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Walker, Aldo, *Tisch II*, 1965-66, Holz, Füllmaterial, Stoffbezug, 110 x 82 x 200 cm (Objektmass), Kunstmuseum Luzern

Documentation level

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Name

Walker, Aldo

Dates of birth and death

* 6.11.1938 Winterthur, † 17.3.2000 Luzern

Municipality of origin (CH)

Silenen (UR)

Nationality

CH

Brief biography

Konzeptkünstler. Objekte, Bilder, Zeichnungen und theoretische Schriften

Fields of activity

Konzeptkunst, Zeichnung, Video, Objektkunst, Malerei

Lexicon article

Aldo Walker spent his childhood in the Canton of Grisons, where his father was the technical director of the power station in Tamins during the war years. Primary and secondary school in Lucerne; from 1954–58, he was trained as an electrician, and then studied at the Electronics Department of the Institute of Higher Education in Winterthur. In 1960, he married Mathilde Fleischmann, with whom he had two daughters, Daniela and Yvonne. From 1963–65, further training at the Cantonal Vocational School in Lucerne; in 1964, Walker took over his father's business, which he managed until 1979. He worked as a part-time artist as of 1960, participating in exhibitions in Switzerland and abroad. From 1979–1989, independent artist; 1987, teaching assignments at the Zurich Design School (fine art advanced course); 1989, appointed to the management team

of the Visual Design advanced training course; 1991–98, department head; as of 1992, also lecturer. He worked as an independent artist in Lucerne from 1998 until his death in 2000.

1984, Grand Prix of the Heinrich Danioth Foundation (bursary); 1984–85, studio of the Swiss Confederation, PS1, Institute for Contemporary Art, New York. In 1986, together with [u]John M. Armleder[/u], Walker represented Switzerland at the Venice Biennale. 1987, Art Prize of the City of Lucerne. In the 1970s and 1980s, he took part in important exhibitions in Switzerland and abroad: 1969, Kunsthalle Bern, *When Attitudes Become Form*; 1970, Kunstmuseum Luzern, *Visualisierte Denkprozesse*; 1974, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, *A Head Museum*; 1975, Centro de Arte y Comunicación, Buenos Aires, and Museu de Arte Moderna, São Paulo, *The Seventies*; 1981, Kunstmuseum Luzern, CH '70–'80; 1986, Frankfurter Kunstverein, Prospect. Solo exhibitions (selection): 1977, Kunstmuseum Luzern; 1986, Aargauer Kunsthaus Aarau; 1987, Kunsthalle Basel; 1988, Kunstverein Hamburg. In 1989, Walker designed the exhibition entitled *Lettre d'images* at the Helmhaus Zurich; also in 1989, the Kunstmuseum Luzern showed a retrospective of Walker's oeuvre with *Früher oder später*. In 2006, the Aargauer Kunsthaus in Aarau organized the large-scale retrospective entitled *Kunst überfordern*. Aldo Walker (1938–2000), *Geschichte und Lektüre seiner Kunst*.

Since its first important public manifestation at the *Annual* exhibition held at London's Institute of Contemporary Art in 1960, Aldo Walker's art has been positioned between the protean use of materials and semiotic conceptualisation as well as references to the changing contexts and subtexts of art. Until now, five phases – based on and complementing Christoph Schenker's observations in the catalogue for the *Früher oder später* exhibition in Lucerne (1989) – can be observed: 1, avoiding the conventional panel painting (1962–69); 2, deploying verbal language (1969–1971); 3, overcoming internal artistic problems in favour of external artistic efficacy (1972–79); 4, reflecting in pictorial terms on the present state of the world and our understanding of reality (1980–87); and 5, evaluating the media and the rhetoric of indirect communication from an artistic perspective, particularly with regard to visual design. Works and groups of works that can be classified in this way include *Schweissbrennerbilder* (1964); *12 Gleichungen* (1971); *Logotypen* (1975–76); *Mein Herz ist frei (Basler Alphabet)* (1977–79); *Neues aus der Innerschweiz* (1981); *Der Vater und sein Sohn* (1981–82); *Formloser Nachruf*, and *Lettre d'images* (1989). In the last two years of his life, Aldo Walker created his principal work, *Morphosyntaktisches Objekt* (Aargauer Kunsthaus), a proposal for a pictorial narrative that is not linear, but open in terms of its meaning

and indeterminate in its spatial arrangement. An initial, seven-part version was published in the magazine *Du* in May 1999, and executed as a six-part wall painting at the Helmhaus Zurich the same year.

To classify Walker's oeuvre in stylistic terms based on material supports or other labels dependent on the media employed would be as inadequate as characterising his works with regard to now established artistic trends. Outward affinities with Arte Povera, Conceptual Art, Minimal Art and Contextual Art are secondary when it comes to Walker's objectives: the permutation of epistemological problems into artistic, reflexive figures, as they are treated in Rudolf Carnap's and Ludwig Wittgenstein's analytical criticism of reason and language. Besides this, the philosophies of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism should also be mentioned – as represented by Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard and Paul de Man –, which undertake a rhetoric analysis of mentality and the living environment. Rhetoric and semiotics are also constant points of reference in Walker's reflections on artistic theory.

For Walker, art is not a symbol of reality, but is an immediate expression of it. In his theoretical observations, he describes art as an open language system consisting essentially of communication, the purpose of which is neither to validate the art system nor to portray artistic problems as points of reference. According to Walker, the essence of art cannot be translated, but has a direct effect. The meaning of art cannot be explained as a formula of representation. Nor is it a Utopia or an anticipation, but genuine reality. Art cannot claim to present the truth, as it creates its own notional reality, which it immediately asserts. The 1989 exhibition conceived by Walker entitled *Lettre d'images* at the Helmhaus in Zurich occupies a key position in the artist's oeuvre. Instead of presenting his own works, Walker projected slides of works of art and images from popular culture, thus rendering the discourse about art itself the protagonist of the exhibition.

Unlike conceptual artists, Walker assumes that the world does not have to justify itself before art, and that art has no special obligation to explain itself with regard to a reality that is self-evident. The figure of the artist appears as a gifted, insidious gambler who tests the rules of society. For this reason, Walker sees his work as a rhetorically staged interface between art and reality, and turns firmly against the ideologies of power, which are inscribed in the art system – a supposedly autonomous organisation.

In Walker's view, art per se has no value, but is a gesture, and as such is noticed by society. True to this maxim, Walker did little to obtain adequate recognition for his achievements according to the rules of the art world. For Switzerland, Aldo Walker is unique, and for post-war art a figure of great significance.

Works: Aarau, Aargauer Kunsthaus; Altdorf, Haus für Kunst Uri (Uri Cantonal Art Collection); Kunstmuseum Luzern; Lucerne, Cantonal Psychiatric Clinic St. Urban, general interior design (in collaboration with Claude Sandoz, Hans Schärer, Rolf Winnewisser) 1980–81, and annexes, 1992; Lucerne, National Bank, group of works in the banking hall, 1985; Lucerne, Cantonal Archives, overall design of the public spaces, 1994; Schaffhausen, Museum zu

Allerheiligen.

Hans Ulrich Reck, 1998, updated 2012

Translation: Toby Alleyne-Gee

Selected bibliography

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- Hans Ulrich Reck: *Aldo Walker. Morphosyntaktisches Objekt*. Herausgeber: Aargauer Kunsthaus Aarau. Baden: Lars Müller, 2003 (Schriften zur Aargauischen Kunstsammlung)
- *Lettre d'images par Aldo Walker*. Helmhaus Zürich, 1989. [Texte:] Stefan Banz [et al.]. Zürich, 1989
- *Aldo Walker. Früher oder später*. Kunstmuseum Luzern, 1989. [Texte:] Martin Kunz, Christoph Schenker. Luzern, 1989
- *Aldo Walker*. Kunstverein in Hamburg, 1988. [Text:] Ursula Meyer-Rogge. Hamburg, 1988
- *Aldo Walker*. Kunsthalle Basel, 1987. [Texte:] Christoph Schenker, Jean-Christophe Ammann. Basel, 1987
- *Aldo Walker. Arbeiten seit 1964*. Aargauer Kunsthaus Aarau, 1986. [Texte:] Theo Kneubühler, Heiny Widmer, Beat Wismer. Aarau, 1986
- *Aldo Walker. Die Mehrsinnigkeit der klaren Gestalt*. Biennale di Venezia, Schweizer Pavillon, 1986. [Text:] Max Wechsler. Bern: Bundesamt für Kulturpflege, 1986 [erscheint zur Ausstellung im Schweizer Pavillon anlässlich der 42. Biennale von Venedig]
- *Stromern im Bild. Aldo Walker. Rolf Winnewisser*. Mannheimer Kunstverein, 1982. Mannheim, 1982
- *Aldo Walker*. Kunstmuseum Luzern, 1977. [Texte:] Jean-Christophe Ammann, Rolf Winnewisser. Luzern, 1977

Website

<http://www.sik-isea.ch/de-ch/Kunstarchiv-Bibliothek/Kunstarchiv/Nachlassarchiv/Virtuelle-Vitrine/Nachlass-Aldo-Walker>

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Kunst in der Schweiz,
<http://www.sikart.ch/kuenstlerinnen.aspx?id=4000055>,
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