



StigmArt Art Review March 2015:

Videofocus Interview Gerhard Mantz

- Gerhard Mantz makes the perceptual process the subject of his films by emphasizing the medium's material form. In his exquisite software artwork he creates a genuinely affecting mood through precise rhythms and colors, inviting the viewer into a haunted, totally subjective flow of clean not figurative images. We are pleased to present Gerhard's work for this year's Videofocus Edition. Gerhard, we want to take a closer look at the genesis of your film: how did you come up with the idea for *Painting by numbers*?

Painting by numbers belongs to a series of work called "Infinite Image Productions" I started in 2000. My basic question always was: is a machine capable of making art. Before I knew anything about computers like most people then, I dreamed of an artificial mega brain that knows better than any human how to seduce and captivate us with intricate images beyond human imagination. When artists started to use computers and software in their work I lost my dream. From what I could see from the results of my colleges and myself my answer was definitely no. A machine cannot make art!

In 2000 I did a complex website where a lot of data had to be loaded before start. The internet was very slow at that time. To prevent the visitors from losing patience I entertained them with a non repetitive animation while the content was loading. I was so fascinated with my animation that I continued to write more complex scripts for animations. I watched these animations develop their endless variations of form and color for hours. Every now and then the combinations were surprisingly stunning - way beyond my personal creative skills. And yes today I think a machine can be creative and can produce art. The machine does not reflect about it, cannot judge and compare. (But frankly who can do that in art, anyway?) The machine produces blindly. Like Beethoven who could compose music without hearing, just because he knew how to do it. I teach the computer how to do it.

- Allegro Scherzando is the subtitle of your piece. We find that you focus on the synesthetic qualities of your work, and the use of a silent track is indeed an attempt at a more abstract narrative cinema. *Painting by numbers* often approach the sheer lyrical quality of visual music. How did you develop your visual imagery?

The elements of my imagery are borrowed from abstract paintings of all kinds as long they meet my personal taste. But I am limited to the use of simple elements, those the hardware can handle one at a time - and also what a viewers perception can handle of abstract imagery changing over and over. Yes, this is visual music, no soundtrack necessary.

- From the first time we watched *Painting by numbers* we were impressed by the way you explore the process of painting and investigate the inner nature of the artistic act. Could you take us through your creative process when starting a new project?

I never start with a blank sheet. By watching what I made already I am getting ideas for improvements or new elements to add and others to delete. Trial and error. It is a constant work in progress. One version emerges from an earlier one. – O.k. o.k., in the very, very beginning one has to start with a blank sheet, right. If I really have to, I scramble something together randomly and

arbitrarily. From that starting point I improve and it can only become better.

- With the advent of digital software, a new generation of abstract cinema has emerged, which tends to refer back to more metaphysical approach of earlier pioneers such as Wilfred and Belson. What was the most challenging thing about making this film using digital technology?

The scripts I write, the scripts driving the animations, gets more and more complex. There are dead ends and detours and I am sloppy with code. I often forget to delete unused code, forget to write comments that explain what the code is for. I am ending up with a messy structure it works – but once I want to change or improve things months later I don't understand my own script any more. As if somebody else guided my hand.

But I love the tinkering. Wilfred and Belson did not have the computers we fortunately can use today. For us the work is not less tedious but we can go further.

- How did you get into filmmaking and animation?

Image making is a process over time. Not only that I found it entertaining to watch that process, an animation is also a way to organize and structure the elements of the image along a time scale not only in space and to play with the viewers memory.

A close inspection of the painters' process - in particular abstract expressionism and motion painting- has been central to the genesis of your work. Can you introduce our readers to this preliminary phase of your work?

I have been a sculptor and used to make color objects and installations when I discovered 3D software. I started to use the software to plan and blueprint these objects. Eventually I was getting more and more absorbed by the computer part of my work and soon I came up with models too delicate to build in a material. So I made prints from the objects as if they were real and presented them like photography.

I was always thinking in abstract terms, with the objects, even with my landscapes. These are borderline abstracts, no big difference.

Generally I am interested in the balance between random and order, in space and in clusters. Space opens a surface into depths. Clusters develop space but prevent penetration. It is always about attraction and rejection.

- Let's speak about influences. Have any video artists from the older generation inspired you?

In 1997 I lived in New-York and tried to get some random scripting into the 3D models for my sculptures. I was fascinated by the work of Manfred Moor. We showed in the same galleries, so I knew him. I could never figure how he programmed his animations. I tried repeatedly to shop talk with him, but he did not let out a syllable. He was extremely secretive. Never the less his work challenged me a lot. And it was in that Williamsburg loft that I wrote my first line of code. - **Thanks for sharing your time and thoughts, Gerhard, we wish you all the best with your filmmaker career.**

What's next for Gerhard Mantz? Have you a particular film in mind?