John M Armleder

Im Rahmen der Ausstellung

Edition Galerie Susanna Kulli

John M Armleder

Im Rahmen der Ausstellung

Künstlergespräch

Im Rahmen der Ausstellung von John M Armleder
Arbeiten auf Papier 1967 – 1995
ein Künstlergespräch mit Bice Curiger
in der Galerie Susanna Kulli am 31. Januar 1998

Susanna Kulli: Vor einiger Zeit wurde ich vom Radio DRS eingeladen, in der Sendung «Persönlich» über meine Galerietätigkeit zu sprechen. Mein Gesprächspartner war der Verleger Egon Ammann, den ich bis dahin als Herausgeber der Gedichte von Ossip Mandelstam und von Fernando Pessoas «Buch der Unruhe» sehr schätzte. Das Pessoa-Buch schenkte ich übrigens auch einem Künstler der Galerie – seit dessen Lektüre gibt es ein «Bild der Unruhe» in der Kunstwelt zu sehen. – Auf die Frage der Interviewerin, warum ich eine Galerie führe, antwortete ich u.a.: "Blinky Palermo. Das Werk dieses Künstlers liegt meiner Sehnsucht nach Kunst als Magnetfeld zugrunde, einer Kompassnadel ähnlich bewege ich mich darauf zu und halte inne, wenn ich mich angezogen fühle." Egon Amman, ganz «homme de lettres», antwortete auf die gleiche Frage: "Die Suche nach einer verlorenen Rippe. Ein guter Verleger ist ein Mensch, dem man irgendwann einmal eine Rippe entfernt hat. Man weiss, dass einem etwas fehlt, und mit jedem Buch, das man verlegt, versucht man, dieses Etwas wiederzufinden." Ich weiss nicht, ob John M Armleder eine Rippe fehlt, ich weiss aber, dass Blinky Palermo ein sehr wichtiger Künstler für ihn war, als wir uns vor vielen Jahren zum ersten Mal trafen. Die Zeichnungen hier von 1967 bis 1995 haben für mich dieselbe Leichtigkeit und Poesie, wie ich sie in den Zeichnungen von Blinky Palermo finden kann. Blinky Palermo stellte einmal während eines Ausstellungsaufbaus Imi Knoebel die Frage: "Was meinst du, Imi, gibt es mehr Elefanten oder mehr Mäuse auf der Welt?" Ich möchte unser Gespräch mit derselben Frage an John

eröffnen: "Was meinst Du, John, gibt es mehr Elefanten oder mehr Mäuse auf der Welt? What do you think, John, are there more mice or more elephants in this world?"

John M Armleder: Well, I don't know if it's good to start in the zoo. But there is a proportion problem. When you have big animals you don't see them, and when you have very small ones you don't see them either. What we know basically is that there are more human beings than elephants and there are supposed to be more mice than human beings. This doesn't tell us how many there are, nevertheless. Another thing one always told me and as I was born under the sign of the rat, that rats are more intelligent than human beings. When one sees rats, there are no mice. So I believe that mice are even more intelligent than rats.

Bice Curiger: When I looked at these wonderful early works on paper of yours, a line of a poem by Meret Oppenheim crossed my mind which has just to do with this opposition of mice and elephants. It is "mit enorm wenig viel," and I think this could be a principle which could be detected here but which also runs through your whole work, even when your works started to become very big, with very heavy tires and very heavy materials.

John M Armleder: Things start to get heavy when people have to carry them around, maybe that is when people started to think about my works. The works got deeper and heavier. What you are talking about goes back to the classical «less is more.»

Bice Curiger: No, "mit enorm wenig viel" is a kind of play with paradoxes. There is a lightness, but a lightness which is also ponderous at the same time.

John M Armleder: It's difficult for me to be aware of my work from outside in that sense. Though it is not planned that way it's certainly true that there is this natural feeling of mine, because this is an attitude I have in my work, and it's, I would say, formative in the making of my work. And at the same time, I would say, it's not true, since everyone works with different levels, different strategies, and we all encompass all those attitudes, we all work with the whole range, like anyone on the street walks with the whole range of what walking on the street implies. The only thing one focuses more on is this or that, some things you can recognize better in this way or in that way. So if someone told me: "You are a damn heavyweight Expressionist," I would say: "It's not totally wrong either."

Bice Curiger: You started in the group «ECART,» and it's obvious that somehow you were among the first to be against this kind of heroic attitude, which the

Expressionists and Abstract Expressionists really stand for. So tell us a bit about that.

John M Armleder: First, I guess I'm a coward and a lazybones. You don't have a choice when you are like that. The only way it works is in the field where I did it. It's probably true that I don't have a heroic attitude. But I respect those guys, they are terrific fighters, and maybe I'm also a bit jealous. But nevertheless if they would give me the position, I wouldn't take it, so there is something true about that. It is true that from the beginning, as far as I remember, and I don't remember much, I had this idea that it was better to forget about one's own personality because it looks so much like others, and there was no point in making a big deal about it. I thought that expressing my own problems or my beliefs in a very personal way was so common that I was interested in something else – like many others. I had this attitude that it would be more challenging for me to produce something which comes not from me but from the world, from the universe, or from wherever, which is a very traditional, classical idea in a way, and quite ambitious in the end.

Bice Curiger: In many texts which are written about you they always mention "tea-time." This, I think, is not so classical.

John M Armleder: It depends. Teatime's part of culture. It has started under a tree, if I remember, in other continents. Well, some drink tea, some drink beer, some drink coffee. There is this idea that doing things aside of what we do is as much a part of life as our main activity. With friends we did all sorts of things and never really made a difference between drinking tea, going down the river with a boat, etc. Whatever we did was of the same quality and of the same level of communication as putting together a show, making a work of art, and transmitting it in one way or another. So we had this feeling. And there is a half-conscious aspect in whatever you do, a part of it that you cannot control. You cannot control how what you play around with is turning out. We had this feeling that it was interesting to plot this situation. So the strategy of this chance of… was a main topic of our activities. We all learned a lesson from people like John Cage, who incidentally at that time drank tea also.

Bice Curiger: It's obvious that this attitude is of high topicality today, for younger artists now, especially here in Switzerland.

John M Armleder: To drink tea?

Bice Curiger: No. Or maybe that too. But they are also interested in forming communicative network groups, transmitting works of each other. There are spaces which

work like artist-run galleries but in fact are bars, coffee shops, tea shops, or whatever. You are a very cosmopolitan person, but you developed your activities in Geneva. How is it to be in a Swiss city which is not an expanding one?

John M Armleder: It's also true, one has to take into view the context – the geographical context, but also the context of time and the references you have. When «ECART» started, even before that when we were still youngsters, we used to do things in a group of friends. The tendency would have been to run away, of course, much more even so than now, because the weight of the bourgeois style of Geneva, the weight of the society in Switzerland, the art scene here and there, sort of made a pattern which would practically either send you walking to Nepal or go to Düsseldorf to study with Beuys. There were two choices. I did find a midstream way since I had this little political activity, being a pacifist and not going to the army, which made me active in that line and which also got me stuck in Geneva. I wanted to go along with my ideas; I had to stay there because otherwise there was no way of making a point. Making a point got you stuck there completely because you ended up in prison. I spent seven months in prison when I was supposed to attend Beuys's class. I don't know why I decided on Düsseldorf rather than Kathmandu, especially with my tea-drinking, it makes no sense – anyway, that was my choice. When I was supposed to go, I went to prison in Geneva, and when I spent time there, I thought of all these things to be done, to open a gallery and so on. When I got out I thought, "Enough of those colors, they're the same as Beuys's." In prison you have grays and greens, so I knew about this and decided to do other things. Now, there was also this sort of idea, I think it came from Robert Filliou, that you shouldn't run to the scene where it's happening, but bring what is happening to you. This was a different way of thinking about it. You could just rebuild it or invite people to come, or think about whatever you want, or correspond by mail, whatever. Maybe it has to do with me being lazy. It was easier to wait until they came. But there was a whole strategy, it's true, and it had to do also with the idea that we were trying to build new spaces and new surfaces, that's a typical sixties thing. The alternative was to create new territories or surfaces where you could work through connections. Of course, a permanent thing somehow, with highs and lows, depending on the context. Now there was another chance for me to leave, in the eighties, when success, money, glory, fashion, all that came, fell around me. At that time I had, as a matter of fact, a studio in New York, but I never thought it made technically sense to have that. Besides, I always had one problem since I do travel a lot, since I do meet a lot of people. It's what we call in French «bon publique.» I'm a very good audience for whoever I meet, and wherever I travel I say, "Oh, I could live here, why I'm not living here?" But, of course, it happens again and again, and that means I basically go back to Geneva. I say also that maybe being in Geneva was a challenge since nothing of what we were doing

got any response. First, we were free to do it with no one having the critical knowledge to comment on it. That was an advantage, but also it was more interesting to create a situation with local references. Probably that helped in a way, in fact doing things with other people. That is a little singularity in the «ECART» thing, that it did not come from a group of artists with a statement or an artistic program. That was the case of most of the relations with groups or individuals we were affiliated with; they had a kind of statement which was very directly towards their philosophy. In our case it was just school friends who grew into doing different things together, and we ended up doing also art or what was taken for art. That's a sort of a special function which also made it go on for quite a long time, which I think is not the case, for example, for friends of mine like B.M.P.T., Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni. That was a very political statement within the art field but maybe also outside the art field. In our case this sort of special activity was not so present. This goes back to what you were saying before, how things spread over or dissolve into other kinds of activities. But not to compare with what is happening today: we always have this tendency to notice things at which we beat each other, and technically this is true but practically it's wrong. Or vice versa, I don't know. I think that people today who create forms which have some similarity with what we used to do in the sixties, and those forms are quite present today, come from a totally different context, the references are totally different and they have another model. So the background and the grounding of it is fundamentally different.

Bice Curiger: That brings us to words like recycling or interference, I think you've put some thought into these terms, using them in making and producing objects, and in arranging objects of other artists as a curator.

John M Armleder: I think, right from the beginning I never really made a big difference between what I was doing and what I was seeing, because basically when you look at something, when you see something, you are taking it over and you are making it your own. When you are doing something you are choosing something which has been given to you to display. I had a facility to abuse my cultural heritage in a way. It looks very often like recycling, I'm not certain if one can really put it like that. Of course, in the eighties it was fashionable to talk about recontextualization and so on. It's true that if you look at some things I'm doing systematically, it has all the appearance of that. At very low levels, for instance, when I re-use a lost piece of furniture which is going to be dumped, and I avoid its ending up in the gutter and bring it to a museum, then it's high recycling. But this has never, of course, been the main topic. It's one of the ironical anecdotes about what one does. You also may see it here in some of the works on paper because the papers are obviously waste. There is this tradition, especially in Switzerland, using all bits of paper to do scribbles and drawings, it's very obvious in some of my

works there. This is more consistent and significant when I re-use what I know and what is not supposed to belong to me directly, I mean our cultural surroundings, views, references. It has to do with different levels of appropriation. You have it, of course, in the works which represent the works of others, the works which use the strategies of others overlapped with other strategies, and the mix of it. At one point I used to say that I never did anything that someone had not done before. Which was picked up on me when I said that and turned me into a «Zitatkünstler» in Germany. Which is also ok because I'm happy when people give me roles. When people tell me, "You are this or that," I always agree. There is always the chance that someone will think that you are something else. It enlarges your personality. As I basically believe I don't have much. There is the other aspect of using other people's work in a way to produce mine. Memory, or whatever. Then there is also the strategy of using other people's work without signing them as my own works, as I do in furniture sculptures. They use constructions which refer to someone else's, or to a historical period, or to whatever. This is even more the case with the shows I've been putting together during the past ten years. There, above all, I'm involved in strategies of perceptions of the works, and in the overlapping of the works and the overdoing of the implicit information they bring. So there are two levels of that. The first one is to consider that you never see a work freed from all that you have in mind while looking at it, from what you have eaten the day before, what is still in your stomach, the person who made you be late to see the work, or it's too hot, and all that, or the fact that you are more a fan of Mary Beachmoore than of Cézanne, or the day before you saw a show with Polke or one with Richter, or whatever makes you look at a work differently. There is no isolation possible. Since this is a given thought, I think there is no ideal unique way of exhibiting works. I'm always interested in how one puts works together, works of other people or works of myself. I worked on those series of projects where instead of splitting the works and making a big effort to show them in the right way, I do it all wrong. I put the works on top of each other, and this is something I'm working on.

Bice Curiger: «Pudding Overdose» you once called an installation, and since we are talking about the stomach, can you describe this a bit, this «Pudding Overdose»?

John M Armleder: It goes into a series of works. The show which was called «The Pudding Overdose» was done at the art fair in Basel, at the Art & Public gallery stand. I was asked at that time, some years ago, to choose the works that should be exhibited and how to exhibit them. I thought about the art fair situation, how to engineer the show, but I also had other versions of it for a gallery or a museum show. The art fair situation is like a jungle scene. There is this sort of scenography. The people walk around, see thousands of things, and they tell you, "I saw a beau-

Bilder folgen

tiful work of yours," and they keep telling you about works you never made and a booth in which you never showed. It still makes sense in a way. It's not totally wrong because you could have made it. This booth was a medium sized box, trying to be bigger than it was. My design was to make a box as a box, and to suggest that it would be painted as if gift-wrapped. We had Robert Barry paint all around, the whole box was red, with his text, and so on. Inside, I went through the whole storage of the gallerist, making a selection. I did select mostly pieces I like – and a lot of them, which was a big transport problem. They still are talking about that today. I mean I didn't do it against the works, I was interested in seeing how these works could overlap. The inside walls were also painted, wall paintings, mostly vivid colors. On the walls were paintings and large pieces by different artists, including reliefs by Frank Stella and Dan Flavin's tubes, which would give the light. That was the interactive aspect of it. The «Glamour» painting by Sylvie Fleury with fluorescent paint was the background for the fluorescent tubes by Dan Flavin. All the colors changed completely, especially when I put a Robert Ryman next to it, which would suddenly be white-blue. Then again one would look at the Ryman, knowing it's white. So the whole cultural appreciation is very specific. You cannot do that in the same way without a Ryman. I mean you put just a Flavin, and then you have a Flavin, and you know that the white walls are blue because of the Flavin. It is very different when you have a Ryman on the white walls. In front of the paintings there were more sculptures, and so everything was overlapping.

There was this idea that you had an overload of information. In my case, this concept of overload doesn't come from another planet. It comes from Larry Poons, but in his case, it maybe comes from another planet; with these words I am quoting him. Larry Poons, who could be considered a minor artist and modernist, is an artist who always interested me. I have always had a tendency to like those minor artists anyway, the second generations of anything. Similarly, I like going to a bar or a disco club which is out of fashion. Because it has a leftover fashion, which is something otherwise impossible to describe. Not that I believe that Larry Poons is an old fashioned disco, of course. I was attracted to Larry Poons when I used to paint the dot paintings. Long before I knew I would actually do the dot paintings. I really got excited by his work when I saw it at that show which was called «The Responsive Eye.» Larry Poons did his dots and I did the jumping beans. Then he ended up stopping all that and doing the pour-paintings. To make the story short, what interested me in his case is that it took years to do all the different kinds of paintings which basically I do all together, and they were done for totally different reasons. As a matter of fact, opposite reasons. I was always interested in the fact that from basically different points of view you can end up doing exactly the same thing. When you have the same point of view you can end up doing radically different things. I'm just talking about art. God preserve me from making claims in

other domains. Poons started talking about overload when he felt that the information in his early paintings was escaping him anyway because he was into this optical thing when he was amazed by his own paintings, but they where escaping, and he had this feeling that overlaying activities at least on one painting would charge them with more and more significance. Because there would be more and more information. Interested in that he put more and more paint on the paintings, and then it started blobbing over the canvas itself, and when that was not enough he started sticking in bits and pieces he found around the studio so that it would really be luscious. In the pastry line they are the things that you just can't get over if you start eating them. This notion is what I'm interested in. In the strategy of those shows it's the fact that there is more and more information you can get, which is the case also in a very minimal situation, so in a way it's a very literal strategy to what it is as opposed to the other version which is the one we started talking about: in a way with very little you achieve much. I'm not trying to say with a lot you achieve nothing. But in a way you achieve the same thing with different types of question marks.

Bice Curiger: Talking about overload and history of art, another work you did comes to my mind, it was called «Don't do it!». We went to see it together last week at Grenoble, and I think it was only one piece in three rooms which was used by the curator, Eric Troncy. He did something about which you might also say it is a forbidden act for a curator: he put two works of art together in interference. I'm interested in hearing your opinion, because those were your works which were put together. Perhaps you can describe it.

John M Armleder: I'm the wrong person in that situation because it's much more fun when the artist is annoyed and makes a scandal. It becomes heavier. And I think that is also the problem with Eric Troncy. In a way he was very wise in spite of his misdoing or his abuses, because in a way there was an agreement about it. I don't work in the same way, but being an artist it's true that you can get away with everything. I mean with your art already quite a bit. I never understood how we do get away, but when you use other artists' works, some artists like it, some others don't. But being an artist you don't have the same kind of authority. Being a curator you have this problem as being the police service or intelligence service of the art world. So, of course, people fight against you in a very easy way. I dream of being abused by a curator. To get back to the «Pudding Overdose» situation, I used all the works of different artists and the worst situation, as I described before. And I do believe if Robert Ryman saw his blue paintings, I don't think he would agree with the situation, although I'm sure that it happened to him before. I'm not sure that he really looked for that. I was very surprised doing that show that most of the artists who witnessed the situation and enjoyed it were conservative. Well, they

wouldn't like that term. I should say some believe in a conservative attitude in the hanging of their art – and the younger artists, the wild guys were very annoyed. I don't want to talk about the wild guys, but one of the apparently conservative artists in the hanging of their work is Günther Umberg. I mean by that, he is very precise – that's maybe not conservative. I mean, people know his work, he retouches his work, replaces it, looks for hours and hangs other versions, looks at the space, etc. And it means something to the work. So that's fundamentally part of the work. He was in Basel, and I was very annoyed because I had decided to put one of his pieces in the show and, of course, Pierre, instead of sitting in front of the work or something like that, said, "Oh, Günther, look at what John has done," and I thought, "I'm not in Basel, I'm not John Armleder anymore." He came up to me and said, "They told me the story, let's do it together, tell me what to do with it, I'll finish it." I was stunned. I still respect him. The "Don't do it!" show was – that is maybe interesting for you and the few curators around – about the idea of how most of us, and specifically people professionally hurling art shows, do it in a silly way. Sorry about that. Because basically it would be so easy just to put works on the walls. When you just do that, people say, "It's not enough," or they think you were silly doing it. So you have to construct a whole strategy, a whole philosophy behind the justification for doing the show. Presuming, in a way, that the art as justification is not enough, or if it is enough you have to enhance it, you have to prove that your ideas were good enough to do a show. Another way of doing it is when you put more than one artist in a show. Then you have to have an idea of how these works have to come together. The big system in this case is the thematic one, whatever the theme is. You have wonderful titles: «Pudding Overdose,» or others. Then you have formal ones like «Blue,» «Triangle,» «Field Painting,» that's more historical, or whatever. These things interest me. Because what I wanted to see or prove is that you cannot go wrong. With the most silly idea it still works somehow, and sometimes it makes it work better than it should. So the show in Geneva was about that. And somehow the curator of the museum in Geneva, Christian Bernhard, thought it was a good idea. He didn't know in a way that he maybe shouldn't have been doing it because it gives a strange look to the other things happening in a museum. The first idea, which is quite silly and refers to a more intellectual way of hanging art work, was a room with eight TV monitors. Each had a film produced in the museum before the show. A single frame within the paintings of eight paintings in the museum. It was a continuous film each time. A bit boring perhaps, but electronic viewing of oil painting is always something exciting. Especially as these were terribly filmed and something went wrong anyhow. It was as good as Nam June Paik anyway. There were these TV sets and you could go in. Some would understand that the paintings were somewhere else in the museum. They looked like this serious heavyweight thing. The second room was the typical stupid show, it was about dots. The walls were covered with a wall pain-

ting of dots all over, and on top of this was a selection of paintings with dots by different artists. So it was dots on dots. The last room was a bit referential. I asked the team in the museum to think about all the objects used emblematically in the art of this century. Let's say, the objects used, objects you can purchase or find, and I showed them as such or the main argument of the work, or built the work like the Readymades of Beny or by Duchamp or Flavin's fluorescent tubes and the muscles… And I put them all together in a corner as if it were done to be taken away as trash. Maybe it's my taste. When I'm in the street I look at dumps, and I think they are interesting, and I lose a lot of time. And then it looks like modern sculptures, somehow. I mean, since the beginning of this century there is a lot of waste that is displayed somehow. I think it's formally interesting. The other thing is that it is an ideal piece for people who bring students or visitors to the museum. They all look at the piece and think, "All this is Duchamp, all this is Broodthaers," or what could it be? It's fun. They put a Duane Hanson bag lady sculpture next to it, standing and looking at the piece. So the whole piece changes fundamentally.

Bice Curiger: It was an overlapping of the idea of what realities are, the reality of art, and the reality in the street. The reality of a fake woman who pretends to be there. At first glance you give us absolutely the belief that this woman is real and looking for what she could use in this bunch of garbage. But you mentioned trash, and this brings me to B culture or Series B, which I know is something that has interested you for the last couple of years.

John M Armleder: Much longer than that. I always hoped that I was born in a B movie. Well, there are two things. There is the fact that I have been a fanatic for these movies for long. Practically what interests me – I'm trying to be as intelligent as I can – what's fascinating in the structure of the B movies in Hollywood. As most of you know, the notion of the B culture as it was given in the forties and fifties and sixties was basically a fifty thing. The Hollywood companies had a budget of so much a year, and they wanted to produce two to three big movies. For that they would build the sets for those movies. It was a very big investment, like building a city. The other aspect is that those companies worked on an employment scheme which was fixed. So most people were employed all through the year, with their technical knowledge, and they would work on a daily schedule: come to the studio at eight o'clock in the morning, which is very early for Los Angeles, and stay there late. So they were the whole day in there with their knowledge and skills, and they were supposed to work. They had so many meters of film to be filmed each week. They had the big films to film. But usually, technically speaking, they couldn't film them because either the film stars might have a caprice or something was not working. Anyway, they couldn't go on filming all the time. So in the time in between they had to have something to do, had to have something in front of

the camera. That's why they would shoot any film. So you had scripts which were written very quickly, in a very free way, and you had extremely skilled people filming those films which enabled you to see something like Indian and Cowboy movies, wagon forts turned into Scottish castles, and things like that. The other interesting thing is, when you think of that scheme, and one knows that Americans are extremely conservative, the milieu in that case was thoroughly conservative. So the regular films were very tame in a way, politically and whatever else. But they had total freedom in most of those B films. So you see films turned out from the Hollywood industry at that time which were extremely provocative in the sexual behavior and in the political program, which could never have passed through if they had been main movies. That is something which interests me as a whole program. Basically what interests me is the fact that for a reason the company would build a situation which would be used for a totally different one. And my feeling is, that's my little theory, that our culture is a B culture today. We are in a B Movie situation, culturally speaking. We have inherited this set, which is the knowledge, the frame, the references of a culture which went through a whole span of time and experiences, and we use it for something completely different. It's the backdrop which is substantially what you see physically, but for a totally different purpose. This can work in total freedom because the reference is of no importance at all; it's totally detached. I think this is one of the great interests of our time. It has lost all moral grounding. If you compare today with my generation, you will find that we always had this very moral scheme of knowing what we were talking about. If you said, "Malevich," it meant that you knew who Malevich was, you could spell it – more or less – and you had an idea that there was a square, a white or a black one. All that made sense. Today, no one cares. I mean, we do because we are old-timers, but a young artist will use it, and there is no point of reference. If we come up and say, "Oh, yes, Malevich" – the youngsters will say, "Male-who?" It's ok. It performs on a totally different ground. It's extremely challenging for us, of course, but I think in that aspect it is a challenge of time in general.

Bice Curiger: I think this describes your attitude towards material in general very well. From the very beginning until now you have been very free. There is always freedom in using materials and having a completely abstract approach to the world, to the material world.

John M Armleder: In the sense that I have a non-symbolic approach to them.

Bice Curiger: Before we come to the end: when did you meet Parker Williams?

John M Armleder: That is an old story! I think I met him at the beginning of this century, basically, and we had a good time together.

Bice Curiger: So I will stop with this little insider joke.

Public: Are you interested in side-effects or in creative misunderstandings, such as when you referred to the exhibition in Grenoble, which created a new or another sense?

John M Armleder: Of the works there, you mean? Of course I'm interested. What I'm basically trying to say is that there is no stable understanding of most things as matter of fact, and certainly not in art and art productions. I think in that case the strategy of pointing that out is what Eric in Grenoble was trying to do in a very sensual way, because he wanted to use the works not only to be something else than what they are taken for, but he wanted to bring them into the beauty of the world he believes in. That's a very specific thing. When I do those things, I'm much more trashy in a way because I don't even give a clue and I don't try to make it look nice. But I also have this tendency of thinking it looks nice. For example, our good friend Helmut Federle wants to find a chapel for each unique painting – with the only possibility of putting a Mondrian somewhere not too far away from that. So that is his ideal. You will always catch me looking at the wall next to his painting as well as at his painting, and I enjoy both. This is a bit of a caricature. What I'm trying to say is that you never look at a work isolated. You are always working on different levels. So I'm interested, but I'm not interested myself in giving it a meaning. Basically because I'm not interested in meanings.

Public: John, you said, "it's difficult for me to be aware of my work from outside," so you must be very much in it. And then you also said, you don't want to bring your personality into your work too much. So while I see the distance in your work, I also see a certain contradiction. Maybe you can talk a little about you and the universe?

John M Armleder: I often had a dream – I'm talking like Martin Luther King! – I always had this idea that it would be nice to go to a museum and see a piece of art, like a painting, and say, "That is not too bad, I sort of like it," and then you go and look at the label, and there was your name on it, and you say, "Wow!" It almost happens now that I have other people do my work, and I haven't seen it. Then five years later I see the work, I look behind it, and someone has signed it for me. So I'm getting close. There is a technical contradiction in that. I'm a very shy person, and most shy persons are very sensitive, and most sensitive persons cannot get away from themselves. In these drawings, obviously it is me with all my feelings, which ended up putting me in a position of doing these things. If I were on trial for the things I say, this would speak against me because it's obvious that there are feelings and all that. There is another contradiction which is semi-true:

it's about recognizing who does what. If I look at all the works up here, there is something apart from me, apparently being the author, but I could not exactly say what. So the personality has shimmered through. Personality is very thin in a way. The most silly things I do, I do with a lot of pleasure. It's very difficult to tell someone that you are having a lot of pleasure and that there is no personality, that you are not there. It's a historical problem.

Public: You said you are not interested in meaning, but can you avoid it?

John M Armleder: I can avoid being interested. If you are very interested in meanings you can be extremely exclusive about meanings. If you are not too interested, you end up being very generous about meanings. So it proves that you normally don't avoid it, but that you open the door. The gap is much bigger. What you happen to do is not to privilege one meaning over another. And in our philosophy – I don't want to go back to tea, teatime, or whatever – when you don't privilege a meaning you accept more than one meaning. Or there is a whole «Birchermuesli» of meanings. Then you end up considering that in our society, in our cultural frame, there is no meaning at all. I don't believe so, to tell you the truth. But I do believe in the richness of meanings in all baby food.

John M Armleder, geboren 1948 in Genf, lebt und arbeitet in Genf.

Die Ausstellung «Arbeiten auf Papier 1967–1995» von John M Armleder dauerte vom 22. Januar bis 18. Februar 1998.
Einzelausstellungen von John M Armleder fanden in der Galerie Susanna Kulli 1983, 1987, 1990, 1996 und 2002 statt.
In der Galerie Susanna Kulli waren Arbeiten von John M Armleder auch in folgenden Ausstellungen zu sehen: John M Armleder, Helmut Federle, Marco Gastini, Gerhard Merz, Giuseppe Spagnulo, Henri Spaeti, Günther Wizemann (1983–84); John M Armleder, Helmut Federle, Marco Gastini, Giuseppe Spagnulo, Günther Wizemann (1985); John M Armleder, Helmut Federle, Joel Fisher, Marco Gastini, Gerhard Merz, Olivier Mosset, Gerwald Rockenschaub, Henri Spaeti, Giuseppe Spagnulo, Bernard Tagwerker, Günther Wizemann (1988); «ECART», curated by John M Armleder: Helmut Federle, Pierre-André Ferrand, Sylvie Fleury, Christian Floquet, Jeanine Gordon, Herbert Hamak, Karen Kilimnik, Jean-Luc Manz, Christian Marclay, Thom Merrick, Olivier Mosset, Cady Noland, Erik Oppenheim, Steven Parrino, Gerwald Rockenschaub, Adrian Schiess, Michael Scott, John Tremblay (1993); «Teppiche», John M Armleder, Olivier Mosset, Gerwald Rockenschaub, Rudolf Stingel (1994); «Teppiche – in neuen Räumen», John M Armleder, Olivier Mosset, Gerwald Rockenschaub, Rudolf Stingel (1995); «selected works by John M Armleder, Sylvie Fleury, Gaylen Gerber, Thomas Hirschhorn, Olivier Mosset, Gerwald Rockenschaub, Adrian Schiess (1999); «Armleder – Mosset – Rockenschaub» (2001); «works on paper 1967–2007» John M Armleder, Olivier Mosset, Gerwald Rockenschaub (2008)

Bice Curiger ist Mitbegründerin und Chefredaktorin der in Zürich und New York seit 1984 erscheinenden «Parkett»-Buchreihe mit zeitgenössischen Künstlern sowie Redaktionsleiterin der Zeitschrift «Tate etc.». Sie ist Kuratorin am Kunsthaus Zürich und organisiert seit 1992 viele grosse Ausstellungen wie «Freie Sicht aufs Mittelmeer» (1998), «Hypermental» (2000) oder «The Expanded Eye» (2006). Direktorin der 54. Biennale di Venezia, 2011.

Lektorat: Prof. Dr. Siegfried Wyler, St. Gallen; Gerrit Jackson, Berlin
Fotografien: Heinz Köppel, Susanna Kulli
Gesamtherstellung: Druckerei Odermatt AG, CH-6383 Dallenwil

Galerie Susanna Kulli, Dienerstr. 21, CH-8004 Zürich
Telephone: +41 (0)43 243 33 34, Fax: +41 (0)43 243 33 35
E-Mail: info@susannakulli.ch
www.susannakulli.ch

Künstlergespräche

Marianne Müller mit **Patrick Frey**
Thom Merrick mit **Corinne Schatz** und **Florian Vetsch**
Thomas Hirschhorn mit **Dorothea Strauss** und **Max Wechsler**
Gerwald Rockenschaub mit **Yvonne Volkart**
Adrian Schiess mit **Christian Kravagna**
Peter Z. Herzog mit **Stefan Banz**
Adrian Schiess mit **Marcel Baumgartner**
Olivier Mosset mit **Rein Wolfs**
John M Armleder mit **Bice Curiger**
Thomas Hirschhorn mit **Sebastian Egenhofer**

Artist's conversations

Marianne Müller with **Patrick Frey**
Thom Merrick with **Corinne Schatz** and **Florian Vetsch**
Thomas Hirschhorn with **Dorothea Strauss** and **Max Wechsler**
Gerwald Rockenschaub with **Yvonne Volkart**
Adrian Schiess with **Christian Kravagna**
Peter Z. Herzog with **Stefan Banz**
Adrian Schiess with **Marcel Baumgartner**
Olivier Mosset with **Rein Wolfs**
John M Armleder with **Bice Curiger**
Thomas Hirschhorn with **Sebastian Egenhofer**