

GALERIE TSCHUDI

Galerie Tschudi

A Text by Gabriel Flückiger

In order to tell the story of Galerie Tschudi—a story of dedication, sensibility, and insistence—we will explore its territory using a metaphorical map. On first sight, three elements leap out of the map at us, which we can think of as orientational markers, outlines of possible continents. One is a phenomenon linked to the historical moment of 1985: “punk.” In 2005 we hear a cry of “hallelujah.” And finally, in 2015, we are caught in the glare of a blue neon sign. Admittedly, these cornerstones seem random; the actual, physical coordinates of the gallery are primarily in Glarus—in Ruedi Tschudi’s Jugendstil family home, and in a specially constructed warehouse—as well as in Zuoz, at the Chesa Madalena (since 2002).

So let us begin with punk. Anakoluth was the name of the band that played at the gallery’s first exhibition *Uecker und seine Schüler. Arbeiten aus dem Glarnerland* (1985). It was experimental, loud, and shrill; simply put, it was an affront to the local bourgeoisie. However, the two founders of the gallery—Elsbeth Bisig was a part of the gallery from the beginning—had not heard the band play in advance. The gig happened without much planning or intent, simply because they knew the musicians; its motivation was not opportunism, but trusting curiosity. Coincidence also led to the artist Günther Uecker from Düsseldorf, who originally wanted to show the work created during a stay in the local Klöntal at the Kunsthaus Glarus. When this turned out not to be an ideal solution, Tschudi spontaneously took the opportunity to put into practice an idea he had been considering for a long time: to establish his own gallery. This exploratory attitude continued after the first exhibition, which back then took place in the paper warehouse of the local newspaper’s printing press. The following shows included rarities, such as the paintings produced late in life by the great dramatist of the theater of the absurd, Eugène Ionesco (1985); curiosities, such as the child-dolls of Sasha Morgenthaler (1986); or more traditional art such as the cushion-like color monochromes by Gotthard Graubner (1988).

In retrospect, however, Bisig’s and Tschudi’s careers as gallerists only truly began with their groundbreaking encounter with Ulrich Rückriem in 1988. This moment is a vivid, sculptural shape on the gallery’s map, a mountainous peak. Not only because Rückriem’s art is all about raw stone, but because of his personality—it was an engaging encounter with an eminent artist. When the first visit in the artist’s studio seemed to go nowhere, Tschudi traveled to a stone quarry in Normandy for a second meeting, where he managed to successfully arrange an exhibition. The gallerists would end up spending a lot of time in quarries over the years, sometimes almost operating as artist’s assistants. They generally sought a close relationship with the artists; the spotlight is always on the artists and their work. In time, the first peak was joined by many more to form an impressive mountain range, with further prominent artists that define the basic topography of our map: Alan Charlton (since 1989), Richard Long (since 1990), Mario Merz (since 1992), Minimalists such as Carl Andre and Niele Toroni (since 1993), as well as Hamish Fulton (since 1995).

The map as a formula for thinking the history of the gallery does not help us to find a strategic direction to its program, for although the name Tschudi quickly began to appear at international art fairs such as Art Basel (since 1992), its approach was never goal-oriented, never intended as a conscious positioning within the overall landscape of art. Encounters with famous Swiss artists and mediators were never focused on establishing a professional, institutional network. The provincial remoteness of the Glarnerland was not the only reason for working in comparative isolation. Of course there were important contacts, such as with Franz Larese in St. Gallen or Konrad Fischer in Düsseldorf, but our map is also a metaphor for an independent approach to running a gallery that made its own way.

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Significantly, the remote location of the gallery inspired artists to create new work. Exhibitions mostly contained new works generated especially for the gallery, which often involved concrete local observations and conditions. Thus, besides the outlines and elevations, our map should have countless correspondences in the real world: walks by Richard Long or Hamish Fulton on the Glärnisch, the sculptural surveying of spatial relations in Glarus by Stanley Brouwn, and Petra Wunderlich's frontal photography of Zuoz's traditional architecture. Some of the works by Carl Andre, which in their reductive stance are generally resistant to being charged with narrative, even include the designation "Glarus" in their titles. It was Carl Andre who in his preface to his catalogue in 2005 professed a revealing "hallelujah" to describe his commitment to working with the gallerist couple.

While the first rough marker of our map's topographical relations stood for experimentation, this second marker stands for friendship and intensive working relationships between artists and gallerists. But in contrast to this closeness on a human level, the gallerists consider the remaining mystery, a fundamental unavailability and resistance of the work, a decisive factor of successful collaboration.

Besides the massive mountain ranges, the map also contains abysses, or at least shadowy slopes. One of these low points occurred around the turn of the millennium, when the gallerists began to doubt their isolated location. It was interesting from an artistic perspective, but their activities began to feel increasingly isolated from the public. The openings attracted a loyal and specialized art audience, but the gallerists were more or less left alone for the duration of the exhibition. The move to Zuoz and into the historic Chesa Madalena, modernized especially by Hans-Jörg Ruch, brought a vital fresh impulse to their activities. Here too, the artists appreciated the intimate atmosphere of the spaces and referenced them in their exhibitions, for example Su-Mei Tse or Kimsooja.

The Galerie Tschudi, however, is situated right in the center of the village and it is only here, under close observation by the inhabitants and visitors from around the world, that the gallerists' art and mediation practice has the opportunity of proving itself publicly. That the gallery does not shy away from this confrontation becomes clear when we turn to the last marker on our imaginary map: the neon sign. It reads "Eau & Gaz. À Tous les Étages" and was mounted on the facade of the gallery during the 30-year anniversary exhibition. The piece is by Bethan Huws, in a reference to Marcel Duchamp. There is no doubt that the building has a functioning water and electricity supply, but the fact that the village allows such a dominant intervention attests the widespread and profound acceptance of the gallery. The neon light therefore represents the gallery's links to its surroundings and a practice of art mediation that does not hide out in an ivory tower, and is discussed in living contexts. Here, our metaphorical Tschudi-map develops a practical application: as a helpful signpost in the landscape of learning and experience that we call art.

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