

Tour for a Left-hander

On my way to the Carolingian frescoes at the foot of the Umbrail Pass I stop in Vaduz once a year – not to check my bank account, but to visit the Kunstmuseum. I am a great admirer of that building. After all, I'm left-handed. In museums the world over, the café is normally located to the right of the main entrance. But things are different in Liechtenstein. Here, the café is on the left-hand side, which never fails to instil in me a great desire for a royal break. At the same time my self-esteem suffers somewhat, given that normally a German would first look at the art and then go to the café. But it's different in Vaduz. There I first get my circulation going with a double espresso, then I really come into my caffeinated own in the exhibition rooms.

Right-handers probably tend to go right, into the collection galleries on the ground floor. I, by contrast, stride upwards into the Parnassus of art with an air of ceremonial expectation. Instinctively I turn left. Often the extremely friendly guards draw my attention to the fact that this is the 'wrong' direction, as the exhibition ends at the end of this corridor. But sometimes I am stubborn and flit past when no one is watching. I look at the exhibition from the end to the beginning.

For me, the left side is clearly more important than the right. By going left, I confound the whole arrangement, the display, the curator's skilful composition. I could probably drive many curators to despair, as their concepts founder because of people like me. For I see the artworks from a totally different perspective: from the last work to the first, from the most recent object to the oldest, from the end to the beginning, from back to front. That is to say, my view is regressive or retrograde, and not progressive or avant-garde. Perhaps as a result of my left-hand turn I – without realising it – perceive art history from its end, from the standpoint of the new and unknown, which, as we know, has the power to fundamentally alter all that went before it.

Which is why the way Friedemann Malsch and Christiane Meyer-Stoll arrange exhibitions is right up my street. The display in the Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein is extremely interactive. Each artwork responds to its neighbour, enters into a dialogue with it, gives a commentary, defines a new aspect, expands its meaning, thwarts what was just seen. At the Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein the exhibits are inserted into a spatially staged display arranged in a well-considered temporal choreography. The curatorial arrangement of that display involves the whole space. Proceeding from the left wall to the opposite right wall and then forwards diagonally on a zigzag course. For a right-hander, the Liechtenstein room alignment runs right-middle-left, right-middle-left, and so on. Sometimes the middle can be empty. However, for me as a left-hander, it runs through the individual rooms in the opposite sequence: left-middle-right, left-middle-right, and so forth.

I punctuate the interactions in the opposite direction and thus also in the reverse sequence. My aesthetic experience of an exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein differs fundamentally therefore from the aesthetic experience of a right-hander. Or does this perhaps only apply on first entering the museum building? Only a left-hander can ask such questions.

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