

Fig. 1 Taris, 2002, G 114, from the series "Line", embossed printing on hand made paper

Win Labuda

Line, Surface, Space and Time

My Artistic Work - a Review

Series Line

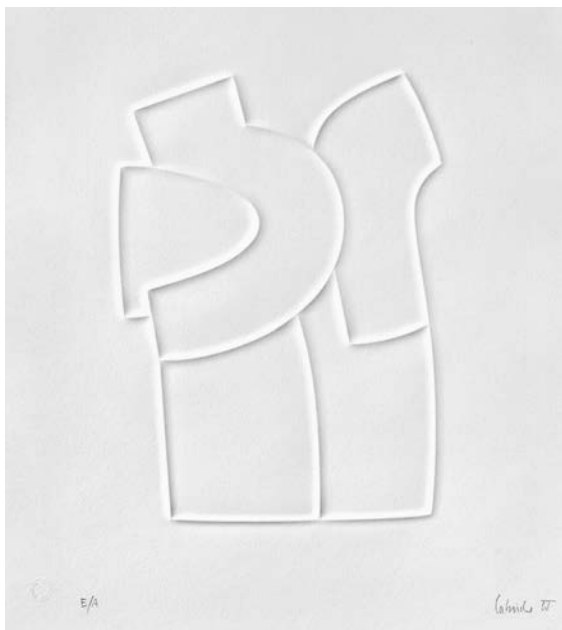


Fig. 2 Karad, 2002, G 076, from the series "Line", embossed printing on hand made paper

Series Surface

This part of my graphic works, the "lineatures" is comprised of embossed prints. Originally they were two-dimensional pictures done in pencil. At first look they appear to be creations of the mind, of fleeting nature, quasi non-Euclidian geometries. They should be seen as fragments of artful architectures, carefully arranged after having fallen down and recombined to emblematic buildings and formations. In their new form they may serve as refuge for noble thoughts and feelings. They are metaphors of the words of Schiller: The old is crumbling down – the times are changing, /And from the ruins blooms a fairer life. The pictures of childhood appear in them, a visit to Dresden in 1948, Germany's demolished cathedrals with their Gothic fragments strewn on the ground, which now in my subconscious replicate their forms – the clearing of the rubble in the deserts of ruins of the postwar years, the hope for a new life– thus, they embody at the same time healing and hopeful confidence which has become form. I have been drawing them for a quarter of a century in small, black books. Sometimes I forget it for a time, and then the forms flow easily from my hand once again, and the drawing becomes a reflection of my state of mind. In the course of time the lineatures have changed: the fragmentary aspect has occasionally given way to an archaic or even playful form. They have gladly acquiesced to the force of the embossing into the porous white rag paper. Here they appear as embossed prints, stroked by light, in the dignity of their immaculate existence.

Essentially my bas-reliefs are metamorphoses which have evolved out of the lineatures. The contours are given, and the contoured surfaces appear in fine nuances of white. My first creative impulse for the works of this series was always a pencil drawing. However, until now the lineatures have not always been willing to follow the temptation to give them a sculptural dimension. In Tokyo in 1990 my reliefs in matte white were exhibited in such a way allowing us to experience time as the subtle grey of the shadow wandering with the position of the sun. But at that time I had given these reliefs a frame which set an unfortunate boundary to the correspondence of the forms with their surrounding space.

After a hiatus of about 20 years in which I did not work with reliefs, I took up this work again in a rather geometric form. It is less playful and thus represents the contrast of the strictness of my later years to the forms I invented in my middle years. Moreover, I have tried to produce a homogeneity between the relief works and the embossed prints which allows the series to correspond harmoniously to each other. The light conditions of the surroundings are what give both series their effect. The owner of such a work is always challenged to find a place to hang it which corresponds to his notion of the best effect of the work. However, the works never remain the same in daylight. They are as alive as the fall of the light which awakens them to life.

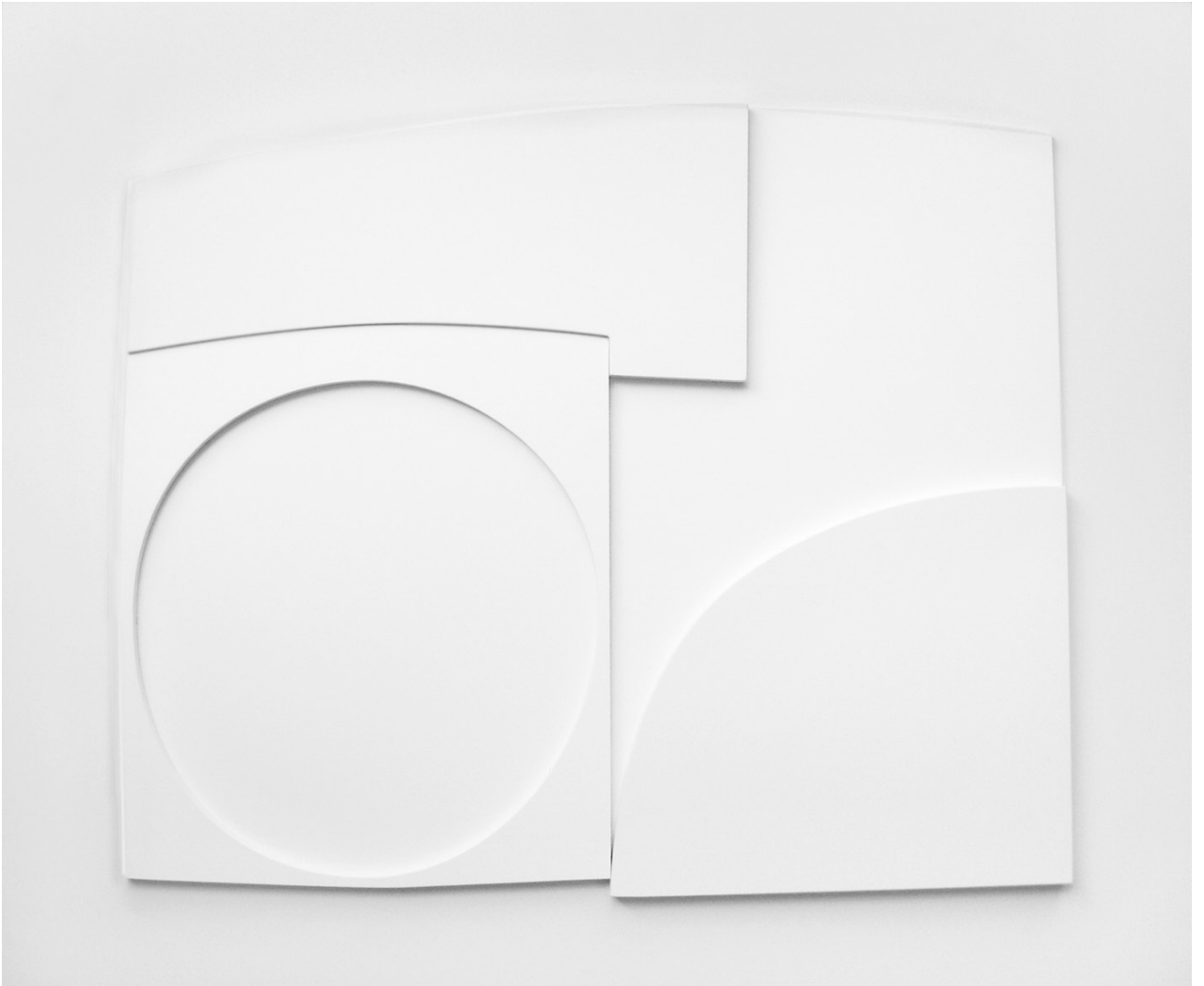


Fig. 3 *Relief 8*, RE 008, from the series "Surface"



Fig. 4 *Time Tunnel III*, 2001, S 003, from the series "Space", Bronze (Foundry Hermann Noack, Berlin)

Series Space

In 1998 I turned to sculpture for the first time. Here, the time tunnel dominates the intellectual orientation, and until now I have not taken any other paths with respect to sculpture, if one disregards the reliefs I made during the eighties. The possibilities of exploring this theme by designing different variants of the time tunnel, however, have not yet even come close to being exhausted. There is still considerable space here for creating something new.

I feel a very close affinity to sculpture. For decades I have been studying the work of Eduardo Chillida. Together with my wife Yuko I visited him in San Sebastian and sought his friendship. As to my affinity to material, I am attracted equally to bronze and steel. The mere arduousness of the intellectual (and material) interaction with such masses of steel or concrete as Chillida was able to achieve keeps causing me to shy inwardly away from such heroic acts of coping with the material. Apart from Chillida, the work of Henry Moore has impressed me for several decades and, incidentally, also Hermann Noack and the wonderful craftsmen of his fine art foundry in Berlin, who cast most of these masterpieces of sculpture in bronze.

Due to their three-dimensionality, it is often easier to endow sculptures and objects with the content of contemporary art in the context of poetic transformation and concretisation than it is to do so with paintings or graphic prints. This is especially true when thoughts, customs or myths have had an influence in creating the form. Thus, I showed my time tunnel to Frank-Thomas Gaulin and several friends at the Art Multiple exhibition in Düsseldorf in 1998. The time tunnel consists of a cube made of wood, metal or stone that has been hollowed out on the inside, giving it the form of a hollowed cube. The front side of the cube has equidistantly arranged, vertically positioned elongated slots. A piece of paper that has been rolled, carefully folded and tied with a hemp string is stuck into one (or more) of these slots. The time tunnel exhibited in Düsseldorf was made of beech wood and painted red on the four outer sides. Only the two surfaces that allow a look through the tunnel show the untreated material wood. With this choice of using colour, a certain tension occurs between the untreated material at the ends and the smooth coloured surfaces. Thus the impression is conveyed that the time tunnel is a segment, i.e. only a part, extracted from a much longer, perhaps infinitely long tunnel.

In July 2001, my Time Tunnel III was rendered in dark bronze by the art foundry Noack in Berlin, cast with loving care by master hand. The intellectual background of the time tunnel is comprised of old customs accompanied by faith, e.g. the Jewish custom to put small slips of paper in the crevices of the Wailing Wall with prayers, thoughts, justifications or even messages for those no longer living among us. Tibetan prayer



Fig. 5 *Time Tunnel II*, 2000, S 002, from the series "Space", beech wood

Series Time

banners also led me to the conception of the form of the time tunnel. These cult objects, called dar-chog in the Tibetan language and made out of white or multi-coloured print fabric, are to be found at prominent crossroads, on mountain peaks and roofs of houses and trees in Tibet. Even in the bleakness of the barren mountain landscape, poles have been hammered into the ground on which prayer banners have been fastened. The banners have prayers written or printed on them. In the Tibetans' imagination, these prayers will be carried away with the wind into eternity, away to the gods. In my imagination the continuum time is moving through my time tunnel and onward. A piece of paper inserted in one of the elongated slots contains my entreaty for the fulfilment of the fundamental concerns of humanity, in encrypted graphic form: victory over hunger, victory over fanaticism and the right to be heard and the right of dissenters to express their opinion in a non-violent way. My supplications will be carried away by time, into the cathedral of eternity, the space in which time no longer progresses, but where the treasured thoughts of humanity may repose and continue to have effect in intense silence.

With the use of numbers came the principal turning point in human history, which divides archaic thinking from scientific thinking. The series Scales of Time is oriented on the process of making an analogue occurrence such as time undergo a digital division, making it describable by numbers and therefore divisible, countable, comparable and thus calculable. The process is the basis and origin of all of the sciences. With my scale pictures, I have attempted to make this decisive process – perhaps the most decisive process of all for human history – accessible to the world of pictures. I have published time scales which transcend the pictorial field as reliefs and as graphic prints.



Fig. 6 *Time Scale 8*, 1998, ZS 008, from the series "Time", woodcut

A scale is a serially constructed graphic element that consists of repetitive dividing lines. On the underlying surface on which the scale is situated due to its intended use, beginning and end lines usually mark it as a graphic unit. However, if the dividing lines are arranged on the corresponding underlying surface in a way giving the impression that the surface is only a segment of a larger entity, the fiction is created that the scale emerges from endless time and is continuing on into endlessness. Here the beholder completes a part of the artistic work by placing the pictorial content perceived in his mind outside of the pictorial field. As time progresses, time scales serve as custodians for the passage from being to non-being. Therein lies their unique poetry.

Impulse forms, like the time scales, characterise a recurring course of events. However, they differ from time scales in that they make a qualitative statement in contrast to the quantitative statement of the time scales.

About working on extensive cycles

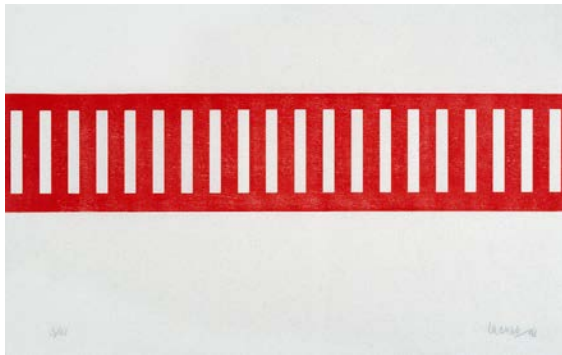


Fig. 7 *Time Scale 4*, 1998, ZS 004, from the series "Time", woodcut

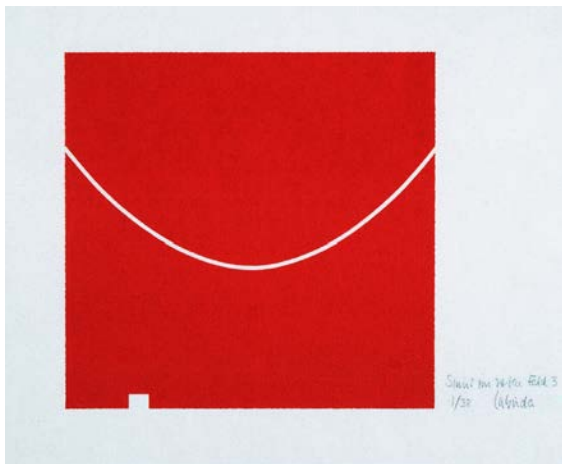


Fig. 8 *Time Scale 7*, 1998, ZS 007, from the series "Time", woodcut

Working on a picture or sculpture cycle differs quite considerably from working on an individual work of art. Cycles require, in advance, lengthier intellectual reflection on and consideration of a certain theme and its possible variations. To a certain extent, the cycle must be completed before it is published and each individual work must be planned in advance as to how it fits into the cycle. This is normally aided by a canon of forms with high recognisability.

In my cycles, however, I have quite consciously foregone the tighter framework which tends to accompany a restricted canon of forms. That was not difficult, because in a photographic cycle the recognisability of the artistic style of a particular photographer is not given to the same extent as in painting. Exceptions are perhaps the oeuvres of several well-known photographers.

I like using different iconographies, hiding behind different masks, to put forth my artistic concerns. To me the essential thing is not the common canon of forms, but what is common in the artistic statement of my different works. The same applies to graphic works and sculptures. I do not want people to say: "Look, that is by Labuda, he always photographs sea landscapes". Working in varied iconographies frees me from the superficiality of the diversion-seeking viewer. To a certain extent, the viewer must work his way into my pictures if he wants to regard them with benefit. And when he has looked carefully at several series – then and only then will individual works appear to him as part of the whole.

Eduardo Chillida, the great master of abstract European sculpture, once told me, "Ultimately, my whole work is a cycle and is about the struggle for space." I will perhaps not reach Chillida's artistic dimension, but to be close to him in an imaginary sense after his death I would like to say: "Ultimately, my whole work is a cycle and is about the struggle for time."

Working on several cycles and series at the same time allows me to light-heartedly pursue the inspiration of the moment. There is always a series in which a particular creative impulse can fit. In the summer months my camera equipment stands ready to capture the fine nuances of light and shadow on film. In the winter months, when it is dark, foggy and dreary here in the north, I work in my studio completing my cycles of graphic prints. This way of working is in beautiful harmony with the cycles of nature.

Besides the cycles *Journey to the Beginning of Time and Line*, *Surface*, *Space and Time* I have created works in the course of the years that cannot be directly assigned to the time theme and are therefore not discussed here. The series *Graphis Varia* contains all the graphic works I created simply for the joy of working and which cannot be assigned to a particular the-

matic area. They were often created while trying out a new technique of printing or while testing a printing machine as to its suitability. They comprise, for instance, the serigraphs of the series *Kodenmacho*, which I created for my exhibition in Tokyo in 1990. In addition, they include etchings, serigraphs and embossed prints that I have given my friends over the course of decades. Last but not least, I would like to mention the series *Photo Varia*. It contains photographs I took without having to be as disciplined as is necessary when working on a cycle of photographs. Some are from the area of sculpture photography which I especially cherish, even if they perhaps do not belong to the category of "photo art", because the art of sculpture is already its origin.

Chronology of my work

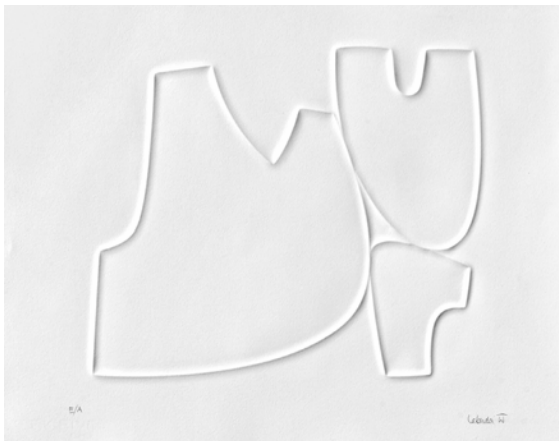


Fig. 9 *Dirlin*, 2002, G 158, from the series "Line", embossed printing on hand made paper

Although I originally wanted to become a metal sculptor and took classes in construction drawing during a metallurgy apprenticeship between 1954 and 1957 and also learned how to forge and weld, I began my artistic career in 1956 not as a sculptor but as a photographer. Photographic series comprise the greater part of my existing artistic work. If I were allowed to be active in only one genre of artistic work, I would choose photography – back then and today as well. It was not until 1972 that I also started working graphically. My first graphic works were screen prints made from photographs. Woodcuts, etchings and offset lithographs followed. In 2000 my old love of metal came to the fore and I made my first bronze. The colourful metamorphoses were created in the new millennium. The same applies to the photographic series *Home of the Gods* and *Beginning of Time*.

In 1998, together with the Lübeck gallery owner Frank-Thomas Gaulin, I was able to show my first works with the theme of the scale pictures. That was for the graphic exhibition *Art Multiple* in Düsseldorf. There I also showed several friends my first time tunnel. The technical execution was still not yet perfect. However, the second time tunnel – which now in 1999 was improved in its execution according to Gaulin's suggestions, attracted the interest of several collectors.

The aim of my more recent photographic work is to create small-format collector photographs in sheet formats ranging from about 30 x 30 cm to 50 x 60 cm and, in addition, large-format pictures sized 110 x 130 cm or 110 x 110 cm and larger from edge to edge. Moreover, I would very much like to publish books of photographs and thus make what I have created up to now accessible to a larger number of people.

Conclusion

In this essay I have briefly outlined 50 years of artistic work. Devoting myself to several complementary fields has always been more important to me than making an artistic mark in the sense of a unique, distinctive iconography. However, I am of course pleased when an occasional beholder recognises

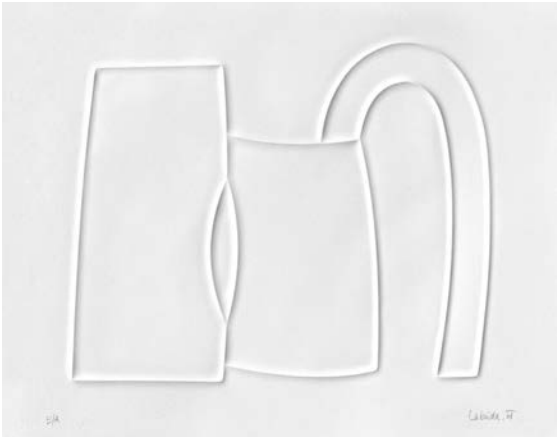


Fig. 10 *Hagewik*, 2002, G 146, from the series "Line", embossed printing on hand made paper

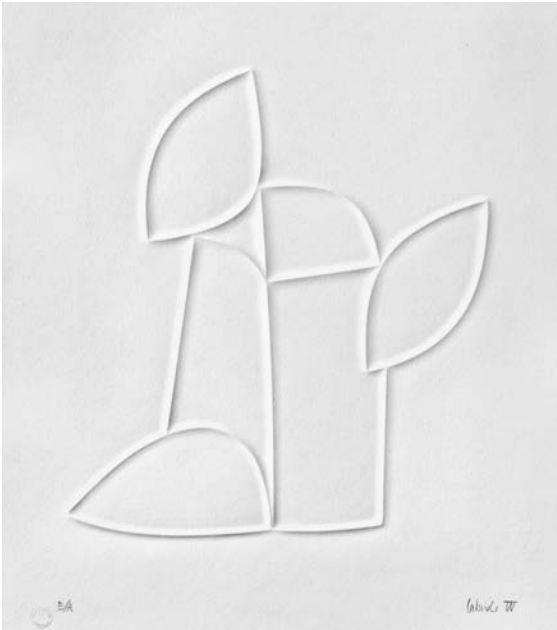


Fig. 11 *Bonvar*, 2002, G 113, from the series "Line", embossed printing on hand made paper

the common thread running through my work: the search for artistic expression of the phenomenon "time" and the effects on our existence connected with it. Most interesting for me in this context are the Stone Age architectures and their outlasting every human notion of time. Although the idea that was once behind the erection of the structures has largely fallen into oblivion, they are today again a centre for celebrating religious rites. These are certainly not identical to the ones that perhaps – we do not know – took place in their vicinity 6000 years ago. Nevertheless, more than 800,000 people visit the Stonehenge monument in England every year and alone 20,000 people come just to the solstice celebration.

The preoccupation with this theme again and again leads us to the realisation that time – in contrast to space – cannot be multiplied. The extension of time beyond our given lifetime is only possible through our works, and even then only as long as our works are needed by succeeding generations.

Translation: Carol Oberschmidt