

ARNULF RAINER

EARLY WORKS 1950-1960

SALZBURG VILLA KAST

29 Jul 2016 - 27 Aug 2016



Opening: Friday July 29, 2016 at 6.30PM

Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac Salzburg is devoting an extensive exhibition to the early work of Arnulf Rainer, focusing particularly on the lesser-known series *Übermalungen* and *Proportionen*.

Arnulf Rainer is regarded as a pioneer of the Austrian movement *informel*. Influenced by the surrealist principle of *écriture automatique*, in the 1950s he developed his obsessive *Übermalungen* that lie in between "aggression and therapy, destruction and correction" (Hans-Jürgen Hafner, 2016). Rainer himself called the *Übermalungen* he made in the latter half of the 1950s a dialectic reaction to the previous *Proportionen* (1953/54), which in turn were to be seen as the antithesis to his earlier figurative drawings, the *Kritzelexpressionen* [scribble expressions] and *Blindzeichnungen* [blind drawings] dating from between 1949 and 1952. "The idea is to dissociate from the work everything that is not immediately involved in organising the functional resources; to abstain from any subjectivity or imagination. This kind of work is rational, unemotional, concentrating on the balance of form. It can be viewed only from this perspective." Rainer wrote this in 1953, about the *Proportionen*, which were first shown in 1954 in the Galerie Würthle in Vienna, under the direction of the sculptor Fritz Wotruba.

"Rainer's studies in proportion may be interpreted as a kind of spiritual exercise in which he prohibits himself from doing precisely what he finds most difficult. The line which was until then predominant, was now replaced by juxtaposed coloured geometric fields. The individual fields are either collaged or filled with one colour, traces of the brush-strokes remaining visible." (Andreas Hapkemeyer, 2015). Rainer himself described these "spiritual exercises" as "balance tests". The *Proportionen* are extremely important for the origins of the *Übermalungen*, which combine two aspects that are paradigmatic in the development of Rainer's work: "It is here that the motivity of the early drawings comes together with the calmer colour fields of the *Proportionen* to form a new level of artistic activity" (Andreas Hapkemeyer, 2015).

In an interview with Peter Weibel in 1972, Arnulf Rainer said of his *Übermalungen* that they "arose from the accumulation of 20,000 gestures of striking through. For me, these additions to the painting were a personal definition of the end of panel painting. Parallel to this, I practised the transition from the brush-stroke, a small, two-dimensional gestural act, to gesture *in natura*". The following year, 1973, Rainer wrote that he pursued his artistic work primarily as *autocommunication*. "Just as a dream, for instance, continues in deep sleep, overpainting is the development of this autocommunication in silence – a communicable silence, for otherwise people wouldn't rush to snatch particularly those pictures which I make through pure autocommunication, and with which I hope one day to achieve the expression of a total calm – that of deep sleep or prenatal cosy security or eternal peace, or whatever you like to call it. The more extensively the picture is covered, the harder is each step towards obscuring it completely."

"The impressive thing about Rainer is how unconventional, and above all how quickly he covers the scope of what is possible in painting, and reorganises it for himself alongside local tradition and connection with the international Modern Movement, anti-academicism and outsiderhood, pictorial symbol and the act of painting, conceptualisation and phenomenology, surrealism and abstraction." (Hans-Jürgen Hafner, 2016).

The exhibition *Arnulf Rainer, Early Works 1950-60* provides an impressive insight into the artist's early work, in which the field of tension between Surrealism, American minimalism, Abstract expressionism and European *informel* reaches a climax. Rainer's contemporaneity with Hans Hartung, Clyfford Still, Barnett Newman and Willem de Kooning, together with his role as precursor of artists such as Blinky Palermo, Günther Förg, Imi Knoebel and many more, becomes manifest here.

Arnulf Rainer was born in Baden near Vienna in 1929. He lives and works in Vienna, Upper Austria and Lower Bavaria, and on Tenerife.