



MAJA VONMOOS

*dreidimensional-farbig
threedimensional-colors*

Freerk Valentien

Maja Vonmoos

threedimensional—color

Color is the central element in the work of Maja Vonmoos. It plays a dominant role not only in her paintings on canvas or paper, but also in her three-dimensional work, which ranges from cast metal to welded or bolted metal elements, to glued wood and cardboard. The most striking aspect of her sculptural part is that each and every structural part is infused with its own powerful color and that these individual parts resound both spatially and visually in a manner reminiscent of an orchestra. Maja Vonmoos's color compositions never fail to convince, although she is very daring in her choice of colors, juxtaposing, as it were, pink, turquoise, violet, fire engine red, mauve, and so forth. On of her pieces resonates in seven different hues of yellow, another in five different shades of green. The confidence with which she plays the color scale and orders the most divergent hues into a whole leads one to assume that she does, in fact, possess something akin to an "absolute sense of color", analogous to a musician's absolute pitch.

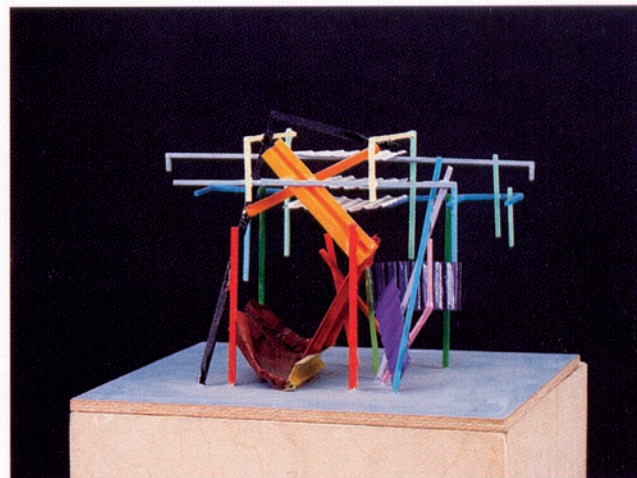
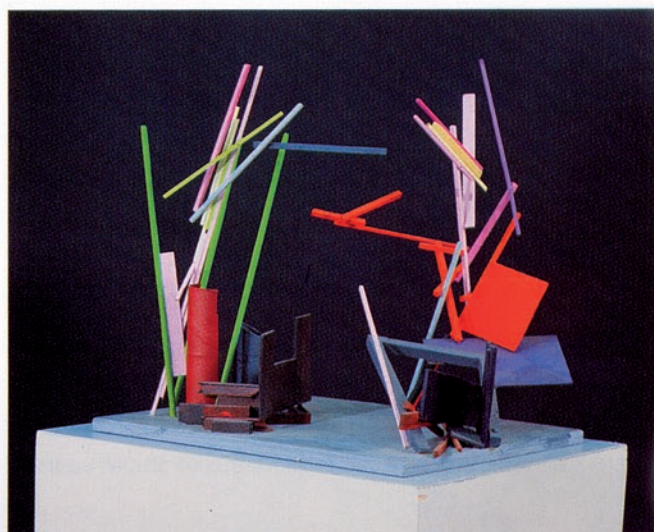
Why, then, did Maja Vonmoos turn her attention primarily to three-dimensional pieces if color is her chief concern? To explain this apparent contradiction she points out that she can use color to even greater effect in three-dimensional pieces than two-dimensional surfaces. Indeed, the colors in her sculptural work seems to radiate out into a space like

3
Deux maisons – un arc en ciel
1990

Modell, Version 1
Holz, Karton, bemalt
45 x 50 x 37 cm.
Siehe Kat. Nr. 40.

Two houses—one rainbow
1990

Model, version 1
Wood, cardboard, painted
17¾ x 19¾ x 14½ in.
See Cat. No. 40.



6
Das beseelende Wasser 1990
Modell
Holz, Karton, versteift mit
Epoxy, Bleiblech, bemalt
25 x 19 x 22 cm.
Siehe Kat. Nr. 33.

Water—animating the soul
1990
Model
Wood, cardboard, with
epoxy, lead, painted
10 x 7½ x 8¾ in.
See Cat. No. 33.

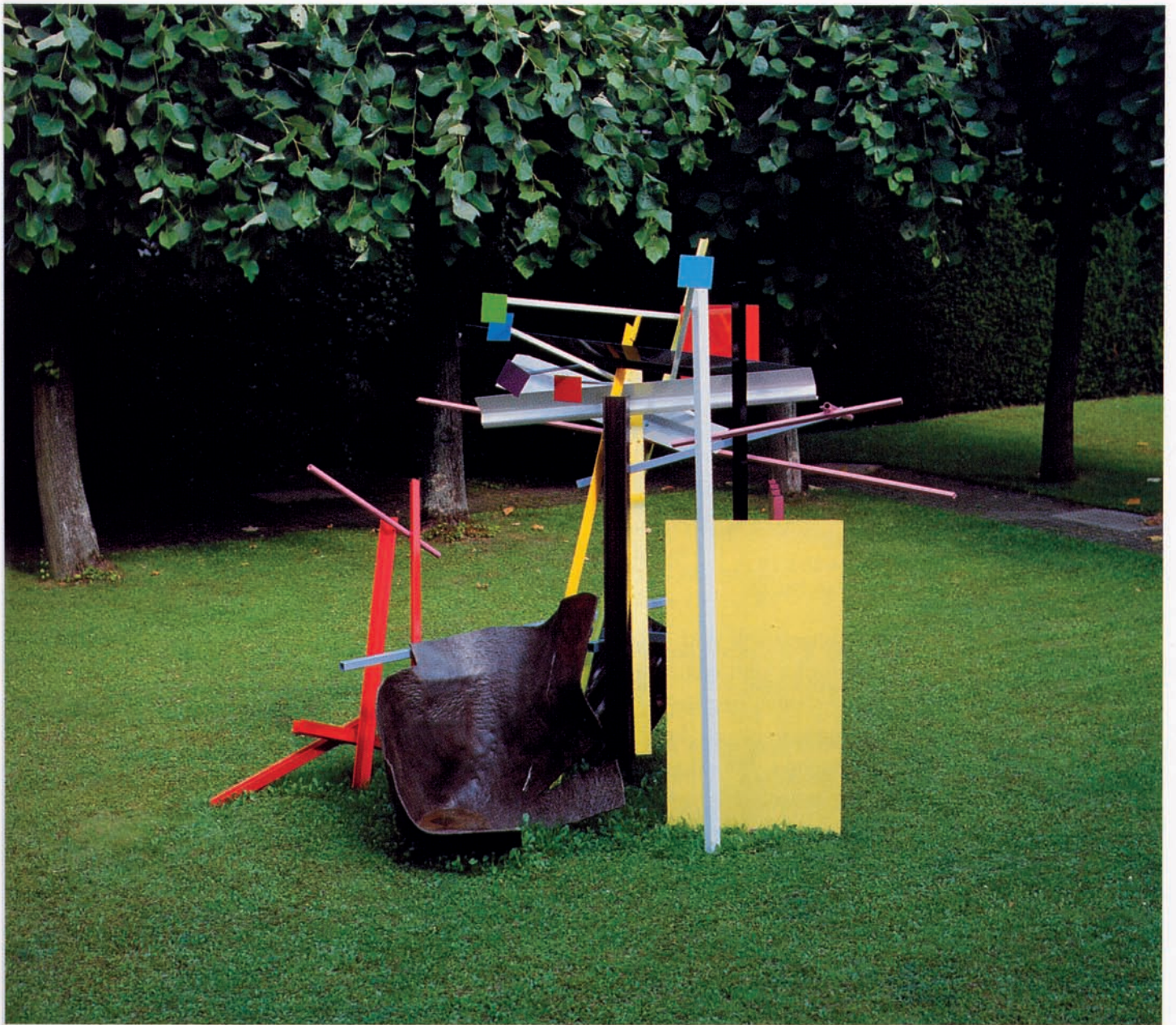
strong signals making it reverberate in a multitude of tones.

Formal Language in Sculpture

When one contemplates Maja Vonmoos's work to date, it becomes apparent that her sculptural language is rich in possibilities. She moves imaginatively and without a trace of inhibition from delicate, gossamer wire structures vaguely reminiscent of Tinguely's early work, to vivid constructivist pieces, and on to free, somewhat amorphous creations of the sort that distinguish the work she has done in New York since 1993.

As poetic as the early wire pieces may be, Maja Vonmoos's constructivist-geometric compositions, which occupied center stage in her work until she moved to New York, constituted the first major and mature work of her career. This body of work allowed her to attain the creative confidence necessary for moving forward into monumental dimensions.

It is not more coincidence but rather stems from her upbringing that she moves with supreme ease in the formal idiom of constructivist art. Early on Maja Vonmoos contemplated becoming an architect; her father was an engineer and taught his daughter to think in techno-structural terms and to work in handicrafts. This was underscored by the influence of her mother, a natural in matters of fashion and color. Though she kept her daughter on a short leash as far as new dresses were concerned, she let her have an unlimited supply of fabrics and materials so that she could sew her own clothes.



4
Lovely Cassita 1990
Eisen geschmiedet,
Profilstahl, Stahlblech
lackiert
270 x 210 x 240 cm.
Siehe Kat. Nr. 39.

Lovely Cassita 1990
Forged steel, structural
shapes, sheet metal, painted
with polyurethane enamel
106 x 83 x 94½ in.
See Cat. No. 39.



8

Gelb am Verglühn 1991
Modell, Version 2, ausgeführt
Holz, Karton, Stahlblech,
bemalt
25 x 34 x 31 cm.
Siehe Kat. Nr. 44.

Dying yellow 1991
Model, version 2, executed
Wood, cardboard, sheet
metal, painted
10 x 13½ x 12 in.
See Cat. No. 44.

Young Maja's first creations were dolls' clothes, which she glued together because she was still too young to use the sewing machine. The family's kitchen table was transformed into her workspace—the family ate somewhere else so as not to disturb the child's endeavors. This open-minded and creative atmosphere certainly ensured that Maja Vonmoos would never shrink from new technical or artistic challenges.

Nor is it a coincidence that she should gravitate toward constructivism, for there is no other fundamental current in the 20th century art that has remained as stubbornly alive and that has radiated into so many different creative areas as has constructivist art (Willy Rotzler¹).

This enabled her to start with a proven style that retained its freshness and originality, particularly in Switzerland, where it did not lose its luster as happened in Germany where constructivism was vilified by the Nazi regime. While constructivism was restricted mainly to individual artist and designers before World War II, as a style it dominated the applied arts—poster art, graphic design, typography, as well as industrial design and architecture—in the post-war years, again more so in Switzerland than elsewhere. In the 1930s Switzerland as the "stronghold of constructivist thought" (Willy Rotzler²), even on an international level, a fact that later bore rich fruit.

Thanks to her insistence on quality and her training from childhood on, Maja Vonmoos was able to utilize the constructivist heritage to her advantage

with absolute assuredness. Some might have expected her to seek contact with such established masters of constructivist art or of "concrete form" as Bill, Gerstner, Honegger, who lived in her vicinity. She chose not to do so. Instead she studied painting in Florence and in Geneva, which meant above all immersion in color. As far as working in three dimensions is concerned, she simply relied on her inherent creativity. This merely required absorbing the wealth of shapes and forms in her environment and training herself in this medium, albeit sub-consciously. Two observations speak for this hypothesis: On the one hand she masters complicated constructivist structures with playful ease and molds a multitude of seemingly chaotic components into a cohesive spatial whole without using so much as a ruler or a compass. Equally striking, on the other hand, is the ease with which she abandoned her constructivist orientation when she left for New York to explore entirely different avenues of expression in sculpture. Maja Vonmoos is so comfortable expressing herself in three dimensions that she is not in the least interested in perfecting formal solutions in one or the other idiom, but rather in focusing on matters of content and meaning.

Though the extraordinary diversity of color from piece to piece suggests this approach, the titles of her pieces actually confirm it. Maja Vonmoos rarely uses titles that denote an aesthetic program, such as "Composition in Yellow-Green" or "Variation in Blue". Instead the titles she conceives are coded signs for circumstances and stages in her life: "The masters memorial" (ill. 10) (1990) grew out of a period when she was embroiled in a very difficult relationship. Titles such as "Tomorrow, a new day begins", "The desperate sun", "Ultimative good-by", "Waves of love and tears", to name but a few, are imbued with the artist's life and make abundantly clear that she has lived and suffered.

Art as a mirror of the soul, the artist's existence as a source of artistic endeavor? This question brings to mind none other than Edvard Munch, for whom sickness and fear were the primordial forces that drove his art. Munch's statement—"All art, literature, and music must be created with the blood of one's soul. Art comes straight from the heart."³—could also have been uttered by Maja Vonmoos, whose aphorisms contain similar reflections, for instance: "A sculpture connotes spatial and three-dimensional relationships which define a given moment in our lives and shed light on the nature of our dreams and longings." "Art gives us the possibility to better experience ourselves."



10
Denkmal des gestrengen
Herrn 1990
Eisen geschmiedet,
Profilstahl, Stahlblech
lackiert
280 x 220 x 210 cm.
Siehe Kat. Nr. 36.

The master's memorial 1990
Forged steel, structural
shapes, sheet metal, painted
with polyurethane enamel
110 x 87 x 83 in.
See Cat. No. 36.



32
Ein Kind der Sonne 1996
Rostfreier Stahl gegossen,
teilweise poliert, Bronze
gegossen, Aluminium bemalt
119,5 x 61 x 112 cm.
Siehe Kat. Nr. 123.

Child of the sun 1996
Cast stainless steel, partially
polished, cast bronze,
fabricated aluminum, partially
painted with polyurethane
enamel
47 x 24 x 44 in.
See Cat. No. 123.