

# THOMAS REHBEIN GALERIE : KOELN

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DOVE BRADSHAW

*Guilty Marks*

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“The things that happen in (Dove Bradshaw´s) work are, so to speak, full of not her determination but its determination, such as chemical change, or gravity. She used the word event, whereas she´s interested in an undefined freedom of action for the chemistry. Of not doing anything. ...what we find in Dove´s work is constant experimentation with things to see what happens when you do that.” (John Cage)

The name of artist Dove Bradshaw (\*1949) ranks among the mayor exponents of US-American Conceptual and Minimal Art, with whom she was not only affiliated in terms of close friendship, but also engaged in an active exchange of ideas starting in the late 1960s. Besides Carl Andre, Sol LeWitt and her life partner William Anastasi, it was above all John Cage who significantly influenced the young artist, whose creative work he closely accompanied and reflected from the beginning.

In recognition that raw material is not subject to a superior thought or idea forcing it into a shape, but rather claims an idiosyncratic development, Conceptual and Minimal artists pursue strategies renouncing artistic mastery and control, instead allowing for a greater freedom and independence of the material. Dove Bradshaw is attached to this non-hierarchic view and concedes to her works the unfolding of an intrinsic potential, which stems from the innate properties of the material itself.

Since the 1960s Dove Bradshaw employs indeterminacy and chance as formative principles, which define her approach to material. Influenced by John Cage, whom she first met at the age of 27 in 1977 and whose understanding of an art freed from all restrictive doctrines and conventions she shared, Bradshaw begins to become interested in the unpredictable effects of time, weather, erosion, as well as atmospheric conditions on natural, chemical and artificial substances. She seeks the “undefined freedom of action for the chemistry” (John Cage), treating the surfaces of metals with chemical and oxidizing agents. Often she applies liver of sulphur to leaf silver, enhancing the process of oxidation that would set in and intensify with the passing of time. In these experimental arrangements the overall outcome of the reactions remains open.

Bradshaw´s Contingency Paintings, whose beginnings can be traced back to 2008, also follow this strategy of non-intention, allowing unprecedented chemical reactions to set in and chance formations to appear. Striking patterns and structures emerge not because of artistic decisions or compositional measures, but rather due to a process of constant interaction between a chemical substance and the surface of a given material, subject to permanent change. The exhibition title „Guilty Marks“ „came

from the fact that they are not 100 per cent chance in regard to the initial placement or choice of action— throws, pours and drops for instance and of materials such as inks, the chemical liver of sulfur, oils, leaf and raw pigment. Chance comes into play when the composition, textures and color all change while drying with the works placed flat—i.e. as the size (a slow drying varnish) off gasses it slips off the linen thereby relaying the inks and chemicals in unpredictable islands and tributaries.“ (Bradshaw)

The series „Spent Bullets“ is also based on processes and actions, whose immediate outcome shapes the material. Coming out of a late 70s Utopian gesture to repurpose deadly weapons, Bradshaw cast .38 caliber New York Police Department shot slugs in silver and made them into earrings. „Better to wear them on the outside“ the artist laconically remarks. Although reformulated as jewelry and thus endowed with a new decorative value, the burst and ragged contour of a cartridge case is a visible testimony to violence and destruction. The current show includes sculptures which are 3D enlargements of thirty times printed in resin and car painted in Mercedes Chartreuse 2018, Toyota Blue 2004, BMW Sakhir Orange 2017 to further abstract from their deadly purpose. The deformed bullet is alienated from its original context and presented as a seductively shimmering object.

In displaying the inherent discrepancy between an aestheticized form and the underlying, albeit “invisible”, controversial content Bradshaw seems to reflect subtly yet poignantly on the general alterations of meaning and distortions of truth.

Bettina Haiss, 2018