

VON BARTHA

ADOLF LUTHER "WORK AND COLLECTION"
SEPTEMBER 2 – OCTOBER 21 / 2017



Portrait of Adolf Luther, Courtesy Adolf-Luther-Stiftung, Krefeld and von Bartha Gallery, Basel

Von Bartha, Basel is pleased to announce an exhibition of works by the late German artist Adolf Luther, in collaboration with the Adolf-Luther-Foundation, Krefeld. Presented alongside influential pieces from the artist's private collection - including Alexander Calder, Yves Klein and Lucio Fontana - the exhibition provides a comprehensive overview of the artist, both as creative and collector.

Luther's fascination with light - in particular in its relation to materiality - characterised his practice from the early 1960s onwards. Central to von Bartha's exhibition is *Flaschenzerschlagen* ('Bottle Smashing'), a performative work first executed publicly by Luther in Düsseldorf, 1968. This artistic 'act-of-faith' saw the artist smashing bottles within the gallery space – as the bottles shattered, light temporarily appeared on the edges of the broken pieces. The heap of fragments divided light from the happenings of the material world, revealing - at least momentarily - the existence of light as a brief visual phenomenon, independent of the reality of objects. For Luther, this action simultaneously presented the end and beginning of an artistic procedure. Rejecting established modes of representation, the destructive act marked a pivotal moment in the artist's journey towards the transcendence of traditional painting, bringing his art closer to reality.

These concerns are reflected in the art and artist's presented alongside Luther in von Bartha's gallery space; Lucio Fontana, Piero Manzoni and Yves Klein were similarly renowned for their 'destructive' methods of production. Through peer-to-peer exchanges, as well as purchases, Luther's collection reaffirmed his interest in art which pushed beyond the formal picture plane. Spanning the geometric abstractions of the 1920s and 1930s, as well as the object and kinetic art

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of the 1950s and 1960s, the collection lays no claim to comprehensiveness, rather it serves as a form of identification and examination of particular artistic moments.

Also on show at von Bartha are Luther's *Lichtschleusen* (*Light Sluices*, 1962), two sheets of glass filled with glass fragments. The works diffuse light across the broken edges contained in the piece. From the mid-60s onwards, Luther replaced the glass fragments with lenses, concave and convex mirrors and prisms. Through the use of these optical materials, Luther acquired further essential knowledge about light; the artist explained, "The light energy that travels rapidly through space carries images with it. I see light as a trans-optical substance, which contains an infinite number of images."

Similarly, Luther's dazzling *Hohlspiegelobjekt* (*Concave Mirror Object*, 1971) presents 44 square concave mirrors laid in a geometric grid. The work further exemplifies Luther's radical ideas concerning dimensions beyond the canvas - light is more than the subject of the work, it becomes its embodiment. *Hohlspiegelobjekt*'s strict form belies the organic nature of the light it diffuses across the gallery space, continuously reflecting the changing environment which it inhabits. This unpredictability, produced and manipulated by the work's setting, is integral to Calder's mobile *The Yellow Dot* (1956) and Vassilakis Takis' *Electro-Magnétique* (1967), also present in von Bartha's gallery space; all three works – existing somewhere between art object and scientific apparatus - rely on external forces to achieve their effect, thus encouraging a direct interaction between the viewer and the artwork.

About the artist

Adolf Luther (b. Krefeld, Germany 1912 – 1990) is widely recognised as one of the pioneers of Kinetic and Optical sculpture and a leading representative of the post-war avant-garde in the field of conceptual Light Art. Luther experienced light as *ungeheure Realität* (*tremendous reality*) and believed in an immaterial, invisible light-reality as separate to the material world. He participated in major exhibitions on Kinetic Art, Zero, and Op Art, as well as in exhibitions on architecture and space.

Luther's work has been shown across international museums including: The Guggenheim Museum, New York (2014), Grand Palais, Paris (2013) and the Museum Kunst Palast, Düsseldorf (2008). Solo exhibitions have included, Städel Museum, Frankfurt (2013) Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (1974) Kunsthalle Basel (1971) and Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels (1971).

About the Adolf Luther Foundation

The Adolf Luther Foundation was set up by Luther in 1989 to promote and support research into the intellectual foundations of Concrete Art since the 1950s. The Foundation also works to further develop Krefeld as a centre of Concrete Art, as well as now preserving the founder's artistic oeuvre and his collection. The foundation is located in the building that formerly served as the artist's home and studio, and runs under the full-time direction of art historian Dr Magdalena Broska. It was accredited by the State of North Rhine-Westphalia as a non-profit organisation founded under private law in 1990.

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Exhibition Facts

Title: Adolf Luther

Address: von Bartha, Kannenfeldplatz 6, 4056 Basel

Telephone: +41 61 322 10 00

Website: www.vonbartha.com

Season Opening: September 1, 2017, 5 - 9 pm

Dates: September 2 – October 21 / 2017

Opening Hours: Tuesday to Friday 2 – 6pm, Saturday 11 am – 4pm, or by appointment

Admission: Free

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