

Metro Station Benrather Strasse, Düsseldorf

Heaven Above, Heaven Below

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As a sculptor, Stricker works with form, material and space, but the crucial dynamic in his work is the process itself and the conceptual development and permeation of his chosen media. Especially in public he moves things for and with people as social sculptures, whether it's fields of rapeseed, springs and gardens in Africa or garbage in Mexico. With the meteorite atelier he created for "Aussendienst" in Hamburg he looks beyond the conventional modes of drop sculpture, site-specific sculpture and the skepticism towards their relevance. The result was a kind of observatory inspired by the designs of geodesic domes like those constructed by the American engineer Richard Buckminster Fuller: an artificial world contained within its own cosmos. Stricker employs sculptural techniques to simulate natural phenomenon not directly from this world, rather one that has dropped from outer space into our own. Meteorites appear like time arrows that shoot forward into the present from the past, finally reaching earth, only to be reduced to the time scale of our planet.

With his competition concept for the Wehrhahn Line he's done it: Embedded the vastness of the universe with its tranquility and weightlessness into the close hectic of a non-place and the occasionally scary space of a subway station. Heaven Above, Heaven Below... With these basic ideas the architects had a very precise approach to negotiations and planning with the engineers. Later, when the shell geometries had long been standing in 2007, he completely revised the basic concept and "broke up the soil" creating a positive spaceship out of the negative space. A process with impressive visual and conceptual results. The space extends downwards, widens and from the two narrow sections to the railroad track a command bridge designed with sloping walls and large glass surfaces emerges. This allows extensive views in all directions. The compact materiality of the earth in which the station is embedded is intelligently resolved and defined by Stricker as space. To achieve this impression, the interior architecture was consistently developed and realized according to Stricker's concept; the artist himself emphasizes how exceptionally well the cooperation with netzwerkarchitekten functioned.

Stainless steel panels cover the walls and lend the station a futuristic dull, silver-metallic sheen. Like droplets, the dots stamped in the plates fall from the wall, forming a matrix or a kind of braille, or in the empty spaces we almost seem to be able to identify encrypted letters. They are reminiscent of the rippling, glowing green code from the "Matrix" or the rivet-enforced techno interiors of spaceships. This station was the only one to maintain the floor as black concrete blocks, in order to enhance the effect of the six media walls embedded in the shell construction, so that they could be inserted flush into the matrix. These media walls offer a view into the universe by means of fascinating 3D animated scenes. They open up to the passer-by as a completely unusual, seemingly real experience of traveling in space. In cooperation with computer specialists from 235Media in Cologne

images and textures of space from the ESA and NASA were reconstructed in 3D and virtual trajectories were conceived. With a six-headed camera, designed in proportion to the architectural geometry of the U-Bahn's distribution level, travel through space was rendered and related views are shown out of the six video windows to the command bridge of an underground spaceship. Starting from the sun as a blazing ball of light, we glide through a tangible simulation of space, passing our solar system's heavenly bodies and moons, become aware of the fascinating details of the planet's craters and hills, until we reach the edges of our solar system and carry on to other galaxies and distant nebulae, traveling through a black hole and back to our sun –and the loop begins anew. This journey through time and space is impressively synchronic. If one follows the planets in the station over the screens we virtually “fly” by them, they move us standing in the spaceship, as observers of the impossible. And, we forget for a moment that we are under the earth. Thus, through the artistic aspect of sky watching, a social and philosophical moment becomes tangible. Man comes for a brief moment, for a pause, a waiting and awaiting, feeling astonishment about the visionary, the imaginary and the impossible. He is a passerby and a “passenger” on the way to a new place, lingering alone or with others in a non-place, then he feels the need to overcome and leave. Metaphorically speaking, it's about new perspectives and fantasies.

The art offers precisely that place where new visual worlds and experiences are possible. It's a medium, with the means and possibilities of advancing to new dimensions. This is immediately clear. The passer-by finds themselves in a protected space, with no advertising and swelling urban design. They are in a free-zone for art where it is feasible to make advances concerning the problems of cultural identity and the grandeur of one's own carnality and subjective-collective questions of meaning. He is a halted seeker at a profane stop.

Thomas Stricker offers a stop that escapes a foundation of reality and leads you to fantastic speculation of the imaginary. The choice of material and shape, the transformation of the “endless” universe as a expansion and the movement of a limited space under the earth, the functional utopia of a non-place, all of this is directly experienced. The takeoff, hovering and flying while waiting for the next train, relativity of time and space, the question of the movement of things and one's self in space and time, from the movement and the rotation of the earth to finding a space for one's self, all of these thoughts briefly enter the mind in the situation of this space. “Floating in space” under the earth. Nothing fascinates us humans more than the sight of microscopically small dimensions or macroscopically endless frontiers. The satisfied feeling of this glimpse into space and time of a crater on Mars, the moons of Saturn or the asteroid belt will certainly cause a few of the daily 53,000 passengers to miss their train one level down.

“To observe the sun, the moon and the heavens,” was the answer ancient philosopher Diogenes Laertes gave when asked why he was in the world. This statement is one of the most beautiful summaries of our present situation, this statement also anticipates the concept of the meteorite atelier and the Benrather Straße U-Bahn. It might be possible to offer a physical description of the interstellar constellation, but there is no explanation or reason for it that can be advanced. And similar to “Power of Ten, a Film Dealing with the Relative Size of Things in the Universe and the Effect of Adding Another Zero” (1977) by

Charles and Ray Eames, or “Scale Model of the Solar System” (1983) by Chris Burden, the utopian visions of dimensions and fantasies about expanding space that are treated in the sci-fi genre seemingly belong to some lost epoch. All things that occur in the course of time as entities encountered on earth are not subject to a need to be explained; they are simply there. Explanations are an abstract, logical exercise performed by our limited field of perception, constructions of the mind that are triggered as soon as we endeavor to grasp the connections and entities of our world as rational truths. The famous instruction manual for operating “spaceship earth,” as Buckminster Fuller called it, has not gone missing; rather we are simply part of these instructions, a component of the spaceship that has been furnished and equipped with such immaculate care. The expansion of this instruction code as part of the overall plan can be found immediately adjacent to the quest for meaning and the human capacity for abstract logic – which, unlike the chunks of cosmic rock, clearly did not drop out of the heavens. Where is above and where is below?