

IMAGES AND LABELS

The exhibition device as an image of history

The items exhibited are two wall coverings from the galleries of the Kassel State Art Collection in Schloss Wilhelmshöhe. They measure 2.9 x 7 m and are mounted on stretchers. Ute Lindner removed the coverings in 1995/1996, when the galleries were closed prior to renovation work. The material is carmine-red felt that has faded considerably over the past 25 years as a result of exposure to UV radiation from the sun. The red is as vivid as on the day the felt was made - but only where it was protected by the exhibited paintings.

The wall coverings presented are material objects with an assertive, aesthetic presence. At the same time they have a surface that indicates something that is not present. This surface is the boundary layer at which the fabric's meaning splits into an absent and a present component. The works refer first of all to themselves in their material quality, their size and their format. The felt functions as a medium into which the forms of the pictures have been burned as permanent fixtures.

Exhibiting the wall coverings shifts attention from the exhibited art work to the exhibiting device. The works make it clear that every art presentation takes place before an (institutional) Background that has to fade out so that viewers can constitute the meaning of the work. Meaning is generated because the material qualities, which were considered dirty, low and corrupted by the senses, are suppressed and rendered invisible. If meaning is to be created, the material quality of the signs has to be faded out, suppressed or made invisible, as otherwise it will create a disturbance. Meaning can be thought of only as absent, immaterial or cognitive. It is precisely this suppression of the present that makes complex references to the paintings, the place and the time possible. 16th century Venetian paintings by Palma Giovane, Veronese and Titian originally hung on these coverings. These were the first artists to establish the autonomy of colouring and the aesthetic of the brushstroke against the Florentine doctrine of disegno and line in art. There are also references to the original place in which they used to hang, the Italian gallery on the 3rd floor of Schloss Wilhelmshöhe. They indicate intolerable conditions in terms of conservation, from inadequate air conditioning via leaky patches in the roof to excessive exposure to sunlight. Beyond this, the wall coverings relate very particularly to time, which is stored directly in the surface of the felt, as a story in the form of different degrees of bleaching. The wall coverings are placeholders for a history of the museum, a history of conservatorial negligence and of a certain time, burned as traces into the material quality of the surfaces. Ute Lindner's work is in the Tradition of the 'institutional critique', in which artists like Daniel Buren, Michael Asher, Louise Lawler, Andrea Fraser or Christian Philipp Müller examine the devices available to art by making the suppressed Background of art experience into a central theme by careful analysis and individual studies. The institutional Background, which is not normally seen when experiencing art, becomes significant in their work as a puzzle playing with presence and absence, between the material and immaterial qualities of the wall coverings.

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