

KAI MIDDENDORFF GALERIE

MARK SCHREIBER  
SPATIAL LANGUAGE IN JEST  
2 SEPT – 18 SEPT 2010

There initially appears to be far more to hear than to see in this exhibition. Brief, computer-generated sounds mark, in precise and incisive manner, the acoustic depth of the darkened space. Similar to the way electricity voltage can discharge itself over distance, tones and noises are released between two loudspeakers, one placed in the middle of the 12-metre-long sidewall, and the other in the right hand corner of the end wall. We move through this distinct sound field from speaker to speaker, from sound to sound.

A corner of the exhibition space, diagonally across from one loudspeaker, is weakly illuminated. An averted screen positioned on the floor serves as a source of light.

On proceeding to this spot, the visitor will see a video showing swift hand movements. It quickly becomes apparent that they relate to sign language. Indeed, this sign system was the starting point for the sound installation. Mark Schreiber initially learnt these American Sign Language sequences and then filmed himself performing them. This uncut seven-minute camera perspective finally served as the basis for his sound composition. Just like an orchestra musician would follow a conductor, so he as a composer adheres to the gestures of this soundless, spatial language. Mark Schreiber translates, comparable to Kurt Schwitters' work, a rigorous speech system into an illogical music one.

The video allows for the hearing of sounds anew and the space-temporal allocation of short abstract noises in the exhibition space. Some of the high-pitched ones seem quite humorous when heard in combination with the hand movements. Any visitor able to understand this form of communication would be amused, considering the artist has sourced jokes told in sign language involving the act of driving. He nevertheless consistently jumps between the tales before punch lines can be reached. Yet most visitors would not be able to follow all the semantic narratives of this sign system. Instead, what really mesmerises one here are the elegant, fine hand gestures that could appear to form part of a choreographed dance. The diversity of expression that this language is capable of is astounding. Being able to visually listen in is the great quality of this work.