

The declared purpose of Faltin's study is the rehabilitation of Hilla von Rebay. An extraordinary lady certainly she was, an artist in her own right, dashing through New York's bohemian scene like a „whirlwind“ (Faltin), admired and envied as the „Queen of Art“, unbearably arrogant at times and yet capable of exuding genuine feelings of empathy and compassion, always ready to give needy talents a leg-up: Léger, Chagall, Kandinsky, Moholy-Nagy figured prominently at the receiving end of her or in fact Guggenheim's patronage.

The relationship between Rebay and Bauer, a story about lovers turned business partners, is likely to attract the attention of historians. Although occasionally a bit anecdotal and gossipy this novel-like narrative reports significant episodes, which historians may appreciate as being at least illustrative. Take the year 1916 as an example: Baron von Rebay, Commanding Officer of an artillery brigade, was seeing action in the battle of Verdun while his daughter Hilla was making a splash as a dedicated Dadaist in Zürich. Or 1938: After having played up to the National Socialist cultural bigwigs, former „armchair Bolshevik“ Rudolf Bauer, now self-styled „intellectual aristocrat“, found himself ostracized as a „degenerate artist“ and was awaiting his transfer to a concentration camp; eventually he was released thanks to the intercession of Hilla's brother, a middle-ranking SA-functionary; a handful of American dollars might have helped as well. In the nick of time he managed to cross the Atlantic. Once more Guggenheim proved to be no miser. He provided Bauer, whom Rebay kept praising as the „Johannes Sebastian Bach“ of modern art, with a posh villa and expensive cars although it began to dawn on him that he was enjoying an embarrassing monopoly as an investor in the works of his still frustrated and not particularly grateful protégé.

PETER STINGELIN

Basel

Theo Bergenthal, Joachim Stracke (Eds.): Emil Cimiotti; Heidelberg: Kehrer Verlag 2005; 300 p.; ca. 200 ill.; ISBN 978-3-936-636-54-3; € 48,00

In 1974, the German art historian and ex-director of the Dusseldorf Art Academy, Eduard Trier, coined the term „Informelle Plastik“ (sculpture of Informel) and in doing so gave theoretical grounding to what had been previously visible in several exhibitions: the parallels between the formal vocabulary of European abstract painters and European abstract sculptors.¹ The elements of the so called „Informel“ art movement in Europe after the Second World War, spontaneity, structured patterns, and emphasis on painting as „action“, could also be found in the abstract sculptures of the period. With his concise book on Modern sculpture titled „Moderne Plastik von

1 In 1974, Eduard Trier used the term „informelle Plastik“ in a series of lectures on sculpture of the 20th Century, see: KATJA BLOMBERG: Zur Plastik des Informel in Deutschland, in: *Plastische Erkenntnis und Verantwortung. Studien zur Skulptur und Plastik nach 1945; Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft* 23 (1993), 43–54, here especially: 43, Footnote 4.

Auguste Rodin bis Marino Marini“, published in 1954, Eduard Trier had positioned himself in German art history as one of the leading connoisseurs of three-dimensional art. In 1964, as commissioner of the German Pavilion in Venice, Trier showed the painter Joseph Fassbender alongside the abstract sculptor of Informel Norbert Kricke (1922–1984) to great acclaim. Kricke, whose sculptures were shown in 1961 in a solo show on view at the Museum of Modern Art in New York² and who had worked with Walter Gropius in Baghdad in 1959, was one of the very few young German sculptors whose work could be seen outside of Germany in the 50s. In 1965, Kricke was commissioned to create a large sculpture to be placed outside the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Younger than Kricke, but no less present on the art scene in the 50s and 60s, the German sculptor Emil Cimiotti (born 1927) was featured at the Venice Biennial in 1958 and 1960, as well as in the documenta exhibitions of 1959 and 1964. This is all the more noteworthy as Cimiotti's first exhibition only took place in 1956 and was met with very negative criticism. In 1957, however, Cimiotti enjoyed substantial support from the influential art critics Albert Schulze Vellinghausen and John Anthony Thwaites. Only one year after his first exhibition, the young sculptor won the prestigious art prize „junger westen 57“ for sculpture.

Sculptures by both Cimiotti and Kricke were presented 1959 in the second documenta exhibit that focused on international post war art and featured a separate catalog covering modern sculpture after 1945. Both artists could be seen as representatives of the two poles of Informel: Cimiotti as a representative of a Structural/Material Informel (Materialskulptur) working with textures, and Kricke as a follower of Informel focusing on Action and Movement (gestisches Informel).

Abstract sculpture from the 50s and 60s was very present in the public eye due to the state directive of „Kunst am Bau“ (art within architecture) that followed a concept of the Weimar Republic allocating a percentage of a building's budget to artworks. Even though this order led to public spaces in Germany being defined by sculptures from the 50s and 60s, art history and especially art criticism of „Informel“ has focused mainly on the „action paintings“ of the time. In the last decade, however, art historians have begun to publish several essays on sculpture of Informel.³

In this time of heightened interest for German post war sculptors, a large format hard cover monograph on the sculptor Emil Cimiotti, edited by Theo Bergenthal and Joachim Stracke, has been published by the Heidelberg Publishing House Kehrer Verlag. The book boasts an abundance of high quality color illustrations and a collection of essays that differentiate themselves not only in regards to their topics, but also in

2 NORBERT KRICKE: Museum of Modern Art, Exhibition #681, March 1 – April 12, 1961; The exhibition catalog features a text by Carola Giedion-Welcker.

3 Among others: HEINZ ALTHÖFER: Informel. Die Plastik – Gestus und Raum; Dortmund 2003 (Schriftenreihe des Museums am Ostwall, Vol. III); Blomberg 1993; CHRISTOPH BROCKHAUS (ED.): Europäische Plastik des Informel 1945–1965, exhibition catalog, Duisburg 1995. – CHRISTMUT PRÄGER: „Action Sculpture“? – Bemerkungen zu einem Abenteuer, in: CHRISTOPH ZUSCHLAG, HANS GERCKE, ANNETTE FRESE (EDS.): Brennpunkt Informel. Quellen – Strömungen – Reaktionen, exhibition catalog; Köln 1998, 136–141. – ROLF WEDEWER: Anmerkungen zur Plastik des Informel, in: EMIL CIMIOTTI: Plastiken und Zeichnungen 1957–1991, exhibition catalog; Osnabrück 1992, 9–16.

regards to their text types: a general survey with an art historical analysis, several case studies, a single work interpretation, a personal recollection, and, finally, a text from the artist's hand.

The most extensive of the featured texts is by the art historian Christoph Zuschlag, known internationally for his work on modern art during the Nazi dictatorship in Germany and for his numerous publications on post war art.⁴ For the publication on Cimiotti at hand, Zuschlag presents the artistic phases of the artist in chronological order. After presenting Cimiotti's early work during his academic training in Germany and Paris under Karl Hartung and Ossip Zadkine, Zuschlag focuses on the pivotal year of 1955 in which the artist, only one year after finishing his studies, had already found his signature style utilizing characteristics of the lost wax technique (*cire perdue*). This preferred technique allows even the subtlest modulation in the plaster to be recorded and reproduced in the cast. Zuschlag agrees with the artist's testimony that this technique epitomizes the most important aspects of Informel: the artistic expression of individuality and the depiction of art as process. Zuschlag uses these observations as a point of departure for a broader discussion of the „openness“ (Umberto Eco) of Informel-artworks and how this characteristic played out in post war Germany.⁵ This „openness“ was often seen as an expression of a „free“ society, and an art form liberated from politics, religion, or any other ideology. Willi Baumeister, the most prominent German painter after 1945 and a close friend and mentor of Cimiotti, defended this view of abstract art against frequent attacks from the religious right and from a German public still indoctrinated by Nazi ideology.⁶

Zuschlag also spotlights the artist's formal shift in the 60s and especially in the 70s, when suddenly concrete object motifs were incorporated into the sculptures, e. g. cans or spoons. This incorporating of motifs previously not found in Informel and, because of their objectivity, apparently contradicting the style, could be seen as a sign of the crisis that Informel went through during the 60s. Already in the second documenta exhibition of 1959, Informel, or abstract art in general, was perceived as the new mainstream of painting, which could be seen all around the globe.⁷ In Cimiotti's work from the 60s and 70s, a reflection of the growing trend in Western Art towards figurative motifs can be found in his sculptures. In the year of Pop Arts international breakthrough in Europe, 1964, when Robert Rauschenberg was awarded the International Grand Prize at the XXXII Venice Biennale (the first time an American won

4 Christoph Zuschlag has published various essays on Informel and was co-curator of the exhibition *Brennpunkt Informel* in Heidelberg in 1998, see: ZUSCHLAG, GERCKE, FRESE 1998 (Footnote 3).

5 UMBERTO ECO: *Opera aperta*; Milano 1962, English translation: *The Open Work*; Cambridge, MA 1989.

6 Baumeister laid out the foundation of his theory of art „free from ideology“ in his book *„Das Unbekannte in der Kunst“* (Stuttgart 1947). – See also PHILIPP GUTBROD: Baumeister versus Sedlmayr – Die Kontroverse um Kunst und Religion im ersten Darmstädter Gespräch (1950), in: KIRSTEN FITZKE, ZITA ÁGOTA PATAKI (ED.) in Zusammenarbeit mit MARKUS LÖRZ: *Kritische Wege zur Moderne*. Festschrift für Dietrich Schubert; Stuttgart 2006, 43–67.

7 For a discussion of the second documenta see: PHILIPP GUTBROD: *documenta II*, in: *50 Jahre / Years documenta 1955–2005*, archive in motion, edited by MICHAEL GLASMEIER and KARIN STENGEL; New York, Göttingen 2005, 191–200.

the prize), Cimiotti began to work with more traditional figurative forms (flowers and even human forms). Cimiotti did not completely abandon his, until then, signature style of Informel, but a new trend could be seen in his works that would later, in the 70s, lead, predominantly, to the depiction of actual objects like skulls, cans and even torsos.

Next to his sculptures, Cimiotti's works on paper are featured throughout the book and Zuschlag, for the first time in Cimiotti literature, discusses both sculptures and works on paper side by side, providing information on the simultaneous development of both mediums. The artist's works on paper, not preparatory notations, but full-fledged artworks, were praised early on in his career and were featured in exhibitions. Two years after winning the art prize „junger westen 57“ for sculpture, in 1959, the artist won the same prize for drawing. The works on paper show an influence of the artist's mentor Willi Baumeister, especially in his technique of frottage. The drawings also show similarities to other artists of Informel like, among others, Emil Schumacher.

Cimiotti's works on paper are also featured prominently in Erich Franz's essay. Franz stresses the energy and rhythms that can be found in Cimiotti's lines and also shows how elements in the sculptures influence motifs in the works on paper and vice versa. Especially interesting is Franz's observation that Cimiotti's sculptures often juxtapose containment and openness, and that this dualism leads to a rhythm and an almost nature-like progression. Here, it would have been interesting to read more about a possible influence by Henry Moore, as the British sculptor was known for his abstract positive and negative forms. Cimiotti was surely aware of the British artist who had won the International Sculpture Prize at the Venice Biennale in 1948 and was prominently shown on the first Documenta in 1955.

Also commenting on the nature-like energies in Cimiotti's art is the art historian Hans Gercke. In his insightful essay in the monograph, Gercke shows how the artist developed proficiency in the creative handling of fundamental forces of nature and the portrayal of micro- and macrostructures. Gercke states that, just as the laws of physics form mountains and valleys, the artist utilizes earth, heat, and pressure to form his artworks and leave the markings of these forces (e.g. drying traces) visible in the finished work. Gercke cites Cimiotti himself who repeatedly pronounced that he does not illustrate or reproduce nature forms. In contrast, he works as nature does. Therefore, his sculptures do not depict landscapes, but contain elements that can be found in landscapes. This leads to artworks oscillating between abstraction and actual objective form, without being descriptive.

These thoughts are also featured in another essay contained in the book by Uwe R uth focusing on the artwork „Afrikanisch, sp ater Gru  an Willi Baumeister“ that Cimiotti sculpted as an homage to Baumeister. As already mentioned, Baumeister was a strong influence on the young Cimiotti and the essay expresses, in a condensed form, the importance of Baumeister for the sculptor and for Modern German Art after 1945 in general. It is a long stretch, however, to regard the open elements in Cimiotti's

work as a place in which Baumeister's concept of the Unknown (*Das Unbekannte in der Kunst*) could find ground.

The very interesting texts featured in the monograph bring light to the full scope of Cimiotti's artistry and many will be surprised to see how many different forms and expressions can be found in the artist's sculptures from the 70s and beyond: multi-colored sculptures, geometric compositions, and floor sculptures.

Still, the naturelike, one could even say „pullulated“ forms visible throughout his career and even in recent works, for which Cimiotti became famous, stand out as the most striking and intriguing inventions in the artist's oeuvre. These abstract sculptures seem to illustrate a sensitivity for nature forms made famous by Paul Klee and especially Wols, one of the founding fathers of Informel. These artists all shared the notion of making art according to instead of after nature.

In contrast to other German artists of Informel, like Emil Schumacher or K. O. Götz, who remained true to abstract art even during the crisis of Informel, Cimiotti branched out to other modes of expression, but always returned to his signature formal vocabulary of Informel.

The monograph is an important addition to the still small list of publications covering sculpture of Informel. It would be interesting if further art historical research could bring light to the influence of International sculptors on the young German artists. For example, the nearly forgotten French sculptor Henri Etienne-Martin was very present on the post war Paris art scene and one can say for sure that several German artists who traveled to the French Capitol to inform themselves about the new artistic trends came into contact with Etienne-Martin.

These links from Cimiotti to other artist's would have been worth exploring in the monograph, but future publications will be sure to fill this void. As a start, just recently, a new exhibition catalog for the artist has been published in which Christoph Zuschlag discusses the influences of modern sculptors on Cimiotti.⁸

One can only commend the publishers for publishing this book in English and German, so that a wide international audience can be introduced to this fascinating artist. It would be nice to also have a multi-national dialogue on the intense, yet relatively short-lived international phenomenon of abstract art in the 50s and early 60s. Especially in the USA, there is a tendency to focus solely on Abstract Expressionism without grasping the quality of simultaneous painterly movements in, among other countries, France, Germany, Italy, Brazil, and Japan.

PHILIPP GUTBROD
New York

8 Zuschlag writes about Cimiotti's first visit to Paris in 1951 and his infatuation with the sculptors Brancusi, Giacometti, and Laurens: CHRISTOPH ZUSCHLAG: *Zu den Bronzen und Werkskizzen von Emil Cimiotti*, in: WOLFGANG THOMECEK, CHRISTOPH ZUSCHLAG (EDS.): *Emil Cimiotti, Bronzen – Werkskizzen*, exhibition catalogue, (*KunstKabinettImTurm*); Grünstadt, Sausenheim 2008, 6–11, here especially 6–7.