



## Visual Nervous Conductors

Ronald de Bloeme's art at first seemed to orbit the world; seven years later his work undoubtedly encircles it. In around 2000 he undid mailbags from the countries associated with the Universal Postal Union and examined the sacking – printed with their official markings – in terms of its inherent aesthetic dimensions. Later he addressed small-format paintings to artists and curators, put stamps on them and sent them on their way through the post – unpacked, unprotected and calling into question their value as art. Following their exposure to the mail he had the paintings returned and exhibited them with all their signs of wear and tear in an art context. In 2004 collage-like tableau in 100 x 260 cm format, like *Arrived too late, show is over*, once again demonstrated his interest in an associative and emotional treatment of the mail. The entire work consists of eight envelope-like interior compositions in gloss paint on cotton, whose individual imagery is made up of a confusion of stamps, postmarks and labels mounted on a coloured background. The series *Slips* (2005/2006) reveals similar structures and territories of meaning.

Obsessive to their very frames, de Bloeme's current colour-bar paintings speak to the influence on art of the consumer goods and advertising world. They quote significant brands and icons and manipulate logos and labels in a continuous give and take. The controlled proliferation in these large-format works in gloss paint of the stripe motif – which at times recalls the bars used for censorship purposes – reflects and reduces the permanent presence of advertising, packaging, national symbols and pictograms and their everyday penetration of our gaze. Despite their smooth, as if varnished, aggressively colourful surfaces we glimpse the abyss of manipulated consumer relationships behind the aesthetic fine-tuning. Ronald de Bloeme is no advocate of extra-artistic social criticism – the creation of formal relationships is too important to him for that – but the cheerful cobbling together and re-evaluation of commodity values obviously gives him a wicked pleasure. De Bloeme calls himself, not without pride, a “visual pirate”.

But he doesn't avail himself of the practices of sampling; his reference points lie at a tangent to those of product advertising. As in a cryptic network he inserts, for example, the insignia of air-force flyers from various countries (e.g. *Chopper I-III*, 2004; *Camel*, 2004) into his ornamental compositions. His obvious interest in flags and emblems comes from his mailbag period. Since around 2003 he has been concerned with processing his concrete image sources in such a way as to jiggle them onto a border between recognisability and alienation that abstracts their original meaning. De Bloeme treats them as patterns reduced to simple basic forms that can be knocked about and made to enter a new emotional context. What remains are visual nervous conductors, a plane of generally horizontal compositional schemes – closely linked to the originals – oriented around colour-differentiated surface sections, and with distinctly contradictory historical-cultural reference points.

In the anyway contradictory, many-layered situation of painting today – simultaneously presented, even canonised, as an article of entertainment both easy

to understand and universally valid; as a socio-cultural context only intelligible to particular groups, at least for a time; as a collector's item to disappear into private apartments – an artist like Ronald de Bloeme takes up his own position. He does so by reducing historically unambiguous imagery to its skeletal structure and then placing it into the general framework of modern visual art – a framework he defines through his very personal aesthetic vision, however. This is easily said, but it isn't a matter of course. In times of culture clash, fusion and sampling, bastard pop and crossover, restriction to the barest aesthetic necessities is once again avant-garde, and the uncompromising, barcode-like stripes that remarkably dissect so many of the paintings once again become exciting. The viewer often doesn't know what is more enjoyable – the mastery with which the artist gives a new unity to a whole range of elements, or the remaining fine imperfections that are a sign of the handiwork. Ronald de Bloeme inhabits a parallel universe to the artists producing techno, house and experimental electronica. And like them he belongs to a category that not so very long ago was accused of being apolitical, hedonistic, self-referential. The political coding of computer sounds or painted formal relationships thus represents a double challenge. This endeavour was taken up by many of the musicians active in such scenes far away from the club mainstream, and very few of them were interested in putting fashionable beats to political texts. Most of these artists worked on the form, staying close to the expressive means of electronic music: rhythm programming, sound design, sampling. They built up structures and destroyed them again, counterposed noise, euphony and quotations. Musical conventions were to be disbanded as representative of ideological constraints, they said. Ronald de Bloeme argues similarly. The harmonic audacity of his simultaneous formal fragmentation and ornamental fabrication is far more experimental than showing off the slogans and insignia of radical discourse. De Bloeme is furrowing through a wide and adventurous terrain, which he is systematically conquering, as his exhibition in Berlin's Spielhaus Morrison Gallery (2007) clearly shows, and where his work on form and type is throwing up its implicit formulas of legitimation. These sound like new music with a humorous undertone. Ronald de Bloeme also shows himself to be a strategic composer who doesn't simply rely on inspiration, but calculates his motifs and connecting passages and then adds in the conventional details of accompanying figures and transpositions during the painting's fluent completion.

There is a relationship between the work groups of 2006 and 2007 that illustrates de Bloeme's struggle for the connection of the parts to the whole. The artist conspicuously demonstrates the validity of the smallest constructive elements, which give rise to his astonishing compositional variability. He subjects his own motivic-thematic work to scrutiny and sets up his quotations like a row of dominoes, drawing fascinating coloured motifs from the back and forth of compositional flow. Here the closed, lacquered surfaces of his works project outwards their references to the world of design and consumer goods, and at the same time the artist underlines his roots in a non-romantic, non-illusory aesthetic.

Christoph Tannert  
(November 2007)