

The exhibition *Why am I here and not somewhere else – Independencia II* by David Zink Yi at Hauser & Wirth in Zurich (31 August 2013 – 19 October 2013) goes back to a performance at Kunstverein Braunschweig. The Berlin-based artist, born in Peru in 1973, transformed the classical Villa Salve Hospes into a walk-in orchestra. Each room was occupied by one of eleven musicians from the artist's Cuban band "De adentro y afuera" who were filmed individually while performing during a collective rehearsal. The result is an eleven-channel video installation, with the recording of each musician being subsequently shown in a large-format projection within the respective room at the Kunstverein. Viewing the musicians in this manner creates a unique sense of intimacy, distinct from the conventional way of experiencing a music group. Zink Yi founded "De adentro y afuera" in Havana, where his long-time fascination with the organically intermingled, non-hierarchical expression of Afro-Cuban music was first sparked on a visit in 2000.

For his video installation *Why am I here and not somewhere else – Independencia II*, Zink Yi zooms in closely on the faces of the singers, percussionists, timbales player, pianist and trumpeters with all their movements, facial expressions and cues. Not only do the musicians interact with the architecture onto which their images are cast, but the viewers themselves establish an almost physical connection when taking in the nuances of the filmed protagonists, even though they are only looking at projections: immaterial images whose content could hardly be more minimalistic and dramaturgically subdued. The exhibition spaces are thus transformed into a kind of sounding body, which viewers walk through as a reconstituted ensemble. Zink Yi achieves the deconstruction of a complex whole organism in which sensuality of expression and reduction of forms become intermeshed. In the spaces of the Hauser & Wirth gallery in Zurich, the images are not projected on the walls of separate rooms as in Braunschweig, but in new combinations on the floor. Despite the opulence of the music captured in the videos, the reduced installation in Zurich makes it very clear that Zink Yi operates in the realm of sculptural minimalism. As in his earlier video work *Horror Vacui* (2009), the concentration on individual, repeated sequences of activity by the musicians allows him to distil their patterns of behaviour from the overall context. While serial in nature, these schemata are repeatedly varied through the application of each musician's personal imprint. The aura of objectivity as possessed by the cubes of a Donald Judd or the grid structures of a Sol Lewitt is inscribed with an individual yet mystic, ritual-like element, which enriches the principle of the deliberately constructed void of the post-war avant-garde with an ethnically tinged narration.

Zink Yi has cited Michel de Certeau's book *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980) as an important source of reference for his artistic approach. The author speaks of a flexible matrix-like context that people individually interpret through their own actions. Personal needs, perspectives and biographies give rise to displacements, which essentially rule out the existence of forms defined in their entirety. Informed by this idea, Zink Yi understands the open form of Afro-Cuban music as a primary structure that gets processed differently each time players come together. An

important factor is the near-physical dialogue of the musicians with one another, reacting to the cues of the others with precision, yet freely and independently. Within the given matrix of a song, the breaks, rhythms, cues and deviations from tones and tempos are as variable as the individual musicians allow. The fact that Zink Yi had his band mates play in different rooms in Braunschweig – or distributed them over two floors for the opening performance at Hauser & Wirth – lends an additional interactive layer to his artistic approach. In order to grasp an idea of the larger whole, the audience and the musicians both needed to surmount numerous spatial boundaries.

In the work of Zink Yi, who moved to Germany at the age of 16 and trained as a woodcarver before studying sculpture at the art academies in Munich and Berlin, questions of identity are not a primary concern. Nevertheless, the documentary content of his film and video works is inhabited by an intense expressive force, which is also evident in his non-film sculptures. Among such works, he has created casts of giant octopus carcasses in ceramic – enigmatically primal yet aesthetic figures whose colossal proportions run counter to the delicate material. Elsewhere, he pairs an elliptical sculpture (Untitled, 2005) with a portrait photograph. What initially comes across as an austere form reveals an autobiographical reference. After the First World War, Zink Yi's grandfather emigrated from Bavaria to Peru where he worked as a master cooper – a craft he passed on in his adopted homeland by training the first generation of barrel makers. Depicting a former employee who had been taught by the artist's grandfather to construct an ellipse, the photograph thus provides the narrative level of a seemingly minimalist sculpture, which in turn refers to a larger connection and proves to be a mere fragment.

In a similar manner, *Why am I here and not somewhere else – Independencia II* represents a synthesis of sculptural fragmentation and socially charged meaning. Strategies such as reduction and repetition, elevated to a governing principle in the modules of classic Minimal Art and indicating a preference for industrialism at the expense of individuality, have the opposite effect with Zink Yi: they tell stories. Wandering among his projections on the floor of the gallery, viewers are not simply confronted with a series of distorted squares that carpet the rooms with images and sculpturally structure the space – but with individual persons who furrow their brows from exertion, move to the rhythm, raise their instruments as they prepare to play and later set them back down again, perspire, close their eyes, stand up, walk away or occasionally glance at their cell phones. Despite the documentary's visual content, the work is marked by a high degree of abstraction: removed from their overall context but still acoustically linked across the different rooms, the portraits appear as fragments of a larger organism. Accordingly – unlike works with a linear narrative – the installation is not independent of place, but must be re-embedded in the context each time. In Braunschweig the walls of the eleven rooms served as supports, the building itself becoming a walk-in sculpture. In Zurich, by contrast, the main emphasis is on circulating through the space: the floor projections evoke a sculptural potential of their own.

Gesine Borchardt