

Recreation

Exhibition at Villa Bernasconi, Lancy/Genève

Peer Clahsen. Mina Audemars & Louise Lafendel. Charles & Ray Eames. Jérôme Hentsch. Misha Hollenbach & Shauna Toohey (P.A.M.). Enzo Mari. Bruno Munari. László Réber. Denis Savary. Oskar Schlemmer. Alma Siedhoff-Buscher. Saul Steinberg by Nieves

Exhibition curators Zsuzsanna Szabo and Jean-Marie Bolay

From April 17 to June 16, 2019

It all started with the discovery of some of the little-known works of the Hungarian illustrator László Réber. Réber is above all famous for his illustrations of children's books, which *Récréation* offers readings; but this versatile artist has also ventured into the volume and press cartoon. His line revealed a playful spirit, skillful in making words and lines appear in a few stripped pencil strokes.

At the same time, a geometric exploration was taking place, translating abstract faces, which were eventually found in the form of a funny construction game made of cardboard cubes. These two distinct practices seemed to us to mobilize the same logic, that of the game. On the one hand, there would be the game of drawing, improvisation with the means of the edge, and on the other hand, the game of construction and the infinite variation of the possibilities of composition. In both cases, the game is presented as a separate activity, a state of absorption - of flow, as it is said today - in which the player would appropriate the world through manipulation according to rules that he would set himself outside any external purpose. This attitude of re-creation also appears in Saul Steinberg's work when, pencil in hand, he improvised in 1954 at the Milan Triennial a city on the walls of the Children's Labyrinth designed by the Italian group of architects BBPR, and which the Zurich-based publisher Nieves reissued in the form of a leporello. Réber's line is reminiscent of Steinberg's, whose drawings he discovered by the Swiss magazine *Graphis*, which he was exceptionally allowed to receive in Hungary under the communist regime. *Recreation* proposes for the first time to bring these two virtuoso artists together.

It also appears that this game and these construction games have maintained close links with pedagogy, at least since the end of the 18th century. They later crystallized with the work of Friedrich Fröbel and Maria Montessori. Abandoning education based on the quantitative accumulation of knowledge, the reformers chose to let the child appropriate the world for himself by manipulating his immediate environment, that is, through play. Hybrid objects, "pedagogical games", were then born, which served both as learning materials and as calls to free play: recreation. The building set is the most emblematic example. Intelligent, made of quality materials, these objects offer a liberating alternative to traditional toys involving a form of social control, such as dolls for example. Not surprisingly, this momentum was to mark the art world, especially the Bauhaus, a school that promoted material experimentation. We can also ask ourselves the question of the debt of abstraction towards geometric construction games, whose motifs seem to have marked painting and modern architecture. Bauhaus set designer Oskar Schlemmer, with the *Triadic Ballet* (1922), explored these links between play and geometry. In the same school, Alma Siedhoff-Buscher produced in 1923 the building set that would make her famous, the *Schiffbauspiel*,

which encourages both imitation and invention and of which the Swiss family company Naef became the exclusive publisher in 1976. Naef, for whom the German Peer Clahsen, a tireless designer of geometric objects, was the most prolific inventor, has made the construction game his specialty.

Récréation also presents the work of Ray and Charles Eames, essential heirs of modular thinking in architecture, who have developed a work in which play is not only an object they make, but also a work process through experimentation and a driving force for creativity.

The exhibition also pays tribute to Mina Audemars and Louise Lafendel, pioneers of active pedagogy at the Maison des Petits of the Jean-Jacques Rousseau Institute, which they co-directed for thirty years at the beginning of the last century. Through their construction games, they advocated learning through free play and stimulating the child's faculties through discovery. For the centenary of the publication of *New Surface Game: Explanatory* brochure, Récréation is publishing its facsimile. Audemars and Lafendel invented this educational booklet to "encourage the nascent artistic taste, provoke the spirit of research, and to feed and educate the creative imagination" from simple elements: geometric shapes with dimensions

Finally, alongside two tutelary figures, Enzo Mari and Bruno Munari, who revolutionized the toy object in post-war Italy, Récréation invites a younger generation of artists: Jérôme Hentsch, Denis Savary, Shauna Toohey and Misha Hollenbach (P.A.M.) to participate in a free game, without fixed rules, for a break.

Zsuzsanna Szabo and Jean-Marie Bolay