



from: Ewerdt Hilgemann
Poet of creative destruction

Hilgemann once told me his childhood memories. Long ago, his grandmother had a house in the country. There was a well with frogs in it and a triangular meadow with mushrooms on it, where her cows used to graze. As time went on, the well was no longer needed, and the frogs died out because of the pollution of the soil and the water.

Before he had moved to the Netherlands, where he now lives, he lived in West Germany. His world was one of modern civilization with all that it implies: rationalism, high technology, materialism, stability, order, comfort. But he still longs for the simple living conditions of the past, with the unpolluted environment and the romanticism of the natural and the unpredictable. Though apparently opposite to each other, he accepts both rationalism and romanticism, and his art is rooted in both.

Rationalism accounts for the systematic and analytical side to his personality - or is it perhaps an acquired trait? - which originally attracted him to system art based on intellect and order.

His series of compositions featuring geometrical divisions and based on mathematical calculations were reliefs or three-dimensional objects. He systematically altered their height, volume and depth, or changed their form, investigating into the illusive character of visual perception. He most often analysed simple, elementary forms, and the operations to which he subjected them were likewise simple. []

Until the late 1970s, Hilgemann's works remained within the scientific vein. In 1980, his art revealed a leaning towards the natural, the romantic and the unpredictable, which is now peculiar to him. [] In Carrara, close to the marble quarries [] he shaped a block of marble into a cube with sides 150 cm long, weighing nine metric tons. It had taken him a month to polish it so as to make it smooth and shiny. On 12 June 1982, he had it transported to the highest point on the slope of the quarry and pushed down. It rolled down the rocky slope less than one minute. Most of the spectators were rather irritated and sorry at seeing so much effort wasted and a beautiful



form destroyed; and overcome by a sense of absurdity. The act was also one of defiance of the accepted material-and-aesthetic values in favour of immaterial ones. It also symbolized Hilgemann's delivery from stereotype thinking: the cult of cool calculation, practical sense and a striving to perfection. He sought to establish a new hierarchy of values, experience the taste of a passing moment, nature, the romanticism of liberated chance. Hilgemann has since become a poet of creative destruction. [] He soon devised a new method of releasing chance in order to destroy simple, most often elementary man-made forms and give them a shape resulting from natural forces engaged in the process of destruction. This time the mechanism he used was implosion. In 1984, he constructed a cube with a two-metre side, of welded steel sheets. In the presence of invited guests he pumped the air out of the cube. Crushed by the external pressure, the cube took on an unpredictable form. [] Having discarded a model of art based on intellectual speculations and perfect rudimentary forms resulting from system transformations, Hilgemann now finds nature an indispensable element of his work. He understands nature as the creative power. []

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1989

