details of its development and especially its duration are not determinable - this is, however, not essential for the work and its message. Rather more important is the process itself and its autonomous development - the calculated but indefinable momentum. When the specific colour indicators of all compartments have disappeared and merged into one unified shade, the process is concluded. The basic elements, the individual components are still the same - the distribution, however, is different.

The artist has developed a work of ephemeral, performative, participatory and contingent character, its tracks manifested primarily in the aesthetic sphere; she has established a kind of reflexive model with political, sociological and

visionary, even utopian⁽¹⁾ references, playfully - or perhaps even ironically - taking up, pursuing and scrutinising social developments and putting them forward for discussion. She addresses, in a Visual equivalent, the phenomenon of a recent world-wide intermixing and levelling of the different ethnicities in a single global society - against the background and guided by the possibilities of technological progress, by communication and mobility as well as by the liberalisation of trade. At the same time the dissolution of traditional stable systems and structures on all levels, whether individual, social, political, national or private, is demonstrated - a process which in the long term inevitably results in the dissolution of concrete and abstract national units, even if local traditional elements are briefly emphasised.

This development naturally raises the question of "*Heimat*"⁽²⁾ It is self-evident that in these times of change, "*Heimat*" is not to be seen as a constant, neither as a physical place nor as psychological paramountcy, as an absolute (as the artist herself has it) - unless regressive escape is deliberately sought in the precise opposite, in established procedures. It seems that today, the question of "*Heimat*" inevitably throws the individual back, impelling him to confront and reappraise fundamental aspects of his own existence. In this context, "*Heimat*" is conceivable only as an individual category, as a subjective, alterable entity.

1 In the literal sense of "non-place".

2 *Heimat* [home (land)] is a German concept. People are bound to their *Heimat* by their birth, their childhood, their language and their earliest experiences.

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