

## MATT MULLICAN

April 2nd – August 29th, 2010

In this space, we present works by the American artist Matt Mullican (Santa Monica, 1951) from the collection of the Kröller-Müller Museum. With his work, this artist attempts to evoke a conceivable, non-physical world as a counterpoint to the world as we experience it in our daily lives. His work comprises a stratified and over the years increasingly complex system with the characteristics of a personal universe. This system or model is not intended as an explanation of the physical world around us, but as the representation of a highly personal, subjective, parallel cosmos. It is no utopia for a 'better' world, but a blueprint for an imaginary world with its own rules and laws. Here, this world has assumed the form of a city, where functions, necessities and symbols have been assigned their respective positions. It is an artistic thought model, a city of the mind. This metaphor is even more appropriate when, for instance, we consider that Mullican uses hypnosis to gain deeper insight into his own realm of thought.

**In the nineteen eighties**, for the visualization of his ideas, he enlisted the help of computer technology, which was then starting to become more widely suitable for developing a 'virtual reality'. The first results of this, based on the **Computer Project** from 1989/1990, were acquired by the museum at the time. Here, you see a large computer print, a so-called piezograph, with the street map of the 'mental city', the animated film originally released on laser disc of a trip through the virtual city, and large light boxes with slides of striking images from the city. The first plans for this project date back to 1986. The company Digital Editions in Hollywood offered him the use of a Connection Machine II, which enabled him to visualize his idea for a virtual urban space measuring 6 x 3 kilometres.

**The street map** functions as a key to Mullican's work, as it clearly shows a number of his points of departure. As a basis for organizing his ideas and his work, Mullican uses a system of symbols and colours that assumes five levels. The lowest level comprises the 'elementary', including the basic geometric forms of triangle, circle and square and the colour green, which refers to the natural. Above that stands the world of everyday life, with all its (subconscious) processes and manifestations, symbolized by a stylised globe and the colour blue. On the middle level, there is the 'contextualized world' of the arts and sciences, to which the colour yellow is assigned. Then comes the realm of language, which as a means of communication connects the subjective with the objective and which Mullican associates with black and white. The upper level is reserved for the activity of the mind, which appropriates reality. The colour is red and the accompanying logo is a head with brains. On this basis, Mullican developed a large number of pictographic symbols that reappear in many of his works.

**Mullican is not restricted** by technique or material. He uses new technology alongside older, tried and tested art disciplines. For him they are of equal value and offer him the possibility to instigate other meanings. Thus the granite slabs with etchings literally and figuratively acquire a monumental character. The glass object on the table, subtitled 'Glass Man', can be interpreted as a thought model in the shape of a figure, in which the five levels reappear in a highly stylised form. In the so-called 'rubblings', images transferred to paper by rubbing with a pencil, the significance is not so much in the transfer of the image, but in the transfer of energy that this process involves. And for Mullican, the transfer of energy is again a symbol for the transfer of information, which once again, is an inextricable part of thought and the exchange of ideas. The untitled work in the centre of the space, consisting of a trolley pole from a tram or a train (a so-called pantograph) and a generator, thus a source of current, symbolizes the same thing in a different way.

**In its organizational** principles and its formal idiom, Mullican's world has much ground in common with the utopian body of thought of the modernist artists (the classical avant-garde) of the 20th century. There is one important difference: artists such as Robert van 't Hoff (to whom a retrospective is devoted in the spaces next to these works by Mullican) and Theo van Doesburg wanted to improve the world and hoped to contribute to a change in the social reality, while Mullican is an individualistic thinker, who creates a virtual artistic universe in order to sharpen the mind.

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