

Portrait: Playing with the art of light

Having narrowly escaped death, Thomas Bachmaier has recognized his true calling: To become an artist. He experimented with various materials until he came across copper. With this element he has been creating light installations for years, which can be admired in many public spaces, but are also very popular with private customers. On April 27 he opens his new workshop-studio.



Thomas Bachmaier, artist

Mr. Bachmaier, would you describe yourself more as an artist or a craftsman?

First and foremost as an artist, secondly as a craftsman, since a lot of manual skill is also necessary for my work. But without ideas, vision and inspiration, the best craftsmanship is of little use. Object art is also characterized by the fact that the "soul" of a material becomes visible through the processing and treatment of it. I have experimented a lot with the design of the copper surface and welding technology and invented completely new ways of applying these technologies for my work. Experts, who possibly know the "basic knowledge" of this application much better than I do, often ask how a certain effect of the copper in my light objects comes about.

How did you decide to become an artist?

The story is a long one. In the late 80s I met some very interesting people in London who lived in a kind of squatter flat in an old Victorian house near Finsbury Park. All of them were shrill personalities and each had his own art of making it known. From here came the trends that were later commercialized in Europe or around the world. Of course, this rubbed off on me and strengthened my own creativity. I started sewing crazy costumes, writing poetry, painting and playing guitar. I continued to visit my London friends several times a year until the late 90s. Then I had a serious traffic accident and after eight months in various hospitals it was clear that I could no longer practice my former profession as a telecommunications technician. So I stayed with art and began to experiment further creatively. I expanded costume design, made leather clothing in a completely new technique, wrote poems in a language I invented myself and then recited these poems at open air events in my "costumes". I produced large-scale paintings in acrylic and oil, calligraphic drawings, carved wood sculptures and then finally came to copper, to which I have remained faithful to this day - apart from a few "side jumps" with stainless steel, which I also combine with copper.

Where do you get the inspiration from?

Due to the previously mentioned accident, I had a near-death experience in the hospital. The three minutes (measured time in the 3rd dimension) of cardiac arrest felt like 1000 years in a perfect world, whose glory I cannot put into words. Each of my works is a kind of fragmented snapshot from the perfection seen there.

There are very large-size works of art on your website. How long do you work on them?

I work on some of them for months. Like, for example, the object I exhibited last year at the Kirta exhibition in the Dorfen savings bank. It took me about six months. An object matures during its

creation. It's not the case - and that's another difference from handicraft - that I have a technical drawing from the start, according to which I purposefully build an object. It is rather a vision of what this object should express and what "charismatic radiation" I imagine. Ideas often arise during the work, as to how I can approach as close as possible to this vision.

Which object took most time and why?

I was "The wall" on the Dorfener Bahnweg, which took a year. The preparatory work already took a month. I had to be present during concreting in order to insert the pipes for the recesses for the later copper installations into the framework of the wall. When the concrete formwork covers were removed after the concrete had hardened, the filler material stuck in the concrete had to be painstakingly scraped out. And since "The wall" has a length of 60 meters, it took some time, of course. Whoever walks along "The wall" sees differently elaborated sceneries, which are independent through the use of certain, also colored illuminants and through their combination with precious stones. However, these different sceneries come together to form a harmonious whole thanks to the use of copper as a material throughout. The client's ideas were also incorporated into the work, a special challenge that had to be met.

You have also built a well-known work of art at the catch basin?

Yes, these are two granite columns with copper in between. There was already another object on site, but this one was destroyed by vandalism.

You will soon be opening your new workshop studio. What can customers and visitors expect?

In the past I always had to improvise when customers or visitors announced themselves. Because in order to present the light and shadow effects of my objects well, you need the appropriate reflection zones, i.e. enough free space around the objects. So far, I always used our staircase and presented my work there on columns. Which was quite time-consuming, because I had to clear everything away again after the customer visit. A suitable exhibition space has been needed for a long time and on Saturday, April 27, it will finally be opened. Hopefully another will be added later this year. It's nice now to have everything under one roof, workshop and showroom. Interested people can drop by unannounced.

You have been friends with the designer and photo artist Cornelia Gottwald for 20 years. How should one imagine an artist partnership?

It's not always that simple. In design matters, opinions often differ quite a lot. But when we design a project together, we are both satisfied in the end. The last joint exhibition at Lake Starnberg was successful for both of us.

You are a native of Dorfen. Does your homeland offer the ideal breeding ground for creative artists?

More appreciation of the artists who were born here would be desirable. For example, that their work is requested and taken into account from the outset in the construction or renovation of public buildings/places. One example for me is the corridor that you have in front of you when you enter the Jakobmayer building and walk towards the back in the direction of the cinema. At the moment, it reminds me more of the emergency room in a hospital than of the entrance to the cultural center of the "cultural capital" Dorfen.

The interview was conducted by Alina Zach for the April 20, 2013 edition of "Intelligenzblatt".