

Hella Berent

*Anteroom BLUE WITH MIRROR*

Raketenstation / Stiftung Insel Hombroich

I have the pleasure to introduce my colleague Hella Berent and to open her exhibition at the *Field Institute Hombroich* with this welcoming address.

Hella Berent is a phenomenon. She makes an appearance and attracts attention through her keen openness and self-confident presence. I got to know Hella Berent and her work in the late 1980s. Our studios were situated in the same district of Cologne, around Ebertplatz, where she still lives and from where she still initiates her international work/study residences and exhibition projects. In this pursuit, her artistic research in the past fifteen years has led her predominantly south and southeastward into the Orient...

As my insight into Berent's *WORKS* deepened, it *dawned on* me that we were not only connected through a random spatial proximity. In Hella Berent's works, in her questions, I find the familiar in the foreign. A similar *BEING IN THE WORLD* – as Heidegger called it – surfaces. And I am using the term *proximity* in exactly this sense, and I am glad for having had the pleasure to invite the artist and her work into the spiritual proximity of the Insel Hombroich. Hella Berent accepted the invitation and immersed herself into the place by living and working in the guest studio during the month of March. The term *LIVING* is also used in Heidegger's sense as described by the philosopher Walter Biemel in his text *Das Geschehen der Wahrheit* (Catalogue for the Stiftung Insel Hombroich, 1998). But back to Hella Berent. She selected the tunnel of the *Field Institute Hombroich* as the *place* (again Martin Heidegger) for her exhibition *Anteroom BLUE WITH MIRROR*.

Her spatial concepts, her ceramic sculptures, her photographs, her drawings, her artist's books as well as her expressions in color are reflecting world, reality or truth not as static constants. The exhibition rather confronts us with an event. Man's respective relationship to the world is being revealed, is the subject of her art.

As every good art, Hella Berent's works focus on the basic elements of our perception and our human condition.

And it is this that has been expressed about her work by various authors in different publications. And these writings are enriched by Berent's own texts and poems which are not explaining her artistic work but constitute independent literary creations in their own right – just another expression of the versatility and holism of her thinking and doing.

I would like to briefly add some of my own observations:

1. The particular role of the color *Blue* in Hella Berent's work:

*Blue* is the sky, *Blue* is the ocean. Everything in life originates in water, evolves from the oceans, wafting away into the sky, into the cosmos. Following this line of perception throughout European art history back to Greek antiquity and still further back to the ancient Egyptians – and Hella Berent has done that – one arrives in the Near East. Blue is a metaphysical color about which much can be said and felt, a color which plays a unique role in the most diverse cultures.

Here in the tunnel we encounter an oddly positioned wall built from individually fired bricks. Each brick projects its own existence. The glazes radiate a wide spectrum of different Blues, ranging from Emerald Green through Cerulean Blue, from Turquoise to Lapis Lazuli – a wall of color that does not block or obstruct but rather undulates like an ocean of color that vibrates and suspends. The surface of the ocean reflects the sky, and like this wall begins to flow before our eyes. A wall that liquefies – is that possible? Are these not two completely contradictory aggregate states?

As we look at this wall, we realize – it is possible. Hella Berent has *measured the sky* and the *undulation of the oceans*; she has observed the surfaces that reflect the sky, and she brings in both for us, positioning this vertical with her ceramic wall sculpture into the earth wall, in the elongated horizontal of the container tunnel. The sculpture refers to a metaphysical dimension and inspires the profane casing of these transatlantic containers for a while... a symbolically rich and therefore beautiful *crossing of two elementary constants*.

Berent is a precision worker. I experienced this when helping her build this wall for a few hours. Every brick is precisely measured and positioned. It functions only in this position and is meticulously led – in the same way as each temple's measurements are related to the entirety of existence, to the cosmos. When in regard to Hella Berent's work I speak about measuring and gauging, it does not only refer to modern measurement but rather to a kind of observation that includes the intuitive and the experiences as well as the decisions of a seeing person. She has carefully researched the techniques of the particular *blue fired glazes* of the Egyptians and the former Persian culture in Iran. Even if she does not really use the original formulas today, her research has greatly expanded her experience, enabling her to reach the greatest possible measure of accuracy which always includes a certain random factor. It is a very exciting process. Those, who have no experience with this technique, must know: the silicates, the powders she applies for the glazes have very different colors before the firing process.

Hella Berent is a sculptor.

Her thinking is very spatial. Therefore, surfaces are no constraints which as compact consolidated bases provide only supporting surfaces for example for color. Nor are surfaces spatial borderlines but rather areas of an infinitely large space of an infinitely large whole in which two aggregate states confront each other and begin to exchange, for example to reflect each other. In reflection the light is not merely repelled inversely, sent back, but it is being bundled during the "collision," which means it has experienced a transformation. Two aggregate states have reacted with each other.

In another context I wrote: "Water surfaces, walls, the retina are membranes that diffuse or reflect brightness. Accordingly function painting and photography as canvas and film. They are not only weapons of optical globalization, but more so an instrument to make *the act of seeing a reflection of what is seen.*" (cf. Insel catalogue)

Looking at Hella Berent's different wall ceramics, wall mirrors and seeing the different designs and explorations of surfaces inspires these reflections and put us in relation to the whole of existence.

You may have noticed that I always arrive at very basic considerations no matter which aspect of the artist's work I address. There are many more essential characteristics which

deserve our attention, such as the role of the artist's books which she has been drawing for decades with great continuity. In the fall, we will have the opportunity to gain insight into her exquisite artist's books at the art- and museumlibrary of the City of Cologne at Museum Ludwig. They reveal among other things a strong conceptual thinking as well as her rich artistic draftsmanship. The position of the line can be revisited.

I have not yet mentioned the way in which Hella Berent explores in her ceramic sculptures, heads and vessels the subject of the ancient *siblings of form and content* and the surprising twists and formulations she arrives at. The head is primarily a metaphor for the spiritual. Here it appears as sculpture and addresses the dialogue between form and content very conscientiously. Many of these heads seem to grow towards the sky, the spheres. They stretch out into the vertical axis. Here too, the shimmering blue and turquoise glazes evoke the spiritual, an almost metaphysical dimension.

Another comprehensive topic is her *eventful* artistic and biographical career, *eventful* because of numerous temporary employments abroad in various cultural environments. These encounters with other cultural and temperate zones always find their expression in her work.

I should actually say it the other way round, because it is the artistic questions that lead her to these different places. Wherever she arrives, Berent *positions* herself, expanding the existing dimensions for new avenues of thought (*imaginary spaces*) through her work.

7 March 2010      Ute Langanky