

ORIOLE

LUDGER GERDES
CURATED BY MATTHEW HANSON
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Neuer Wall 72 20354 Hamburg

PRESS RELEASE

German artist Ludger Gerdes (Lastrup, 1954 – Dülem, 2008) was a multifaceted practitioner: a painter, sculptor and photographer as much as a writer and theoretician. He turned to these mediums episodically to develop his enduring aesthetic and philosophical inquiry into the possibilities of artistic autonomy in the public sphere.

While studying at the Düsseldorfer Akademie in the early 1980s, Gerdes befriended a group of artists who shared an interest in sculpture, architecture and model-making. The group, known as the ‘Düsseldorfer Modellbauer’, included Thomas Schütte, Reinhard Mucha, Wolfgang Luy and Harald Klingelhöller. Gerdes was pivotal in establishing their intellectual orientation, writing extensively about their work in the context of utopian political philosophy, aesthetics and architecture.

For Gerdes, the model was not just a question of scale but a wellspring of critical thinking. His idea of a *Denkmodell* (model of thought) offered a framework for making art in the form of a sketch, plan or test; a working hypothesis that could be elaborated “sometimes seriously, sometimes ironically” in numerous ways, visually and sculpturally.

Gerdes’ interest in a syncretic correspondence between arts forms was matched by his interest in cultural paradigms in which art was used to unify public life. “I had this idea that we could read art works of the past not in terms of style but interns of different methods. Styles vanish, methods don’t.”¹ Working under this rubric, he incorporated a range of historical tropes, design languages and aesthetic motifs into his work, using them to forge narrative paths from, say, the open-plan architecture of Stonehenge to the Barcelona Pavilion, from mediaeval European fortifications to 18th Century English Gardens, from the Tuscan columns of Ancient Roman structures to the town halls, urban squares and car parks that surrounded him.

This exhibition brings together sculptures and rarely seen paintings that Gerdes made in the 1980s, together with one of the artist’s most ambitious works of the 1990s, the photography series *Public Space – Private View*; a study of urban and rural environments that considers the role of art beyond the institutions and audiences that typically structure it.

Throughout his career, Ludger Gerdes participated in major national and international public art projects including documenta 7, 1982, Jenisch-Park Skulptur 1986, Skulptur Projekte Münster 1987 and Floriade, Zoetermeer, 1992. He was the recipient of the Ars-Viva Kulturkreis der deutschen Wirtschaft, 1986, and the Sprengel Prize for Fine Arts, Hannover, 1994. Ludger Gerdes passed away in a car accident on October 17, 2008. A number of posthumous projects, including the construction of a mural in Kiel, testify to the lasting impact and appreciation of the artist and the oeuvre he has left behind.

1 Ludger Gerdes, Trevor Gould: *Ludger Gerdes. An Interview by Trevor Gould*. In: *Parachute*. Nr. 47, 1987, p. 15.