



**Fig. 1** *Time Scale 2*, 1998, woodcut

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## **Moment and Duration in the Art of Win Labuda**

*An Exposition by Nadja Labuda*

1998



Fig. 2 *Time Scale 1*, 1998, woodcut

*Time is one of the essential aspects of human creation. The finiteness of each one of us is the crux of every religion and philosophy that has been conceived by mankind. And the struggle against this finiteness over the centuries led to the most varying outcomes. Inherent in the feminine principle is the notion that by giving birth to a child one will enter into eternity. In contrast to that is the masculine principle in which one may overcome finiteness through intellectual offspring, if the idea or the work achieves immortality. This essay is a daughter's attempt to come to terms with the intellectual and spiritual progeny of her father and thus to bridge the gap between the feminine and the masculine principle and, at the same time, between work and reality.*

The aspect of time as a represented continuum came to art much later than to literature or to the sciences. This can be explained by the nonmateriality of time. Time cannot be represented as an entity, but merely as a progression of separate scenes. This kind of representation was used inter alia by the ancient Greeks in the metopes and friezes of temples in order to portray a battle. (Parthenon Temple, Acropolis, Athen, begun 449 BC)

The different scenes were rendered in their chronological order in the upper part of the temple in separate rectangular fields. It was not in the least the Greeks' intention to represent time; on the contrary they were intent on depicting the heroic deeds of a warrior. This manner of representation was retained in the Middle Ages.

Worthy of mention in this context are the Books of Hours of the Duke of Berry, at the end of the 14th century. These books, in which prayers for the times of day were preserved, contain richly detailed calendar pictures and representations of the lives of the saints. Also in this case, the saints' lives are depicted in a historical sequence of separate scenes. Many centuries were yet to pass before the representation of actual time or the phenomenon of change took place.

I see the beginning of this particular manner of representation in the serial works of Monet at the end of the 19th century. Important, however, is not only the aspect of time, but also the serial representation of pictorial content. At that time this concept was a novelty that was met partly with scepticism and partly with enthusiasm. At the beginning of Monet's serial works are the Haystacks at Giverny, 1885, 65x81 cm, private collection, which were painted at different times of day. After a visit at Monet's exhibition in May 1891, the Dutch art critic Byvanck wrote about the bewilderment he at first felt in seeing the repetition of a continually recurring motif. But with the central motif Haystacks he succeeded in comprehending the separate pictures as an ensemble: "They take on their full

significance first through the comparison and the sequence within the entire series." The Haystacks series was followed by further serial works such as the poplar and the cathedral series. Especially the latter drew much attention. Prophetic significance was ascribed to Georges Clemenceau's remarks in the essay *La Justice* regarding this. In the chapter *Revolution des Cathedrales* he postulates the series to be a hymn to material existence. In his opinion, the significance of the cathedral was that it was a central point on which the painter could belay the material changes, "the continual evolving of light in time." Parallel to this cognition, cinematography and photography from the same period demonstrate the technical possibilities of capturing the moment within the duration of an instant.

### On serialism in art

As mentioned before, the beginnings are to be found with Monet.

An important contribution to serialism is the development of duplication mechanisms.

The series is one of the forms of expression of modern art.

The structural laws of classical constructivism originated from Monet's cyclical variation, the dialectical interlocking of repetition and variation, uniformity and change. These basic motifs were formalised by the constructivists and set apart from what elicited the perception:

- Certain basic patterns now fulfill the function of constants; certain elementary signs fulfill those of variables. With Mondrian, for example, the right-angled grid is the constant; the actual painted beams and colour fields are the variables.
- The pictures become phases of variation chains.
- According to Werner Hofmann's theory, serialism dates back to the "ars combinatoria" of the Middle Ages.
- Another conceptual root is the geometrical system of thought, which comprehends itself as being world-creative (An example is Ph. O. Runge's "First Figure of Creation").
- The preliminary end is computer graphics (an example is G. Nees).



Fig. 3 *Time Scale 3*, 1998, woodcut

Max Bill, Josef Albers and Richard Paul Lohse are pioneers of the mathematical, geometrical abstraction with the series as chain of combinatorics. Minimalism and post-painting abstraction integrated serialism into art, in the endeavour to negate the gestural in the creative act.



**Fig. 4** *Old Door*, 2001, F 144 from the series "Pictures and Signs"

- The series reduces the image metonymically to the attribute of one of its parts.
- The serial principle takes the place of the composition in the endeavour to leave aside all irrational elements.
- The series must therefore not be comprehended exclusively as progression in the sense of further development.

Serialism becomes an immanent element in Concept Art:

- the creative act of Concept Art is the planning;
- the art develops in the sense of a dematerialisation;
- Concept Art should be transferrable by telephone.

In Pop Art serialism becomes the symbol for the ubiquitousness of consume icons:

- the reversibility of the production process in Pop Art excludes the notion of uniqueness or unrepeatability to the serial principle in the sense of changeability. Added to this is the concept of revocation.

Further examples for the gradual change of an object are Op Art and kinetic art.

### On serialism and the notion of time in the works of Win Labuda



**Fig. 5** *Hommage to Barnett Newman I*, 1984, F 012 from the series "Pictures and Signs"

- Moments are recorded that depict both the past and the present.
- The present becomes the past in the instant the photograph is taken.
- The viewfinder-image-like quality of the photos refers to a larger (architectural) context (F 012).
- The margins of the photos are not identical with the borders of the motifs.
- A wavy line drawn on the wall depicts the endlessness of time in the moment of the instant.
- The traces of a no longer existent enamel sign on a wall bear witness to an artistic symbiosis of present and past (F 023).
- The flat surface is accentuated; depth, i.e. three dimensionality is avoided.
- Structural attributes of the wall are to be understood as products of time (F 144).



**Fig. 6** *Shadows of Time*, 1985, F 023, from the series "Pictures and Signs"

- There are influences of Hans Arp, Ben Nicholson, Frank Stella and Eduardo Chillida.
- Fragments of destroyed architecture are pieced back together to new figurations in the sense of a healing process.
- The drawings always remain committed to the surface and never include the spatial plane. With the reliefs and the embossed prints (G 117), this is primarily achieved through their own monochromism.
- An important variant are the colour prints, in which two identical motifs are placed next to each other (G 039). For each motif, however, the aim is to find a subtle differentiated colour. Thus here, the element of time is accentuated by the colour change and to a lesser degree by the form.
- The differences in the colours reflect different times of day, seasons or states of mind.
- Seemingly human figures are integrated into the lines and are part of the healing and integration process.
- The principle of humanity dominates, despite the high degree of abstraction.
- Time scales and wave pictures refer in a direct way to time and give the formalistic undefined phenomenon an artistic name, which is very much oriented toward geometry and the sciences. These works are the culmination of the preoccupation of the artist with the phenomenon "time".
- Wave surfaces, wavy lines running in opposite directions, electrocardiograms, different time intervals, event and time; impulse sequences (negative and positive) are depicted. Time as a continuum is partly negated and brought into a sequence that is felt subjectively. Compressions within a depicted time sequence occur, nonlinear scales are contrasted with the linear time scale in the same work.
- The sine wave is considered to be the symbol for the continuum and as evidence for the affinity of the artist to science.
- Event sequences are depicted by collating different motifs.
- In some depictions colour moves to the background. Occasionally colour is used, however, to depict a chronological sequence chromatically (parallel vertical stripes).
- A concept that is humanly felt, which is inseparably united

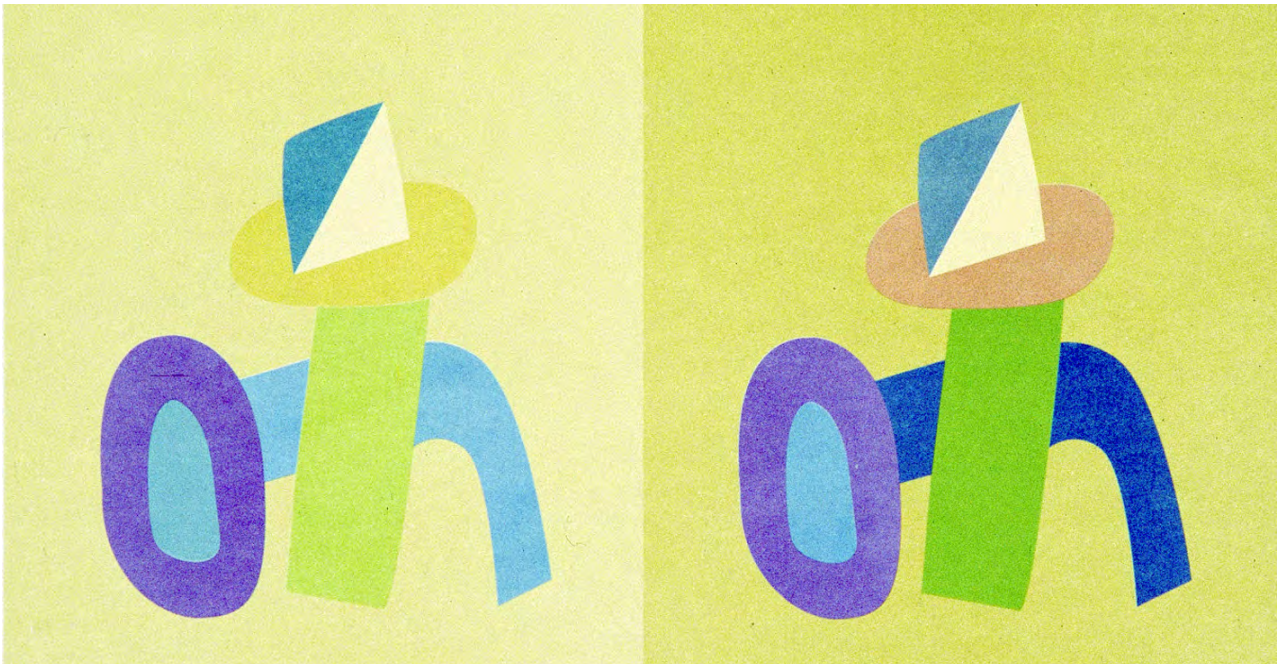


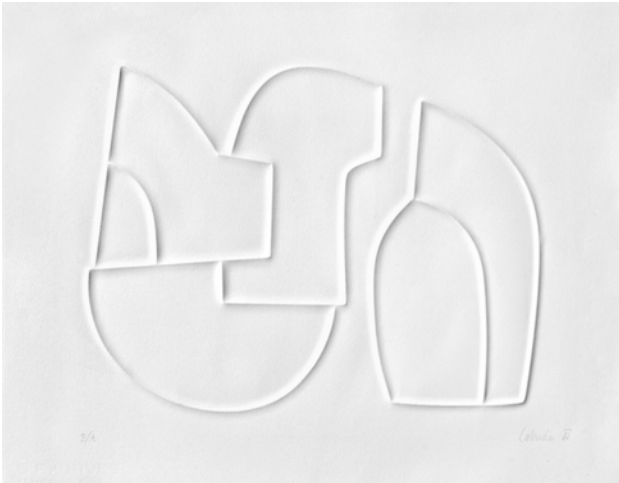
Fig. 7 *Siblings I*, 1992, G 039, offset lithograph of five plates

with the artist, i.e. it is not a matter of Concept Art in the literal sense.

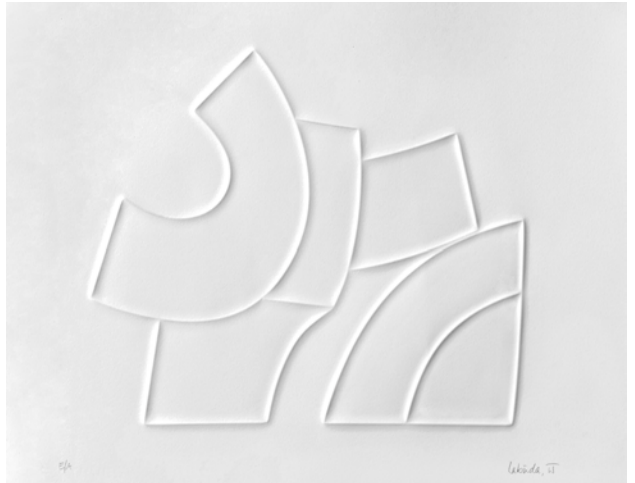
## Conclusion

My father's art is in fact based on a certain concept, but the concept alone does not embody the work as it does in Concept Art. To be sure, in the time pictures an interaction between viewer and object is aimed for, and only the execution of the concept on a surface can make this interaction possible. Thus, formally seen, my father stands close to Minimal Art, but intention, expression and also the differentiated and characteristic choice of colour go far beyond the "non-relationality" of minimalism. Because for him the line drawn on the paper means much more than the stroke itself, namely making visible the abstract concept of time, one may make the assertion that for him the time scale is the work-defining symbol for time. Here, of course, formal means are reduced to a minimum, but nevertheless making visible time and time events has always been an immanent element of my father's oeuvre. His work must therefore be understood as art that has taken the step past the minimally required referencelessness and has restored content and humanity to form.

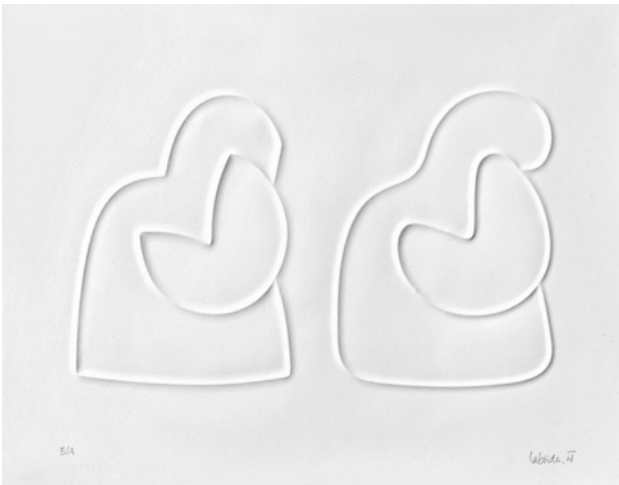
Translation: Carol Oberschmidt



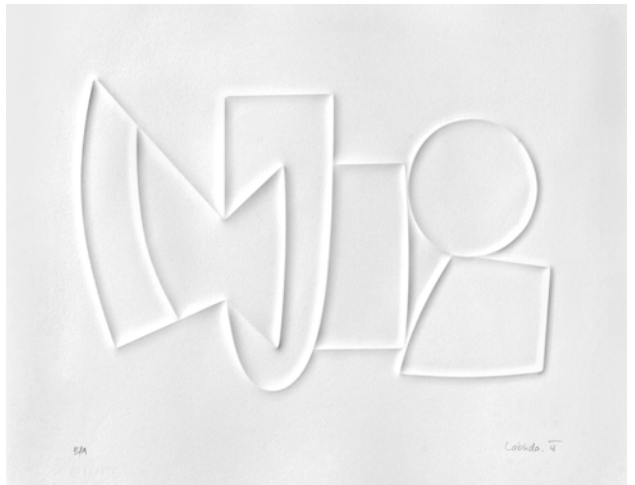
**Fig. 8** *Lurak*, 2002, G 120 from the series "The Line", embossed printing on hand made paper



**Fig. 9** *Mytram*, 2002, G 139 from the series "The Line", embossed printing on hand made paper



**Fig. 10** *Halar*, 2002, G 148 from the series "The Line", embossed printing on hand made paper



**Fig. 11** *Asler*, 2002, G 117 from the series "The Line", embossed printing on hand made paper