

# KLAUS RINKE: Changing Visual Intelligence

by Hunter Drohojowska

A large crowd spilled into the street, disrupting the flow of traffic to Ma Maison. Across Melrose Avenue, people craned their necks to see Klaus Rinke. In the alley-like space next to Ace Gallery, the German performance artist was suspended in air like a living marionette. Attached to his limbs and head were cords that spectators could pull to make him move, dance, walk or jerk around spasmodically. Titled *Ma-ni-pu-la-ti-on*, the performance lasted some 30 minutes. Those who tired of the game wandered into the gallery installation, a severe arrangement of hardware that resembled a laboratory unit for analyzing water. Water was everywhere, transported through copper tubing or contained in buckets, beakers, hoses and faucets. On the walls, geometric angles were outlined with string held taut by brass plumb bobs, the instrument used to determine water depth and define a true vertical line.

Outside, Rinke began his second performance, titled *Level*. A level is a liquid-filled tube that gauges horizontal surfaces. Rinke has been using water to examine time-space relationships in both his sculpture and performance work since the '60s. For this performance, he constructed a large-scale primitive level. Twenty-two galvanized aluminum buckets were placed on a 20-foot wooden plank that balanced upon a steel sawhorse. With the aid of his elfin assistant Heinz Blaumuller, Rinke filled the buckets with a garden hose.

It was a common action using common materials, and it took over an hour to complete. Murmurs of discontent percolated through an audience waiting impatiently for something to happen. Occasionally, the plank would tilt to an alarming angle, producing expectant gasps from the crowd. There was, however, no climax, no magic act. At the conclusion, Rinke served beer to the spectators, but an ambience of disenchantment prevailed. People felt that they'd missed something, when there was really nothing to miss. However, Rinke's action was markedly different from the recent performance work in Los Angeles.

Over the last few years, California performance art has shifted toward the narrative and often approached undisguised entertainment. Preoccupied with autobiographical confession, artists reveal intimacies that, in theory, speak to universal experience. In fact, they speak to theatrical ex-

perience, following linear plot development, charging admission fees to gallery cum theater spaces, and drawing SRO crowds. This can leave people ill-prepared for the non-literary work of Klaus Rinke.

Rinke charged no admission, and the performance took place on the street, so the audience was free to act as it pleased. Seen for its dramatic content, it was boring. It was also compelling. Water was used as the tangible equivalent of time. Water as a boundless, formless, infinite material that flows without past, present or future. Like time itself. In containing the water, Rinke stopped the flow and held the water in the present. In the performance, Rinke directed the water to 22

containers, measurements of volume, but also measurements of time. Just as the linear flow of the water was captured and held in the present, for the duration of the performance, so was time. The spectators were made uncomfortably aware of the suspension of time, and the event confounded their expectations.

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from above, a conical brass plumb bob gently dimples the quiet surface of the water. A golden phallus at the edge of silver penetration.

"Water is feminine matter, the Mother of us all," explained Rinke. "We are born in water, we come from water, water is the pre-embryonic situation. Bodies of all forms come from that state." Gesturing at the water table, he added, "I am not dealing with illusion, I'm defining space. That sculpture is a clear concentration of one point in space."

To one side stand four narrow glass beakers of water, each more than ten feet tall. In two beakers, the plumb bob determines the true vertical, the direction of gravity both in and suspended above the water. In the other two beakers, a hollow copper ball floats in the water or is held just beneath the water's surface. The lovely, simple sculptures demonstrate the contra-gravitational properties of water. What goes down in air will go up in water, floating free, free of the properties that make up an environment of air. The passive medium of water alters and affects all the rules that govern the common atmosphere of air.

"What is interesting to me about art — and water — is that it is not stable, not

dead. Water is a life material," mused Rinke. "Even contained in an art gallery, water possesses these life properties, while a painting of the ocean is an illusion of life." As Rinke said, he is not dealing with illusion. "Every art should have its own real existence, not be an illusion of something else. Reality is the thing itself in space, *the real thing in space.*"

Rinke, a distinguished instructor at the Dusseldorf Art Academy, hadn't been to Los Angeles since 1972. Like most visitors, he had a souvenir snapshot taken at a pool. Only his was underwater at the Chateau Marmont. Dressed in t-shirt and jeans, bricks in his pockets to hold him down, Rinke stood underwater for a portrait by Daniel Martinez. Asked why he hadn't removed his clothes, Rinke pointed out that he wanted to move, just as he was, from one environment to another and feel the full effect of both.

Why does Rinke work with water instead of plexiglass, why does he explore gravity and time rather than compositional problems in advanced painting? Rinke concluded, "As artists, we have an obligation to go further, bring a new vision to art and not rely so much on history. Too many artists don't think in terms of changing visual intelligence. They don't realize that their power as artists is in *changing visual intelligence.*"

Rinke's installation remains on view at Ace on Melrose through September 12. In January, he will install *Projection, Distance = [Forth and Back] = Mass* at Ace in Venice. ■



Performance artist Klaus Rinke (clockwise from the top) underwater, up in the air and hard at work

photos by Daniel J. Martinez

