



HORST GLÄSKER

Catalogue text for the exhibition

Crime Scene Paderborn, Earthly Power - Heavenly Powers, Paderborn, 2007

Ingrid Raschke-Stuwe

Campo Santo (Labyrinth) – Who is afraid of public space?

Labyrinths have been known to us ever since ancient times. Of imprecise date the rock carvings in the region of the Alps and on Sardinia are presumed amongst the oldest. In the history of civilisation it is the Labyrinth of Knossos that produced the name and term labyrinth. Famous medieval examples of labyrinths still continue to fascinate us to this day, like the floor mazes at Notre-Dame de Chartres, Notre-Dame d'Amiens and at Siena Cathedral. With their ground plans they are based on the original shape of a labyrinth symbolising the path for the penitent to Jerusalem.

Horst Gläser – a painter for whom the canvas alone has never been sufficient as a means for conveying image and colour and who is indeed obsessed with colour – has transformed the grey square in front of the Marktkirche into a sea of colour, creating an image whose luminosity not only puts the enclosed “holy” area (the “campo santo”, as the artist puts it) into a new light but also radiates out beyond this into the adjacent areas, into squares and shopping streets.

With its Baroque façade the church occupies a slightly elevated, commanding position over an enclosed square located alongside the high school Gymnasium Theodorianum and diagonally opposite the Historical Town Hall in the centre of Paderborn. Seven steps separate it from its spaciouly proportioned square that is enclosed by a surrounding wall and blocked off by cast iron gates from the noise of the urban traffic and the lively hustle and bustle of secular life. The church square reinforces the solemn character of this House of God, denying us at the same time any all too casual approaches and enabling us to view the church from an appropriate distance. Once the main doors open you see an impressive, reconstructed golden Baroque altar.

The church square can only be seen in its entirety once you have ascended the seven steps – then suddenly a field of colour quite unexpectedly opens up before us: the previously grey square with its square flagstones has been transformed by Horst Gläser into an intoxicating symphony of colour. Nothing seems able to constrain the rush of colour, you seem to sink into the colour, warm sections alternate with cooler hues, everything seems set in motion, inhaling and exhaling the overwhelmingly powerful colours and turning the square into a surging sea of colour of inexhaustible proportions. The approx. 3,000 individual, differently painted flagstones seem, in their totality, like a large individual grid of a colossal and monumental painting.

At first sight, this approx. 720 m² artwork seems incoherent and confusing to the observer until we discover its “Ariadne’s web” so to speak: a yellow, winding path following the rhythm of the flagstones, always changing direction, leading the observer through the labyrinth of colour.

On our way around this labyrinth we encounter words written in capitals to the left and right – grey and functional, emerging from the monumental field of colour, as if they had always been down there on the ground. Conflicting terms like courage, cowardice, lust, asceticism, compassion and malice. Terms that describe the balancing act between human virtue and human vice.

Following this path and placing your trust in the artist you explore the entire square over approx. 500m. You find your own rhythm – in the same way the artist had to when exploring the square, walking on and around it, literally even dancing on it in order to sound out rhythm and structure, indeed to develop the very composition of the painting to be executed later on, - stopping to decipher words and ponder over their meaning. And in the same way as cold and warm areas change the colour of sections of the picture, the written down words also create a constantly changing emotional mental state.

Now that we have found our way the initial confusion of the splendid colours reveals an order and harmony that is a fundamental feature of the labyrinth – for this wandering through the maze can also be seen as meditative renewal just as the ancient labyrinth symbolised a magic place of tranquillity and reflection.

Gläser’s labyrinth on the “Campo Santo” does not, however, lead us to a centre of knowledge and contemplation with the promise of answers to ultimate questions or even the goal of final redemption. The path begins where the main iron gate is located and ends at the steps leading up to the church on the left-hand side of the square. This is the point where secular life and religious reflection touch and where the earthly and the heavenly meet. Once this threshold has been crossed the believer enters into prayer in communion with God.

Depending on the time of day the mighty church throws a shadow over the square allowing parts of the sea of colour to withdraw into the background and others to stand out with even more radiant force. Architecture and painting enter into a close relationship here, benefiting from each other’s powerful expression and temporarily merging into a new aesthetic unit hitherto unseen at this location.

Perhaps Horst Gläser’s hope will come true – his hope that people will now be more strongly drawn to this square, that they will want to walk on it in order to enter into dialogue, communication with each other in different ways – whether this be through the meaning of painting and architecture, through the relationship between earthly and heavenly powers or even through contemplation or exchange on existential questions and life itself.