

## The Sum of her Parts

Steps towards rediscovery:

The Kienzle & Gmeiner Gallery exhibits works of Anna Oppermann

Thomas Hirschhorn? No, the texts on a multitude of large and small slips of paper are too personal. Jonathan Messe? Not him either. The installation presented by Hamburg's Art Agents Gallery at the last Art Cologne was too etheric. Yet, much like Meese's best material, this omnium-gatherum of text and pictorial elements seemed to lead directly into the head of the artist. The so-contemporary seeming text and space installation "Portrait Herr S." was created in 1969, and the artist responsible for it has been dead for more than a decade.

Anna Oppermann, born 1940 in Eutin, studied Art in the Hamburg of the 1960s, participated in the documenta 6 in 1977 and the documenta 8 in 1987, exhibited in the interim at Venice's Biennale, and became Professor for Free Art at Berlin's art academy, the Hochschule der Künste, in 1990. At one stage she was one of Germany's foremost artists. Nonetheless, relatively few people - and of these, many are artists - still remember her 1984 solo shows at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien and in the Kunstvereine of Hamburg and Bonn.

Her permanent installations in the Kunsthalle Hamburg and the Sprengel Museum are by and large forgotten or ignored. It can be no matter of chance that Oppermann, who died of cancer in 1993, is being rediscovered now, not only thanks to the Art Agents Gallery, which manages her estate, but also due to the efforts of the Württembergischer Kunstverein, which is planning a retrospective in May 2007, and the Berlin Kienzle & Gmeiner Gallery, which has included her in its programme.

Anna Oppermann called the processual works, which she often created over years, and which would change during mounting, "ensembles." The artist would create three-dimensional, meandering works, arranged in altar-like form, from a compilation of private notes, quotations, photographs, found objects and drawings which would progress from the simple to the complex. Forensic material, interwoven like thought and psychic processes.

The observer may enter into the world of thoughts at any point and follow the chain of associations as far as he wishes. The spectrum reaches from Anna Oppermann's concept of self as woman and artist to themes such as love, truth and veneration. Sixty-one ensembles were created since the 1960s, whereby even here the boundaries are fluid and each new mounting of an ensemble is tantamount to a new interpretation. These days, such a process can only be undertaken by close friends of the artist. Besides a series of pictures, the Kienzle & Gmeiner Gallery is displaying "The Economic Aspect", an ensemble developed between 1979 and 1987 from work originally exhibited at the documenta 6 (price on request). Oppermann critically and ironically integrates quotations about market mechanisms with a visualisation of the theme of being a business woman as an artist and the idea of "commodifying oneself."

The boundary between actual artistic activities and comment thereon vanishes. Even the photographs printed on canvas on which she has then drawn and printed appear

in the mirror as mirrors. As in *Alice in Wonderland*, size is relativised and the stability of the viewer's perspective is rudely brought into question.

This is perhaps one of the aspects which makes these works so contemporary. The viewer is curious about how things may have continued with this artist of the exception. She herself once said that one should "not draw conclusions from what I communicate, but rather, from what I omit".