



## HORST GLÄSKER

Catalogue text for the exhibition

### 7 Treppen

An art project from the Elisabeth Montag Stiftung in Wuppertal/Ostersbaum 2006

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### **The way over the backstairs to the philosophical parade steps. The Holsteiner Treppe, transformed into Scala by Horst Gläser.**

Not to be confused with La Scala in Milan, Wuppertal now has its own Scala thanks to Horst Gläser who, with his wife Margret Masuch, has divided steps into sections according to content. *Scala* is the Italian word for steps. Horst Gläser has created a temporary art object by connecting verbalised emotions to it. He originally named this installation “Steps of Feelings” or “Scala dei sentimenti”. He wants to make people aware of their feelings and sensitivities as they climb the steps and challenge their emotions through concepts which he has mounted on the front side of each of the steps in succession. Single words in bright colours escort the climber step by step.

Sandwiched between houses, the 112 Steps of the Holsteiner Treppe extend upwards, albeit hardly noticeably, between Gathe and Holsteiner Straße. The artist has covered them with words from the bottom to the top. The steps have nine landings which the artist has employed like paragraph breaks for his word arrangements. In this way, he has formed nine ensembles of word ideas for each one. Each step bears a word which can only be read when ascending. He has used adjectives, verbs and nouns. Nine sets of steps recall the stages of life, which are also divided into nine levels. The portrayals of the stages of human life as steps lead back down after the highpoint of 50 years. Here the steps are only directed upwards like ladders to heaven.

Gläser has created word complexes. The first four flights each contain 15 steps, in accordance with building regulations for public spaces which allow no more than 15. Thereafter there are 11 steps on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> flights and between these 10 steps each with corresponding words.

The lowest flight still seems **homely**; here the words refer to the family, which warms, protects, strokes, and caresses, but can also terrify and then forgive again. The words in this context speak of mother and happiness, home, family, honour, innocence, but also of fear and remorse. One can dream up and imagine an entire novel from them.

The second flight could be entitled **friendship**. Here there are not only nouns and verbs such as laugh, speak, and reassure, which are fitting for this context, but also

arm and defend oneself, and adjectives such as peaceful and aggressive. On the whole, however, the nouns show the way, with honesty, closeness, brother, enthusiasm and anger.

If one wants to climb the third flight and understand, **caution** is called for. Here one walks over such terms as rage, envy, accusations, trauma, lies and threat which should clearly be countered by words such as respect, prudence and restraint. Anyone who is distressed by malicious abuse and being offended would do well to be warned against the muddle of extremely different reactions.

A new, fourth flight introduces an unreservedly positive **feeling** – love, affection, kiss on the hand, passion and admirer are the only nouns here. These are joined by adjectives such as ebullient and attractive, before the verbs make everything clear with come together, seduce, yearn, fall in love, dance or tingle.

The fifth flight shows **resentment**, this time in only 11 stations. Jealousy, panic and doubt are coupled with rashness, lovesickness, offence, hatred and disappointment. Only three accompanying and explanatory terms remain – desperate, cry and feel abandoned.

The sixth flight re-establishes **equilibrium** in the person striving upwards with a wealth of words in ten parts. It highlights worth, loyalty, benevolence, depth, clarification and perseverance. It advocates remaining steadfast, standing by someone and overcoming. In this it seems to find itself divine.

But not all the bad has been passed yet. In the endangered seventh flight, **bad** follows. Here one needs only to go through the list to understand what this is about – guilt, tears, vengeance, sorrow, delusion, silence, abuse, persecution, fright and terror. There are only nouns.

But then comes peace! The eighth flight shows the great **reconciliation**. It is based on hope, trust and esteem, understanding, reflection, insight and sympathy. Only two verbs are here to assist – heal and shame.

The ninth and last flight has finally led the exhausted wanderer to the top, to **sublimity** with courage, sense, honour and respect. Now he can enjoy the view in all its expanse and the tranquillity of freedom. He can now literally look back and consider – he has achieved a lot by climbing all 112 steps. He can be proud of himself and believe in himself. In short, he is moved by gratitude at the end. The artist shows us, in part with conscious irony, in part seriously, what a long flight of steps can provoke in a person who has climbed them if he does not just walk over them without thinking.

Gläser has created minimalist notions here. It has been inspired by Concept Art – he has only preserved the colourfulness. No complete sentences are formed, as with Jenny Holzer; instead, precise words set off a poetic logic. Horst Gläser was predestined to create such an artistic project, even though this work casts a new light on his interests. He does not want to create art for the ghetto, museum or gallery, but integrate it into the everyday environment or, as here, install it into the city architecture. The “Urban Indian” with the colourful feather head-dress, as he likes to

portray himself, was born in Herford in 1949, studied at the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf, had his first solo exhibition in the Von der Heydt Museum as early as 1980-81, has held various visiting professorships in Münster and Braunschweig since 1988, and has been a full-time professor at the Kunsthochschule in Kassel since 1998. For a long time he has concerned himself with the dialogue with architecture; he has also created small and large multi-coloured sculptures. His approach using words on the steps in Wuppertal, which he himself has walked on many occasions, is of special concern to him and he executes it in masterly fashion.

Wuppertal's steps are an architectonic jewel and a special feature of the city, which connected the residential districts with flights of steps for pedestrians in the 19<sup>th</sup> century because of the considerable differences in the ground elevation. 469 flights of steps with a total of 12,383 individual steps were built at that time. The most famous flight of steps has the very onomatopoeic name of Tippen-Tappen-Tönchen – from the sounds produced by visitors when they walk on them. Horst Gläsker has now revealed that steps can, however, also arouse sensations, accompany one on a fabulous, verbal journey upwards and at the same time help make one fit. This is how he creates fabulous metamorphoses here.

Thanks to Horst Gläsker, these steps, which have been neglected for so long, now finally begin to tell a story and adjust to the people who walk over them, since some people walk over these steps pensively; others test themselves physically; still others are occupied with completely different things. Many people can find themselves here – families, neighbours, lovers, the troubled, the burdened, loners, even bad people are taken at their word. The steps can of course also be used to descend, but then it becomes more difficult to read. However, one has the pure pleasure of the spectrum of colours, which is not related to the words.

These steps, wedged in between the house façades, leading upwards, can now finally also have their own say. Incidentally, the font that is used is called Humanist.