

Bernhard Schreiner
VOIDs

*Sound is a present absence; silence is an absent present.
Or perhaps the reverse is better: sound is an absent presence; silence is a present absence?
In this sense, sound is a sinister resonance —*

This quote from David Toop's *Sinister Resonance – The Mediumship of the Listener* (Continuum, 2010) has always been a focal point for Bernhard Schreiner's work, as it shows strikingly how (in)tangible, phantom-like and almost eerie the phenomenon of sound can be. In Schreiner's work until now, sound plays a prominent role in the form of installations actually producing sound or as a motif in other media, such as photography.

For the artist's current fourth exhibition in the spaces of the Kai Middendorff Galerie, sound would seem at first not to be a theme. The show, titled *VOIDs*, presents in the main gallery fifty-four flat, square objects that are vaguely reminiscent of tiles, facing the floor and placed in a uniform geometric grid. However, they are not identical enough in their arrangement to be seen as ghosts of minimalism, since they have various deformed edges and recesses of different heights, showing different shades of colour and surface structures. The uniformity of their mass, their repetition in rows is thwarted by the individual assertion of the different elements.

The title of the work, *Materialized blank (54 units)*, suggests that something has materialised, possibly a void or emptiness. The plates are made from cast concrete, their form deriving from empty pizza boxes from a pizzeria next to Schreiner's studio that served as moulds. These boxes once contained pizzas that were eaten by the artist, studio colleagues or visitors. The traces and structures left in the surfaces of these objects reveal not only that each pizza has its own, unpredictable, random marks imprinted in the cartons, but also that Schreiner has left his, in the selection of always disparate concrete mixtures, different types of cement and aggregates, added pigments and diversely treated (oiled, waxed, etc.), or completely untreated surfaces.

The results are volumes: physical, three-dimensional objects that take up space and possess weight. Now they displace, in this exhibition, a (gallery) space that was once empty before they came into being, the empty space of unlike, and yet supposedly identical, cardboard boxes. In harmony with the aforementioned quote on absence and presence of sound and silence, one could say that Schreiner has tried to give the sound-like, ungraspable, indiscernible void a form, or rather, he has tried to replace it with something dissimilarly heavy, as air, in order to make them tangible. This is a hopeless attempt, since void is absent and cannot be represented or held onto firmly, much like sound and silence. Yet there is something before us on the gallery floor – a resonance of a former emptiness, perhaps.

Another association that arises in this work, is that of a diary – albeit a very peculiar one, which records the emptiness inside some objects over a one year period of time, while simultaneously dealing with the documentation of a specific material: concrete.

The latter consists of several on-going works in paper and canvas. The six-part series, *Debris (indeterminacy)*, in the entrance area of the exhibition, was created by the immersion of papers in a concrete mixture that, after drying, produced two different conditions. Here, part of the concrete mix penetrated the paper, while another formed a crust on the surface of the paper that could be partially removed by lightly tapping it. The spalled residual crusts are located, along with their former carriers, in object frames. There is no guarantee that the works will retain their current state. As the title suggests, this is quite the contrary, since destruction and chance – change occurring by itself or due to external influences – are important aspects to these works, as well as the space inside the object frame, whereby volumes similar to pizza boxes are on view.

The work, *Betwixt (and between)*, already in its title alludes to that which can be applied to all works on display: the question of the perception of surface and space and their counterparts, or rather the positive/negative problem, or the condition between these two antagonists. *Betwixt (and between)* seems to embody a threshold or a transition state in several ways: Is this still a paper work or a concrete work, an object, a relief or painting after all? Is there a fore- and background and are there areas that are considered positive or negative?

There appear to be similar considerations at play in *Chant (bone)* and *Edge (brain)*. Here again, concrete and a kind of cement slurry are utilised, however, this time acrylic also finds its way onto the canvas – the work thus appearing closer to aspects of painting perhaps than the others exhibited. These two works refer specifically to a peculiarity in the rear area of the gallery, a sort of wedge, which protrudes from the wall in the space and seems to be almost like a leftover of an artwork. This feature was reduced in its precise dimensions to two dimensions, and the resulting construct was placed to the side as an architectural starting point. In fact, here it does not concern, as is always the case in painting, a purely two-dimensional representation: the solid wedge, in its three-dimensionality, recalls that even these relatively flat works displace space and are to be regarded as objects.

A sound work is further still perceived in Schreiner's exhibition, although it carries no title, and naturally cannot be seen (and is not manifested by output devices, such as speakers in the room). Nevertheless, the sound also tries to hide itself acoustically, while still occupying space, an acoustic space, which mixes with the physical space and, in so doing, alters it. This change refers to a third level. We are not certain if this level is the threshold referred to between two states or conditions, or whether it is obvious that from these two mixed elements, a further positive is created.

David Toop, whose quote is included at the outset of this text, has the last word:

If Murch is right, then sound without apparent source will always return us at some unconscious level to our pre-birth state, but with the added anxiety of awareness, of knowing that sounds should have a cause. If they lack a cause, then our need is to invent one.

Exhibited works

Debris (indeterminacy) I II III IV V VI

Materialized blank (54 units)

Betwixt (and between)

Cant (bone)

Edge (brain)

Materialized blank (4 units)

Borderland (#1 - #7)