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Letter from BERLIN: FRANK BADUR, Why Pattern?

By David Rhodes
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Frank Badur has been part of the Berlin scene from the time he studied here, between 1963 and 1969. He became a professor at the University of Art in 1985, and, like many other German artists who maintain successful international careers, he has continued to teach. This has resulted in a certain continuity in German art, which makes it less subject to the vagaries of fashion that affect places like London so damagingly. His influence on many younger artists, such as Tim Stapel, Rebecca Michaelis, and Katinka Pilscheur, who are sustaining an interest in abstraction, is becoming more evident. At fruehsorge contemporary drawings, a gallery dedicated exclusively to drawing, Frank Badur is exhibiting two groups of works on paper; concurrently, he is presenting new paintings at Hammish Morrison Galerie and an edition of prints at Galerie Jordan Seydoux, both also in Berlin.

Known as something of a Minimalist who works through series of abstractions, **Badur** makes meditative paintings, drawings, and prints that have a particularity and at times an oddness that save them from being otherwise generic. In his drawings and prints, the line is often both lyrical and austere, and his deployment of color is intense and unexpected, sometimes suggesting partial views of unspecific objects. It is very much the case in northern Europe—especially in Germany, Switzerland, and Scandinavia—that a tradition continues of meditative minimalism installed in architectural settings.



Holocaust Memorial (2005).
Photo copyright Frank Badur.

This coexistence of work and site emphasizes an awareness of physical being and spatial experience.



Eisenman Grid Drawing (2009)

The centerpiece of the fruehsorge exhibition is a cycle of drawings called “Reflections on the Eisenman Grid” from earlier this year. It consists of 24 small-scale drawings, presented in close proximity to each other on one wall, in four rows of six. The reference is to Peter Eisenman’s “Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe,” located close to Berlin’s Brandenburg Gate. Badur’s reaction to this extraordinarily charged site is modest and personal. It’s commendable that he has absolutely no desire to exploit the subject as a way of injecting meaning into a work that is otherwise potentially neutral in its formal exegesis. The visual relationship between the drawing’s linear grids and blocks of pale, muted color, and the monument’s tiled pathways and concrete stelae is clear and straightforward. Drawing here acts as mental note: a topographic memory and, as the title of the piece states, a reflection.

The use of the grid, a starting point in eliminating subjectivity as well as a standard of compositional relativity, is subtly undermined through small idiosyncrasies and acts of imprecision. The choices made are not, within this context, arbitrary: they are personal, and rational, allowing the deviation within the repetition to operate much like the sounds in a Morton Feldman composition. Feldman talked about how repetition, after a certain duration, can achieve a feeling of scale: it is no longer simply a movement from one point to another. This has much to do with memory and the temporal experience of the works, whether listening or looking.

Sol LeWitt wrote in 1966, “The serial artist does not attempt to produce a beautiful or mysterious object but functions merely as a clerk cataloguing the results of the premise.”

This describes a strategy that relieves the artist of subjectivity, yet Eisenman and Badur have each produced works that gain poignancy precisely from their repetitions and seriality. In the hands of administrators of mass murder, repetitive methodologies were manifested in barely conceivable acts of organized evil. There is no need for symbolism; the power of these works is in their openness to elements beyond the power of description.

In Greek tragedy, the Chorus repeated the key elements of a story to keep them in the mind of the audience; the repetitions here acknowledge the limits, or lack of them, of understanding and of summation.