

MEDIUM STAMP (ING)

Thanks to the activity of J.-H. Kocman from Brno, who has been devoting part of his work to the problem of the stamp in actual art tendencies and who in cooperation with a number of other artists has under the title of « stamp activity » gathered the first collection of rubber stamped creations, we can maybe for the first time try their elementary typology.

Stamp and stamping are not only one of many technical means, but a medium sui generis. If part of the artists turn their interest to mass-media and their possibilities of the largest possible communication and thereby make use of the wide scale of technical means, on the other hand a series of authors try to work with the most elementary means the range of which is limited, but with which they are neither bound to the dictatorship of the market nor to the needs or interests of institutions nor to so called social interests. Stamp have roused a comprehensible interest - they have a socially strictly codified function, a simple production technology and they practically exclude the possibility of a unique original work, repeating and multiplying is given by their character, they are ideal for a simple visual or verbal piece. (1) Most common is the use of a stamp in connection with another element, e.g. a drawing, a written text etc. Customary official or commercial stamps are known from Kurt Schwitters's « merz » drawing, in which their meaning grotesquely or ironically specifies their sense. The czech author of « acoustic drawing », Milan Grygar, has created nonsemantic sound units from single stamped letters, which in combination with a drawing form a score where the stamp represents the voice element.

(2) We also come across an isolated drawing as model for a stamp by means of which it is then multiplied ; in this case the stamp serves as multiplication means which preserves the character of the author's original (e.g. some drawings of the berlin poet Ludwig Gosewitz).

(3) By the combination of various for this purpose individually created stamps arises a sort of « stamped drawings », in which the variation of elements can be made use of. Thus arose the largest published cycle of stamp pieces, the « mundumculum » of the german poet Diter Rot.

(4) Stamping is used by some authors in creations which could also be printed in another way. In this case, too, it is a sort of transition between the author's original and the print, the publication. Such a stamped text can have the character of a short visual poem (e.g. of the type of constellation as in « chicago ciao » by Timm Ulrichs) or a conceptual text (some works by Ken Friedman or Jiri Valoch).

(5) Many authors proceed from the standard function of the stamp, but they change or specify it in different ways. e.g. the today already classic stamp « Vorsicht ! Kunstwerk ! » by Daniel Spoerri

is in fact the analogy of stamped notices - they stress the specific character of the thing on which they are printed - and at the same time it puts the things into the context with the author's work. The institutional function of the stamp is transformed by Josepy Beuys in context with his political and socioally critical texts. A half serious, half grotesque categorization of art species is carried out by Schwind in his certificates to various works of art.

(6) A specifically stamp character have some conceptual creations bound to a single term (some cycles by Jiri Valoch), to a numerical series (Eric Andersen) or to sequences of another kind (sequences of dates in the time works of the Gabor Attalai). In them the visual shape of traditional rubber stamps of all kinds, scriptural dates etc. is made use of ; the author's interest is bound to the demonstration of the idea, not to the asthetic quality of the creation as in most works falling into group (5), which is in distinct opposition to groups (1) - (4).

(7) The most specific group of rubber pieces are the metastamps - they are either bound directly to the term stamp or to the process of stamping ; it is e.g. represented by the stamp with the text « nichtstempel » by Jiri Valoch or « ich drücke der Welt meinen Stempel auf » by Timm Ulrichs. The act of stamping is fixed by J.-H. Kocman's stamp « touch » ; the visual transposition of the touch and the metaphorical demonstration of the kiss as stamp touch is the stamp with the imprint of the lips by Stephen James Kaltenbach.

(8) Stamped action texts form a special group only thanks to their specific visual shape. They are spontaneous expressive prints, often many times repeated, which by their character come near to typographical action texts or expressive typewriter poems. From the semantic point of view they may belong to group (7), if texts bound to the act of stamping are used (e.g. « I am glad that I can stamp » by Endre Tot) ; into the sphere of visual poetry « Bezahlt » by Emmett Williams is traditionally ranged as well as the stamped texts by some japanese visual poets.

(9) The comparatively large scale of using stamps in art activity enables some authors to include into the context of stamp pieces also creations which technologically are no stamps. It is espacially the metaphoric idea of the stamp as any imprint, maybe best represented by the signature of Gabor Attalai which the author understands as « stamp » of his personality, or the imprints of various parts of the same author's body (nose, navel, phallus etc). Finally into this group also belong texts realized in another way e.g. typewritten, printed, but semantically directly bound to the process of manufacturing a rubber stamp (e.g. the unpublished contribution by Laslo Beke, originally prepared for the volume « stamp activity » about the impossibility of having stamps made in Hungary) or to the process of stamping.

Jiri Valoch, 1973

Translated by Gerta Pospisilova