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## [Issue 110](#) October 2007

### Achim Kubinski

Simultanhalle, [Cologne, Germany](#)

They were young and they painted decisively, drew on vast sheets of paper or laid out minimal enigmatic installations. They always appeared as a trio, their openings were perfectly staged and in the studio they operated with instinctive sureness. ‘You’d better ask my gallerist,’ 19-year-old graphic artist Angelika Wiesenthal once answered a critic, ‘he knows more about it.’ And asked in a television interview about Joseph Beuys, sculptor Stefan Ravena, also under 20, replied with relaxed arrogance: ‘Who?’ The close-knit group came to prominence in Stuttgart in the late 1970s, with the painter Christoph Brügge as their third member. Their biographies were couched in theatrical terms and played back from a tape recorder at every opening, a ritual entitled ‘introduction famili’. And their young gallerist Achim Kubinski hired premises primarily for their work. When the gallery drew attention at the Cologne art fair, famous names such as Martin Kippenberger and Joseph Kosuth were among those showing an interest in the clique.

For all the impropriety and presumptuousness of their public image, the group’s art remained reserved and quiet. In Foxtrott (1979), Angelika Wiesenthal spread tangled craquelées from floor to ceiling; in a black and white photograph, Stefan Ravena’s small installation Eulenflucht (Flight of Owls, 1977) looks very much like fabric, wire, clay and Blinky Palermo; and even on a cheap material like cardboard Christoph Brügge’s paintings make an intense, though restrained, impression. If there was one thing the critics found fault with, it was the lack of an identifiable shared style (in contrast, for example, to the ‘Mülheimer Freiheit’ group of painters). But as unexpectedly as the three Stuttgarters appeared, so they vanished again, and their gallerist moved to Cologne.

When the Simultanhalle in Cologne recently announced a forthcoming show of work by Angelika Wiesenthal, it brought with it something of a revelation: in the space usually reserved for the artist's name was that of the gallerist, Achim Kubinski. It would seem that finally, 30 years on, we are being quietly let in on a well-kept secret: Kubinski, an art school graduate born in 1951, was actually the creative force behind all three bodies of work, dividing his oeuvre between the three identities and finding a name and an impersonator for each genre – the part of 'Angelika Wiesenthal', for example, was played by his then girlfriend. When he explains today what he was doing at the time, Kubinski insists that the project was not just a charade: the front provided by the three fictitious artists was the only way for him to continue developing his work in three disparate genres, each with its own rules. His concept also had a theoretical side: Kubinski not only wanted to contest the traditional notion of what constitutes a work of art he also made a forward-looking statement that, in view of the relatively small international art scene in the late '70s, may at the time have sounded exaggerated: 'Art ... disappears, replaced by the artist's public image. In art, show is the name of the game.'

On the other hand, it is inevitable that Kubinski's conceptually motivated split careers now smack of parody, not least on account of his own admission that for each of the three artists he set himself the goals of 'one prize, one solo show, one bursary'. Standing in front of the almost ceiling-height drawings, which seem to float in the bright overhead light of the Simultanhalle, it is hard to forget their newly disclosed provenance. They still come across as solitary, light, decisive and reduced. But what is the value of a distinctive artistic style in which the self-imposed limitation of expressing oneself entirely through non-figurative, handwriting-like marks was ultimately nothing of the kind, since that same hand also created powerful and heavy constellations of fabric, wire and paper? When one knows that Kubinski kept this body of work together to a large extent, deliberately minimizing sales and keeping it in storage for years, the connection between the slightly crinkled, almost skin-like texture of the paper and the cloud of merging lines is all the more appealing – but the rustling one seems to hear also carries with it whispers of a lie. For the young Kubinski's splitting of his oeuvre into three parts is also a metaphor for his generation. It is hard to accept the 'famili' project as a concept free of base, market-oriented pragmatism, but as with so much of the late-'70s and early-'80s 'New Wave', which positioned itself with irony and narcissistic glamour between nihilism and over-affirmation, Kubinski's project fits in just well enough to ensure continued acceptability.

## Catrin Lorch

Translated by Nicholas Grindell

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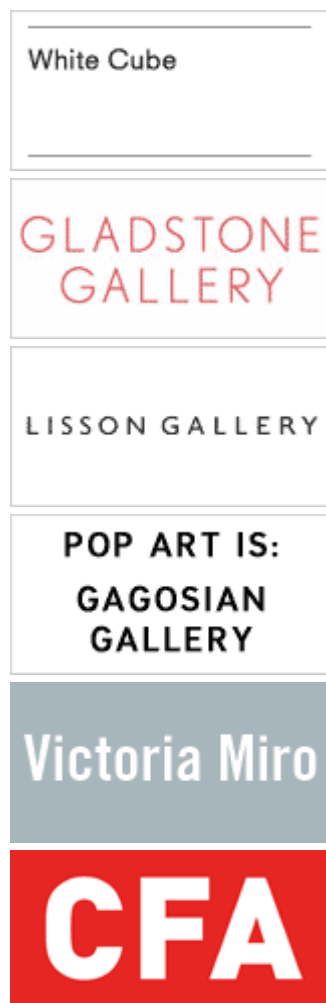
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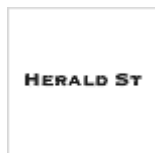
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