Willi Baumeister: Drawings, Gouaches, Collages
Alchimia Fa Bene Al Design

Exhibition 2 December 1989- 14 January 1990
Admission free

Willi Baumeister

Willi Baumeister was born in Stuttgart in 1889. This major exhibition celebrating the centenary of his birth surveys the artist's career from 1921 to 1954 (Baumeister died in 1955) and delineates the succession of themes which preoccupied him over 30 years. By concentrating on works on paper, it enables us to closely follow the evolution of Baumeister's ideas through various stages of development. Not all of the works were intended primarily for exhibition, indeed few of the drawings left Baumeister's studio during his lifetime. Seen together they provide a comprehensive guide to the intense enquiry which he maintained throughout his working life.

Baumeister received his art education at the Stuttgart Academy prior to a period of travel in France and Switzerland disrupted by the First World War. It was whilst attending the Academy he first encountered Oskar Schlemmer, a fellow student who became a lifelong friend and colleague. Both artists' work contrasted sharply with the introspective and pessimistic character of German Expressionism, the prevailing style in Germany at that time. Baumeister's work of the 1920's shows an affinity with the idealised, abstract geometric compositions of Leger, Le Corbusier and Ozenfant and with the multi-disciplinary approach of the Bauhaus. These works, known collectively as the *Machine Pictures*, reflect the notions of reconstruction through technological development which were widespread in the aftermath of war. When mankind appears it is in an idealised form, completely absorbed into a machine-driven culture. They also illustrate Baumeister's experimentation with the traditional, illusionistic images and the new, two dimensional, stylised shorthand invented by the cubists.

Notable too is Baumeister's adoption of collage, first in imitation by means of paint and later by actually cutting and affixing paper. The *Sports Pictures* of the late 1920's and the early 30's further develop these techniques, taking as their theme the perfect tuning of the sportsman's mind and body used as a metaphor for the society the artist aspired to create. Upon entering the 1930's the drawings are subtlely altered and begin to distil to its very essence the ideas of human form and the dynamics of motion.

The works from the late 1930's onwards show a shift away from the modern, technically orientated world towards an interest in ancient literature, archaic pictorial symbols and Asiatic calligraphy. These studies surely reflect the increasing persecution and isolation that Baumeister suffered as Nazi rule took hold in Germany. Increasingly his images are those of myths, dreams and demons that inhabit the unconscious. In adopting this new, inward-looking approach Baumeister radically altered his technique, working in low relief, frieze-like compositions and experimenting with frottage (rubbing) to achieve a sense of three dimensions. As the memory of the war receded Baumeister returned to more abstract, less symbolically loaded compositions, though he maintained an interest in ancient pictorial symbolism until the end of his life.

The exhibition has been organised by the Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart and will continue to the Kuntsmusem, Berne, in 1990.

Alchimia Fa Bene Al Design

Alchimia was founded in 1976 in Milan by Alessandro and Adriana Guerriero. The first movement of its type to blend design, production, criticism and analysis, it was established in response to energies emerging in Italian design of the mid 1970's. Setting out to manufacture and show collections of three dimensional objects in a similar way to fashion, Alessandro Guerriero approached a group of designers, including Alessandro Mendini, Ettore Sottsass, Andrea Branzi and Michele De Lucchi, and proposed to implement projects which up to that time had been waiting impatiently on the drawing board. The resolution of Alchimia was to reject the orthodox, industry-orientated culture of conventional design and instead employ the banal or kitsch imagery of popular culture and the mass circulation of fine art imagery (notably, artists such as Enzo Cucchi, Francesco Clemente and Mimmo Paladino were associated with the 1981 *Infinite Furniture* collection). Alchimia's influence has been important and far-reaching, their projects many and varied: products, writings, exhibitions, clothes, videos, scenery, actions and architecture have all featured. Most recently Alchimia have created their own showroom/gallery in Milan.

The current exhibition has been specifically designed for the Fruitmarket's upper gallery. It is conceived as a house- a large, open loft, a colourful space featuring decorations, objects and mosaics from Alchimia collections of the past ten years, including their most recent, the *Ollo* collection (1989). Believing that we live our lives in a state of turbulence,

Alchimia intends its pieces to act as focal points, its interiors to function as calm sanctuaries for individual meditation. By tackling the problems of the house (and consequently of design) their work suggests new ways of relating to the home and places each person in control of their environment. In attempting to re-integrate design with everyday life, it reaffirms the ideals of democracy and the belief that the imagination of the individual is crucial to the world's survival.

The collaborators of Alchimia are Alessandro and Adriana Guerriero, Giorgio and Bruno Gregori. This will be the first ever showing of Alchimia's work in Britain. In early 1991 the exhibition will travel to the academia Italiana in London.

The Fruitmarket Gallery

45 Market Street
Edinburgh, EH1 1DF, Scotland

P +44 (0)131 225 2383
F +44 (0)131 220 3130

info@fruitmarket.co.uk
www.fruitmarket.co.uk

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