

Catherine Christer Hennix

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Okey Dokey II in collaboration with Blank Forms, New York and Empty Gallery, Hong Kong.

Catherine Christer Hennix's (born 1948) exhibition at Galerie Max Mayer is already her third solo presentation in the field of visual arts this year. This is all the more noteworthy since the part of Hennix's oeuvre that one might consider as her visual practice had largely remained a secret for many years. The pieces presented here cover a period of almost 45 years and are the artistic output of a transdisciplinary project comprised of Hennix's diverse activities in other specialized fields on the outskirts of mathematics, philosophy, and music.

One reason for the extended under-representation of her artistic position—and for the recent attention to it—might be her work's complexity, which exceeds the capacities of the contemporary art world, coupled with the artist's own uncompromising nature. Taken together, these two factors have been an obstacle to the seamless assimilation of her work into the art business. Against this backdrop, her piece *Fragments Of A Writing From The Unconscious* (1994–1995) may be seen as a metaphor for the difficulties that arise in the mediation of her demanding artwork. Vinyl texts mirrored on both walls adjoining the gallery entrance refer to the wall texts conventionally used as an informational tool in exhibition contexts to decode what is on display. Here, however, Hennix communicates her own illegibility more than anything else: the digital compression of the text is too lossy for viewers to decipher a word of it.

The earliest works on view—displayed as a pair like the other works in the exhibition—are two reproductions from her series *Toposes*, which she began in 1974. The works depict Lissajous figures—visualizations of relations between tonal frequencies—which Hennix often employs to precisely tune the sine wave drones that feature prominently in her music. Her inspiration for this technique came from a visit to La Monte Young and Mariam Zazeela's downtown loft on an early trip to New York in 1969. In 1970, Young would then visit Sweden in order to seek her help in realizing one of his *Drift Studies* on the oscillators at the Elektronmusikstudion in Stockholm, where Hennix was also experimenting with computer-generated sound. Shortly thereafter, Young introduced her to the Hindustani singer and guru Pandit Pran Nath, whose circle of students would soon include Hennix, in addition to Young and Zazeela as well as Jon Hassell, Simone Forti, Henry Flynt, Charlemagne Palestine, and Terry Riley.

Originally conceived for computer monitors, the artworks *Topos #3* and *Topos #4* have been reconstructed for the exhibition as LED light boxes with aluminum frames. These works were part of Hennix's first solo show, *Toposes and Adjoints* (1976) at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, which remained her only solo exhibition for a long time. She had already organized the installation-oriented music series *Brouwer's Lattice* a few months before at the same venue, where she premiered *The Electric Harpsichord*, one of her major compositions. Henry Flynt would subsequently go on to develop the concept of the "Illuminatory Sound Environment" in dialogue with Hennix, which they presented in a concert at The Kitchen in New York three years later. Previously, the two had founded the group "Dharma Warriors," which briefly included Arthur Russell as well. Hennix had

already been active as a jazz drummer when she was young in Stockholm, and she continued playing the drums in different constellations in New York during the 80s.

Parallel to this, she held a research professorship at the Department of Mathematics at SUNY New Paltz for a few years as well as an interim post at MIT's Artificial Intelligence Laboratory. In the early 90s, Hennix relocated from the USA to Amsterdam. There she produced a set of "algebraic" paintings for a group exhibition at the Fodor museum. In these paintings, she pursued a minimalist formal vocabulary, which can already be recognized in the photographic documentation of her work for the Moderna Museet exhibition. The diptych *Algebra w/ Domains* (1973–1991), on view towards the back of the gallery, alternates colored blocks within a grid, employing Hennix's characteristically limited color palette. In both paintings, this grid is offset with a superimposed chromatic field, which is inscribed with mathematical equations. Hennix delineated the philosophical-mathematical reflections at the core of these works in her *Yellow Book*, which is included in a publication on her work, *Being = Space x Action* (1988).

Henry Flynt's lecture titled *The Philosophy of C.C. Hennix* (1996) outlines her intellectual and artistic career and identifies her return to Europe as the period when her attention turned to the ideas of Jacques Lacan. At the time these paintings were made, Hennix was traveling to Paris regularly and studying with a few of Lacan's students, including Jacques-Alain Miller, the publisher of his seminars. This connection produced the readymade piece *Encore & Encore* (2018). A pair of stuffed rabbits that Hennix purchased—themselves reconstructions—are placed on an armchair. The suggestively psychoanalytic setting is emphasized by the work's title, which comes from Lacan's Seminar XX. Hennix describes her two "patients" as an analogy to Lacan's famous Bretagne anecdote—just like the sardine can glistening in the sun, which Lacan saw floating on the ocean as a young man, the plush toys also seem to return one's gaze.

Hennix's multifaceted Oeuvre may be further contextualized by recent curatorial advances, especially those by Lawrence Kumpf, alongside Marcus Boon's growing research on her work, which will culminate in a monographic publication. Discursive connections to Germany have been achieved through the exhibition of her long-time companion Henry Flynt at the Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen in Düsseldorf (2012), which was presented the following year at the ZKM in Karlsruhe.

Flynt once noted: "Hennix wants the art world to subsidize radical thought. I object that it just demeans the work."¹ Even if the art world's current embrace of Hennix's work may be met with certain skepticism, it is at least able to achieve a long-overdue moment of expanded resonance for her work.

Moritz Nebenführ

¹ Henry Flynt, *The Art Connection: My Endeavor's Intersections with Art*, http://www.henryflynt.org/aesthetics/the_art_connection.htm, 2005.