

Wolfgang Wimhöfer – Art between Chaos and Order

Anyone who deals with art and artists will find that the starting point of making art is often in childhood and was triggered by a certain event. Many artists – whether musicians, writers or visual artists – cite these origins in childhood and adolescence and they often become a recurring theme in their own art.

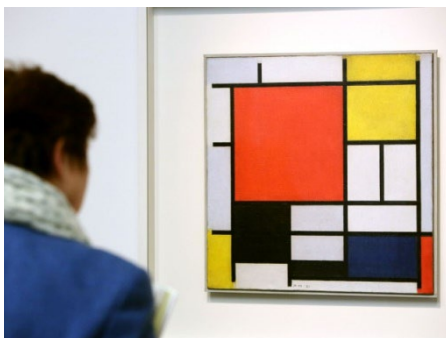
This is also the case with Wolfgang Wimhöfer. His themes are varied, but one thing comes up again and again and does not let him go: it is the oppositional pair: chaos and order.

To this day, his mother's admonishing sentence rings in her ears: "Clean up your room!" Certainly, this request is familiar to many. But for Wimhöfer, this recurring reminder was a profound turning point. He says: "You can feel here what others are doing with their sense of order, what others are doing *in my* head when they say: 'Do this, do that.'" The situation of his father, who actually wanted to become a bridge engineer, but remained an accountant, also shaped the son through the permanent frustration and dissatisfaction of his father. The rectangular wallpapers at home were another formative expression of parental attitude and the call for order.

The negative feeling for him developed into an inner necessity to deal with it artistically and from the 1970s onward, in a series of paintings continues to this day.

According to Wimhöfer, chaos and order are mutually dependent. He sees "rhythm and movement as a connecting element. Rhythm stands for order and movement for chaos" and compares these principles with dance.¹

A quick look into art history shows the significance of the topic for other artists – for example, for the Dutch artist Piet Mondrian. At the beginning of the 1920s, he brought order and structure to his paintings by limiting himself only to horizontal and vertical black lines as well as small areas of color in the primary colors, because this is how man is oriented in his life. The human being, the tree or the plant are raised vertically and move on the horizontal, the ground. For Mondrian, a diagonal as a



dynamic element was out of the question and even argued about it with his artist colleague Theo van Doesburg, who deliberately incorporated the diagonal into his painting. Both artists are among the co-founders of abstract-concrete art and were influenced by Russian Suprematism.

The Russian Kazimir Malevich, who in 1915 for the first time, freed the image from everything representational and recognizable and instead painted a black square on a white background, thus also negated compositional rules. There was only this one form. Due to its four equally long sides, the square is considered *the* form that symbolizes order. His so-called suprematist paintings, which he subsequently painted, include beams, lines and basic geometric shapes that are criss-crossed over the picture surface, resulting in a seemingly chaotic and arbitrary composition. At first glance, the classical compositional rules, which relate the pictorial elements to each other and thus ensure an inner order in the picture, have also been disregarded here. A wild, chaotic confusion

¹ Wolfgang Wimhöfer in conversation with the author 2019



reveals itself to the viewer, which, on closer perception, nevertheless contains an inner structure and balanced order. Malevich's vision was to leave the image ground with these dynamic, flying and floating forms and to enter real space all the way to space.

Since the Renaissance, artists have been using compositional rules based on dynamic diagonals, invisible triangular lines or opposites such as large-small, chiaroscuro and asymmetries in order to avoid uniformity and build up tension. Not infrequently, the golden ratio is used for image design, which relates a larger and a smaller area.

For many artists, order is therefore rather boring and "deadly". Rather, they see chaos as the living. Artists want to resist the well-known saying "Order is half of life", which everyone has known since

childhood, and follow their own order. In chaos, some have their creative source and impetus. A scientist describes it this way:

"Chaos is an important part of creative processes. Short-term, unregulated states of overstrain or procrastination often allowed a new view of things. Chaos as a creative means of artistic processes. (...) Chaos used to be the original state *before* every order, i.e. the unregulated par excellence. The Greek poet Hesiod described it around 700 BC in his 'Theogony' as a misshaped and confused primordial state, from which the gods and the earth then emerged. This ancient narrative suggests an early link between notions of chaos and order. It already expresses what Fücks interpreted as the substrate of the entire history of civilization: the attempt to tame chaos through certain elements of order."²

The term procrastination means postponement or hesitation and means that again and again postponement of tasks that one does not face and does not do them or only under pressure. Here the memory of the nursery and the conflict with the mother comes alive. Of greater importance, however, is that Wolfgang Wimhöfer artistically works this theme.

The philosopher Theodor W. Adorno wrote, "The task of art today is to bring chaos to order." In this respect, artists also become role models for managers in this respect in order to resist the sense of order and break up deadlocked structures. ³Experimentation, courage and curiosity, but also repeated failures are among the important success factors of managers today.

The sentence "Order is half of life", which resonates with the reminder to clean up the room, also contains a dialectic. Because the question must be asked: What is the other half of life? The chaos? And does one condition also need the other? Don't the opposites of chaos and order inevitably belong together, is one not conceivable without the other?

² Steffen Andrae, Die geordnete Unordnung der Dinge. To the opening podium of the 11th Lichter Filmfest, <https://www.normativeorders.net/en/news/current-topics/6316-die-geordnete-unordnung-der-dinge-zum-eroeffnungspodium-des-11-lichter-filmfests>

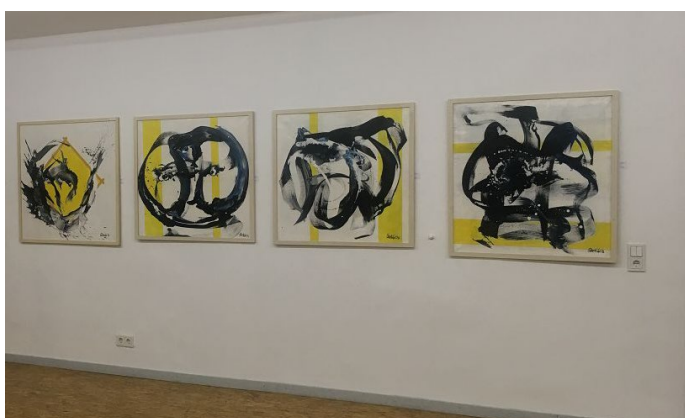
³ Theodor W. Adorno, Minima Moralia, 142. Aphorismus, Frankfurt 1970

Wolfgang Wimhöfer has developed his own way of expressing himself. In some paintings he combines geometric shapes such as a triangle, square or octagon with picturesque, informal streaks; splashes of colour or irregular curved lines and loops (e.g. 408, 423). Strikingly often, a three-part group of lines appear, which formats itself into a pointed triangle and lies over the moving-picturesque image background. As an ordered form, it slides from the edge of the picture into the interior of the picture like a reminder or warning (e.g. 301 and 398, 404, 410, 420). The octagonal image format, which Wimhöfer uses repeatedly, is also reminiscent of the famous stop signal in road traffic, which signals "attention" and thus also expresses a warning (e.g. 333). While the image format outwardly suggests calmness, uniformity and order, the interior of the image lives from dynamic, gestural and colored brushstrokes.

Some pictures have a powerful spiral, which starts thin in the beginning and gradually becomes thicker (e.g. 319, 379). In other pictures, on the other hand, their circling and swirling character is more expressed (e.g. 412, 399, 400). The artist uses this form to express a kind of Big Bang, chaos as the beginning of all life and life itself. With its dynamically growing shape, the spiral is the symbol of life. In Picture 408, it even swirls six blue rectangles through the pictorial space, which here is reminiscent of pictures by Malevich.

In a series, two yellow bars appear on a white background, which are unequally wide and at different distances from each other. A certain rhythm is evoked by the arrangement and size. Wimhöfer drives over this strict structure of the surface division with a very moving wide brush stroke and black paint. With all his physical effort, he seems to whitewash the clear division of the image and counter it with the dynamic. The viewer is inclined to follow this movement with his own body. It is precisely through the re-experience and the living absorption that the aesthetic value of the image is revealed.⁴

His brush movement resembles the informal painting of the 1950s and 60s, whose main representatives include Gerhard Hoehme and Karl Otto Götz in Germany and Jackson Pollock in the USA (Abstract Expressionism).



The informal is used for an artistic style that sees itself as expressive and non-geometric abstract painting. Its characteristics include formlessness and spontaneity. The work process based on the use of the body and gestures is not subject to rigid rules, but follows processes of the unconscious.

With both very diverse expressions of austerity and rhythm on the one hand

⁴ Cf. Hans Lenk: „Our perception is mainly based on the Egrasp 'processual structures' and 'programmed' to recognize the beautiful form (as a tendency towards a dynamic form). (...) One can always find the process of creation in a form that is experienced as beautiful, not deny it (...) The liveliness of a beautiful form consists precisely in the fact that one suspects this kind of creation process and or experienced. (...) This is the hallmark of beauty on the border between order and the chaotic. (...). Hans Lenk, *Fractals and Chaotic Creativity*, in: *Neuroästhetik*, Hrsg by Martin Dresler, Seemann Verlag, Leipzig 2009



and gestural, moving expressionism on the other, Wimhöfer once again invokes his main theme of chaos versus order or rhythm and movement. Chaos is perceived as nonlinear and order as linear.

Wimhöfer has been dealing with another subject since the 1980s. On the occasion of the 90th Düsseldorf port anniversary, he discovered the Hydrants as symbols of fire and water.

Hydrants are located on the roadside and are mainly used by the fire brigade during extinguishing operations or street cleaning companies. They are usually about knee-high, painted red and white, have a kind of head and two lateral "arms" to which the water hose is attached. Today, they are rarely used

and are now historical witnesses. In their defunctionalization, they now become anthropomorphic landmarks of history.



Since then, Wolfgang Wimhöfer has used the hydrants as a figure in numerous pictures and has also cast small models in bronze. Novel in his art is the use of photographs in the picture, which he collages or links to current newspaper sheets and then paints over gesturally and colorfully. Pigment prints with the revised motif have also been created.

In the meantime, he speaks of "hydrantism" that "attacked" him: "My interest was aroused. I created a series of illustrations on canvas, combined them with geometric patterns and my shadow as well as different colors, which I applied as if by chance on the transparent canvas, the 'hydrantism' was born. The depictions of the cast-iron heavy hydrant on transparent canvas became the subject of my representational painting. Since then, hydrantism has been gaining more and more space and reality in my pictorial

language. So I developed and refined the possibilities of artistic depiction to this day, so that the last painted hydrants shine as if colored in the canvas and are visible from both sides."⁵

Wimhöfer went one step further. His passion and artistic interest in hydrants led him to an extraordinary civic commitment. In 1997, on his initiative, 20 hydrants over 100 years old in the Düsseldorf harbor were placed under "monument protection" and in 2017 some of them were restored. For eight hydrants, the local organization Düsseldorf Jonges e.V. pledged a protection sponsorship. And Marlies Nitschke even composed the "Hydrantsong" for him⁶.

Through his works of art and actions, the artist awakened a new view of an everyday object that stands inconspicuously along the road side. With his artist's eyes and alert mind, he has also opened

⁵ Wolfgang Wimhöfer, Hydranten im Wandel der Zeit. The history of the Hydrantismus, 1997, https://www.artwim.de/image/texte/hydranten_im_wandel.pdf

⁶ <https://www.artwim.de/image/texte/hydrantenlied.pdf>

the eyes of other Düsseldorfers to the hydrant. The famous quote by Paul Klee also applies here: "Art does not reproduce the visible , but makes it visible."

Wimhöfer's artistic interest relates in particular to the particularly extraordinary anthropomorphic and cross-like shape of the hydrant, only secondarily to its function: "Each of the 20 hydrants has its own story and an unmistakable face. As silent witnesses of a time gone by, they remind us of protection, water donation and convey a sense of security. They remain a source of ideas and inspiration. Thus, they enter into a dialogue with us: A new task and era for the robust water people has begun."⁷

His interest in the human form led him to further depictions of figures, which he integrated into his gestural-abstract painting. This is how the series "Dropmen" was created, in which he introduced imprints of bubble wrap and the painting thus gains a special structure. Another figure in Wimhöfer's pictures is the Radschläger (cart wheeler), Düsseldorf's landmark. Since the nineties, in which he also regularly resides in Lanzarote, he integrates pictorial and written characters, which he discovers there in cave paintings, into the Radschläger pictures. Thus, the fertility symbol "Idol of Tara" or dancing figures and spirals from the cave paintings of the indigenous people of the Canary Islands appear in the cart wheeler and hydrant pictures and leads the Düsseldorf figures into a new international context.

Whether historical pictorial signs or cart wheelers – Wimhöfer's motives are always inseparably linked to his whereabouts and at the same time they are an expression of his historical consciousness, artistic formal interest and alert spirit that observes and recombines. This is the truly creative achievement of the artist, who will hopefully remain with us as a contemporary witness for a long time to come.

Ulrike Lehmann
September 2020

Photo credits:

Piet Mondrian

Composition

https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/diskurs-ueber-die-rolle-der-museen-aufs-hirn-soll-s-wirken.950.de.html?dram:article_id=281872

Kazimir Malevich

Dynamic Suprematism, 1916
Museum Ludwig, Cologne

Wolfgang Wimhöfer

Tanz 06, 2006 Acryl/painting plate 100x160 cm

Wolfgang Wimhöfer

2071 Fire / Water & Hydrant Pigment Pressure A2 2017

⁷ Wolfgang Wimhöfer, *ibid.*

Texts General

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Space and movement:

Space

The yellow crossbars in the pictures provide the framework on which the paint can hold and grow. Different beam width creates the illusion of spatiality. This is how the fuller bar appears to be at the front and the slimmer one to be at the back. The yellow disc pushes forward, the cool color to the rear. On this grid, the color body spreads. It's similar as above, the wider brush stroke appear further forward, the thinner one turns tapering to the rear. The movement of the color body is dynamic, chaotic. It corresponds to an instantaneous, unique and unrepeated movement. Associations with lava formations, waves and clouds arise.

Lanzarote in January 1996

Movement

Most of the works shown here are were developed in the early 90s on Lanzarote and Fuerteventura. At a time before Internet and the telephone connection to Germany always a new adventure

Thus, the white line groups in the pictures indicate the then usual communication by airmail, sent in an envelope with light and dark blue cross stripes. (Fig. 400, page 14; 402, page 42)

Düsseldorf, October 2020

Wolfgang Wimhöfer

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Résumé:

Wolfgang Wimhöfer was born in Lippstadt in 1948 and moved to Düsseldorf in 1952. After secondary school, he completed a chemistry apprenticeship as a laboratory technician at the Bayer plant in Leverkusen. From 1970, he began free studies of painting under the influence of Op-Art and the professors Beuys and Kuhna. Cesar Manrique of Lanzarote and Kurt Link from Turkey inspired him to see the essentials in things.

Since the 1990s, Wolfgang Wimhöfer has been rotating between his studios in Lanzarote, Fuerteventura and Düsseldorf. Since 2010 he has been helping children and seniors to develop their artistic creativity within the framework of a holistic approach.

Important artistic activities and exhibitions:

Kunst im Eisstadion, Düsseldorf; New flag for the reunited Germany; Monument protection for Düsseldorf harbor hydrants; Exhibitions im Kunstpalast Düsseldorf, Cabildo Insular de Fuerteventura, Centro Insular de Cultura, Lanzarote; Museó Lag-o-mar, Lanzarote; Kö-Galerie and Galleries Kontraste, Kunstwerk and Merkelbach, Düsseldorf.

Public and private acquisitions, member of VG Bild, Bonn and the artists' association Malkasten, Düsseldorf.

Internet

<https://artwim.de/>

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Press:

"... In almost all of his works, Wimhöfer uses the basic colors blue, red and yellow, like a stabilizing recurring element. He lets one dominate the others, plays with their warm and cold values, and spacial effects.

Color strands applied in generous colour strips suggest movement, changeability..." "... The coincidence of the creative process plays an important role here, as we know it from informal art..."
Ilse Tjardes, Rheinische Post, 1.12.1989

"... With the basic colours red, blue and yellow, Wolfgang Wimhöfer from Düsseldorf illustrates his theme: "Energetic processes".

Inspired by the lava island of Lanzarote, he developed a special technique to create new colored volcanoes and exploding star worlds on the canvas..."

Sabine Königs, Rheinische Post 25.09.1990

..."Wimhöfer works with acrylic on canvas. A changing approach to both can be observed. In the past, he primed in the old way but today he uses the textile structure as a means of expression together with the paint. Translucent images are created, reminiscent of silk painting or reverse glass painting when held in front of the sunlight-lit windows.

Graphic elements everywhere provide, sometimes from the structure of the textile background, sometimes from letters of one's own name, for order in the apparent chaos of color explosions..."

Gerda Kaltwasser, Rheinische Post, 5.07.1994