

Alfons Bürgler, 11 May 2018 / Exhibition in Zurich Oerlikon

Opening speech by Peter Killer, art historian and art mediator.
Former director of the Kunstmuseum Olten and co-editor of the culture magazine "Du".
Former art critic Tages-Anzeiger. Author of many books and writings.

At the age of 15 Ferdinand Hodler was able to apprentice to a painter of souvenir pictures. Cuno Amiet and Giovanni Giacometti were allowed to go to Munich after leaving school to study art. Augusto and Alberto Giacometti, for example, also had the chance to go directly to art. I deliberately do not say the luck of the direct way, because the indirect way is not necessarily a detour, loss of time, disability.

However, the rule is that the parents of a son or daughter, standing at the threshold of adulthood and expressing the desire to devote themselves to art, let this wish be and put the pupils in a future-oriented apprenticeship, which should give the young life a solid basis. Alfons Bürgler, sixth of eleven children of a shoemaker in Illgau/Schwyz, completed a tailoring apprenticeship and worked in this profession until the 1960s, also in French and Italian Switzerland.

Imagine Alfons Bürgler sitting cross-legged, with a needle and thread in his hand. The Brothers Grimm say: "One summer morning a little tailor sat on his table at the window, was in good spirits and sewed with all his strength. Then a farmer's wife came down the street and shouted: "Good mush for sale! Good mush, haggle! That sounded sweet to the little tailor's ears, he put his tender head out of the window and shouted: "Up here, dear woman, here she gets rid of her goods". You will probably remember the success story of the brave little tailor who finally acquires a kingdom.

In detail it doesn't correspond to the biography of Alfons Bürgler, of course - but in broad outlines, because Alfons Bürgler has meanwhile also established himself well in a kingdom, the Kingdom of the Arts. When Alfons Bürgler worked as a tailor, the days of village tailors, who sewed clothes out of durable fabric that lasted a lifetime or changed things worn for a long time, were over. Ready-made garments came up, almost only wealthy customers with special wishes went to the tailor. The tailors now mostly worked with fine fabrics that were not to be found in department stores.

You are right, I should talk about the artist Alfons Bürgler and not about the tailor. But: As I mentioned at the beginning, the path to art is not always a detour. Jean Dubuffet was a wine merchant before he became an artist. Henri Matisse had studied law and worked in a law firm before coming to art. I could add many other examples. With many resumes I would not be able to build a bridge between the first and second life. With Alfons Bürgler this seems possible to me. From his former work and from the processed material. Fabrics are woven according to the orthogonal principle of warp and weft. Before the shuttle can shoot, the so-called warp must be stretched at right angles to the weaving direction. For thousands of years. With the small hand weaving frame and the computer-controlled high-tech machine, there is no difference in the weaving principle. When weaving, thread after thread follows each other. Fabrics are the result of a sorting process. When painting his pictures, with standing or moving figures, Alfons Bürger lines up line by line. As with fabric. Something lingers on.

You can tailor something beautiful out of a plain checkered fabric, but the masterpieces of tailoring, the couturiers, occasionally need fabrics that are more rhythmically free than kitchen towels. I dare to claim that Alfons Bürgler's artistic sense has been shaped by

precious, exclusive fabrics. He has intuitively grasped that the effect of ornaments depends indispensably on the rhythms. A series of stylized little people is not exciting in itself. Alfons Bürgler's intuitive sense of rhythm turns this concept into a work of art.

Most of the fabrics we wear, which we use, are very simple in colour. Monochrome, bichrome, trichrome. It only became colourful - at least in Western textile art - when fabrics could be printed. Today you can have whatever you want printed on T-shirts in any copyshop, in whatever colourfulness. But that was not the world of the tailor Alfons Bürgler. Beautiful, valuable fabrics usually have a simple colourfulness. That also has an effect. Most of the works of art you see here tend to be monochrome or are very simple in colour.

When the family father Alfons Bürgler decided in 1984, 34 years ago, to take the risk of establishing himself as a free artist, he first created works that looked like works of art, at least in the eyes of provincial art lovers. The clientele reacted positively. But soon the confusing artist became an unmistakable one. Probably because he was able to recollect the positive things that his first bread and butter job had given him.

If figurative elements appear in woven textiles, they are abstracted, simplified according to the medium. They are signs rather than figures. You know the story of the Cypriot sculptor Pygmalion, who created a female figure that finally came to life animated by love. This myth is also the basis of the musical *My fair Lady*. In Alfons Bürgler's work, the dancing signs have awakened, have detached themselves from the two-dimensional picture, have become three-dimensional for a decade and a half. His tree or branch figures, very small or huge, are today an indispensable part of Swiss plastic art. Here you can see a small selection. The most impressive tree figures can be seen in Alfons Bürgler's "Baumkfigurenkabinett" in Steinen.

I'll come back to the tailor for a moment. Tailoring is a work of patience and concentration. But also Alfons Bürgler's art. But perhaps concentration is not the right word. The Alfons Bürgler Gestalten is more meditation than concentration. With one as with the other the distraction excludes itself. I don't know how wearable clothes would be that would be sewn in a meditative process.

Tailoring is also sitting still. The brave little tailor, tired of sitting still, closes his chamber and sets off into the moving world. Alfons Bürgler did the same. And since his inner movement ultimately has to do with warp and weft, with a certain order, this surplus of energy still leads him to the dance studio today. Dancing is a part of his life. The dance that Alfons Bürgler cultivates is structured movement, follows rules and allows freedom. Like his works of art.

Alfons - dance on. In life, in your pictures and sculptures.

Peter Killer