

Characterization of Hannes Malte Mahler's Oeuvre

How does one track down someone who has left so many tracks that initially it seems just a multitudinous tangle? Perhaps only by first acknowledging that this polyphony cannot actually be condensed into a single core. Hannes Malte Mahler, who once began his career as a master student with Marina Abramović at the HBK Braunschweig, was highly expansive in his entire artistic work. He, the draughtsman, performer, painter, installation artist and inventor of ideas, was always more than the sum of all these parts, and he was fundamentally limitless in his quest to transform his entire world into a Mahler universe.

One axis of this universe was his conviction that art was far too important to be practised solely in the narrow field of pure art. Shortly before his untimely and tragic death, he formulated his credo as follows: "This Mahler essentially consists of three parts: Art, design and marketing. These worlds are connected by drawing". The ease with which HM Mahler changed the boundaries between these spheres was breath-taking.

With similar ease, he created '*Mahlerwear*', his own fashion line, as well as offering himself as a commissioned draughtsman with his *private domain* performance, ironically questioning the hierarchies between client and author. In the same breath, he organised his annual *glitter ball shootings*. The performance event is not just about shooting at the baubles on a Christmas tree with an air rifle, but it rather scrutinises whether our faith in Christmas has degenerated into nothing but a formal ritual.

Dazzling and ambivalent, appealing and ambiguous, this is how Hannes Malte Mahler's work could be characterised. The themes of his works revolve around being human in today's world and what an artist can or should contribute to it. The cosmos of his visual world can be described as a contemporary '*comédie humaine*' and indeed Hannes Malte Mahler had something of a contemporary Balzac. He was a bon vivant who knew how to enjoy life and a keen observer of the actions of his fellow human beings.

He wasn't just concerned with extending art into life, but also and more importantly, he was interested in creating a brand, in 'mahlerising' the world with all means available and with an acute sense for the necessary pinch of self-irony such a project needs to avoid ending up as plain hubris.

He himself recognised that his sharpest sword was drawing, which could be comic, laconic, melancholic, screamingly loud and squeakily colourful, and then again of extreme delicacy and devotion. He could caricature what he saw with a deadly pen, but he could also trace it with great tenderness and sympathy. His continuous drawing grasped the world around him and brought it to Mahler's contour, as well as holding up a compassionate mirror to the world: a mirror in which everything appeared distant, but thereby became closer and more precise.

Hannes Malte Mahler seduced us into a re-vision of our expectations and ideas of what drawing, painting and art should be, as well as what to expect from the world. With his work, however, he also gives us the impulse not only to expect something but also to think about what we – following his dazzling example – can contribute to the world.