

PRESS FILE

WIELS 09.02-12.05.2013

THOMAS BAYRLE

ALL-IN-ONE

Introduction



ein Pils bitte!, 1972. Silkscreen print on cardboard, 88 x 63cm. Courtesy the artist

An influential and pioneering figure, German artist Thomas Bayrle (b. 1937 lives and works in Frankfurt) has been an important reference for several generations of artists, both through his teaching (he taught at the well-known Städelschule from 1975 to 2002), and through his participation in international exhibitions (Documenta 3, 6 and 13, the 50th Venice Biennial, etc.). Over the years, Bayrle has built up an extremely coherent body of work, one that tends towards the obsessive while combining allegiances to Pop, conceptual and Op art in unique ways.

In the 1960s, Bayrle started to produce works based on the serial repetition of the same pattern, a move inspired by structuralism, which was proving extremely influential for minimal, Pop and conceptual art. These results set the foundations for his singular visual language, perceptible no matter the media: collage, painting, sculpture, film or printed matter. At once critical and engaged, his practice emerged from or has been directly related to the protest movements of the times. Like his neighbours at the Frankfurt School, he was – and remains to this day – interested in mass culture and in propaganda methods. At the height of the Cold War, Bayrle's work incorporated the very symbols that both capitalist and communist societies had been forging on either side of the Iron Curtain.

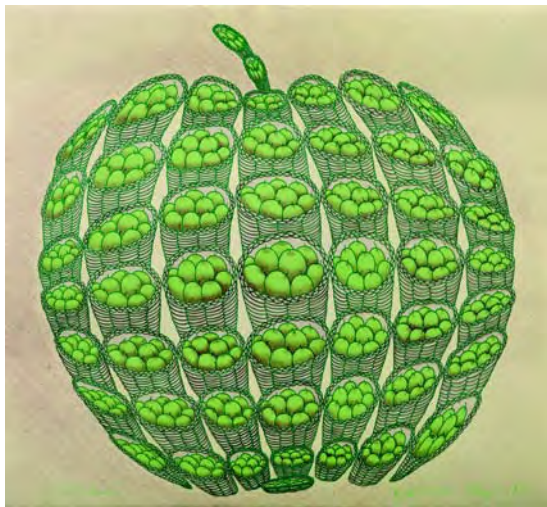
The exhibition *All-in-One*, a title inspired by a Buddhist proverb turned marketing tool, offers a broad overview of Bayrle's career, from the first painted kinetic machines to his most recent work. The exhibition is arranged, not chronologically, but in such a way as to bring out the many themes and patterns that form the running thread of his oeuvre: consumer society, political propaganda, new technologies, sexuality, religion, urban development, etc.

Commissaire : Devrim Bayar

L'exposition : All-in-One

2nd floor – front

In 1956, Thomas Bayrle started a two-year apprenticeship as a weaver at a textile factory, an experience that gave rise to a lifelong fascination with woven structures and their metaphorical powers. The repetitive nature, monotony and boredom of factory work led him to see an analogy between the fabric produced by weaving individual threads and the social fabric, a notion that became prominent in all his subsequent work.



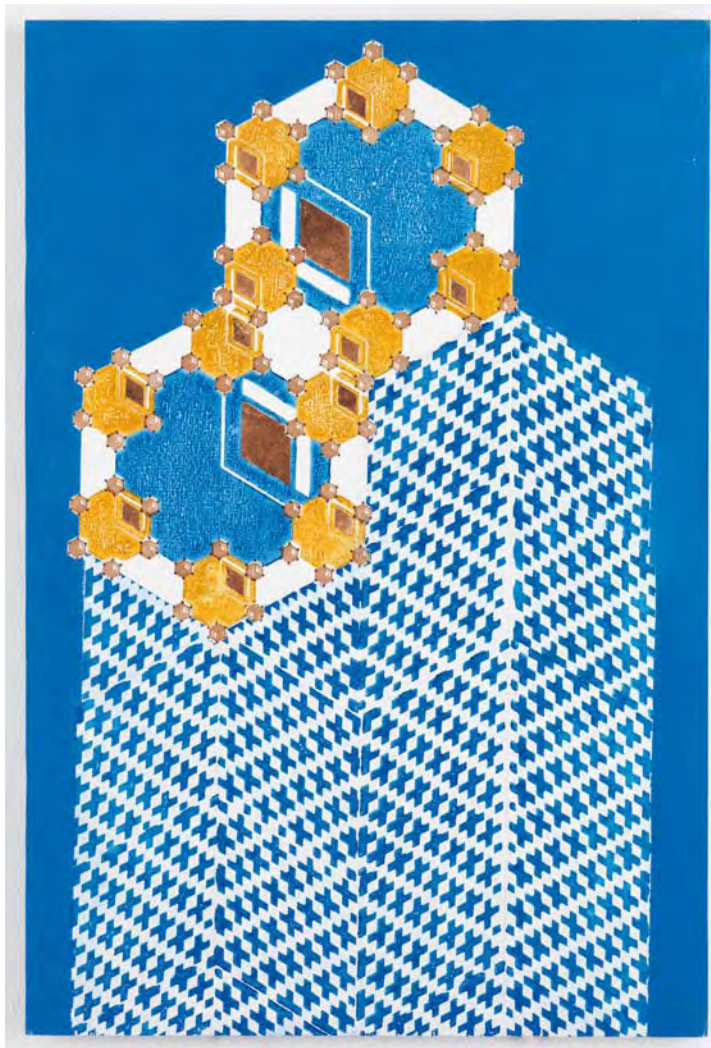
Apfelbrei, 1974. Offset lithography on paper, 46 × 48 cm. Courtesy the artist

Less than a decade later and profoundly marked by the images he saw of gigantic parades in China, of immense gatherings in which the individual is nothing more than a dot in a gigantic moving image, Bayrle was moved to create his first 'super-images': huge patterns composed from a multitude of tiny, identical patterns. Germany had rebuilt its economy during the so-called *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle), and the new products that began to appear there in the post-War period invaded Bayrle's universe: cans of condensed milk, bottles of concentrated Maggi stock, industrially produced fruits and vegetables, and so on.

This practice allowed Bayrle to critically merge the iconographies of communism, capitalism and fascism: for him, mass production in the West and the propaganda in the East were, paradoxically, visually similar. Drawing, collage, serigraphy, painted paper, the accumulation of objects – Bayrle avails himself of a variety of techniques to create works with a Pop look, but which are critical of consumer society and political indoctrination.

2nd floor – back

During the War, Thomas Bayrle's family, like many others, fled from Berlin to a small village in the countryside. He found himself the only Protestant child in a predominantly Catholic place. However, instead of freeing himself from this 'narrowness' (as his parents saw it), he became interested, fascinated even, by the religious rites of his neighbours, especially the signing, the humming and the sniveling he could hear every week during the saying of the rosary. Twelve years later, in the middle of a roaring textile factory, Bayrle found himself assimilated the deafening noise of the machines to the piercing religious chants of his childhood. In the era of the mechanical reproducibility of images, Bayrle's work attests to the ever-growing infatuation with such technologies as television, cloning, the automotive industry, the digital image and so on.



TV Madonna, 1987, Acrylic on wood, stamped, 62 °— 42 cm

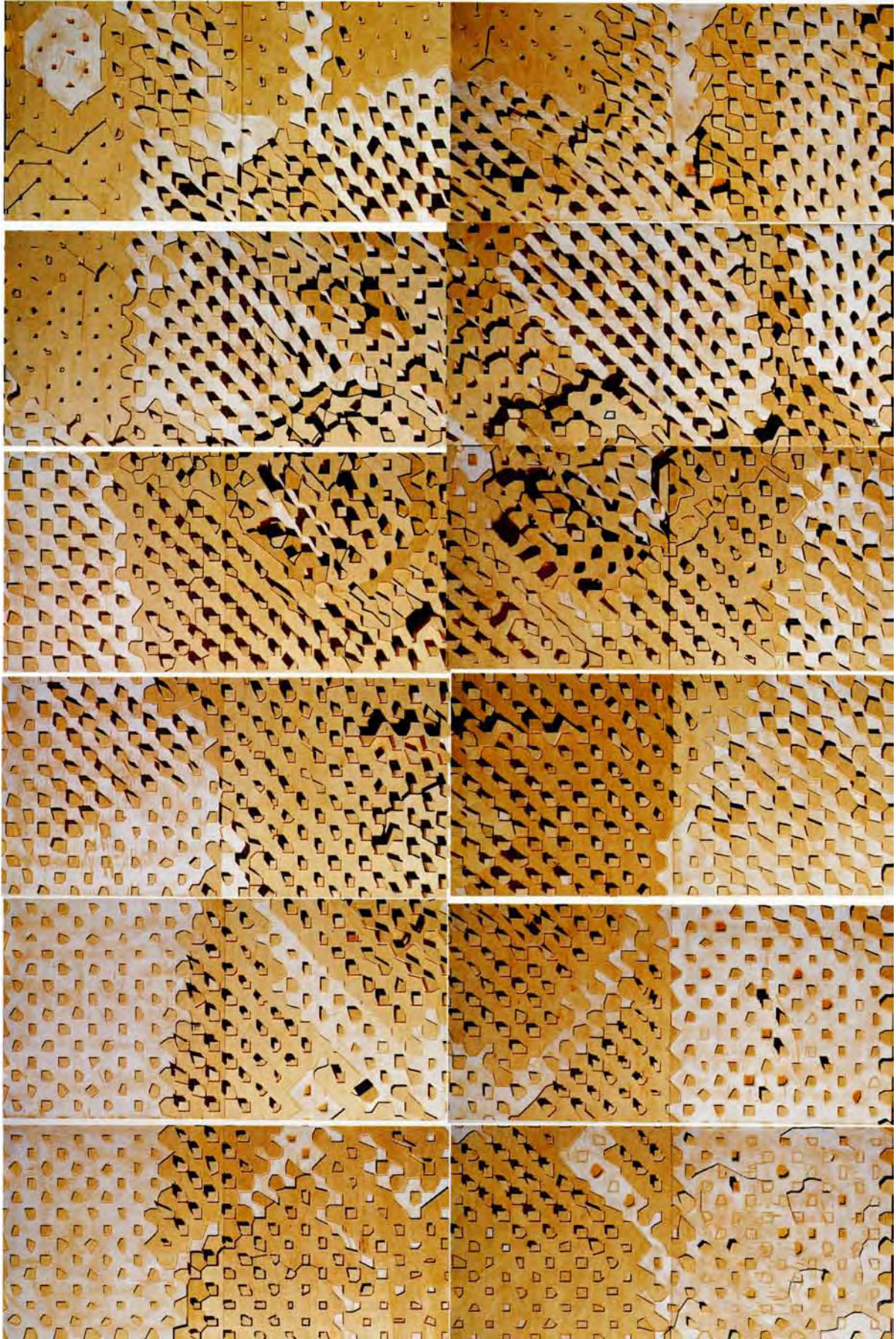
Although a good many of his pieces seem to have been created using digital means, Bayrle only started using computer software in his art in 1988. The diptych *Canon Meets Utamaro* and *Canon Meets Sharaku* perfectly illustrates this double nature of the image: each work represents a master of Japanese printmaking from the 18th Century through the prism of the new photo cameras being mass produced in Japan in the 1980s. Incidentally, *Utamaro* was manually produced – this is true of many of Bayrle’s work from this period – through a collage procedure that relies on the deformation of a printed piece of rubber; *Sharaku*, on the other hand, was produced on an Atari computer game thanks to a software programme developed especially for the artist.

3rd floor – front

In the 1970s, Bayrle started adding urban montages to his representations of bodies and objects. In these new images, cities are composed of standardized modules that produce monotonous, mechanic and alienating environments quite reminiscent of the universe of the German band Kraftwerk, whose record *Autobahn*, from the same period, inaugurates a new electronic music that is at once cold and robotic.

The American architect Philip Johnson, a major, and controversial, figure of modernist and post-modernist architecture looms large at the entrance to the exhibition space: on one side, presented like an urban landscape, is a pixelated portrait of Johnson on the floor, while on the other there is an architectural-type structure whose façades reproduce the layout of the front page of the New York Times. Lurking nearby the portrait of this conceiver of the modern city is the figure of Carlos the Jackal, the Venezuelan terrorist responsible, most notably, for orchestrating the attack on OPEC’s headquarters in Vienna in 1975, which resulted in over sixty people being taken hostage.

References to the unbridled expansion of modern cities and their attendant traffic drives, as it were, the monumental installations and sculptural reliefs that Bayrle, at a later period, composed by interweaving highways. In their highway networks, the mural reliefs show images taken from propaganda magazines that Bayrle came across while on a three-month stay in China in 2005.



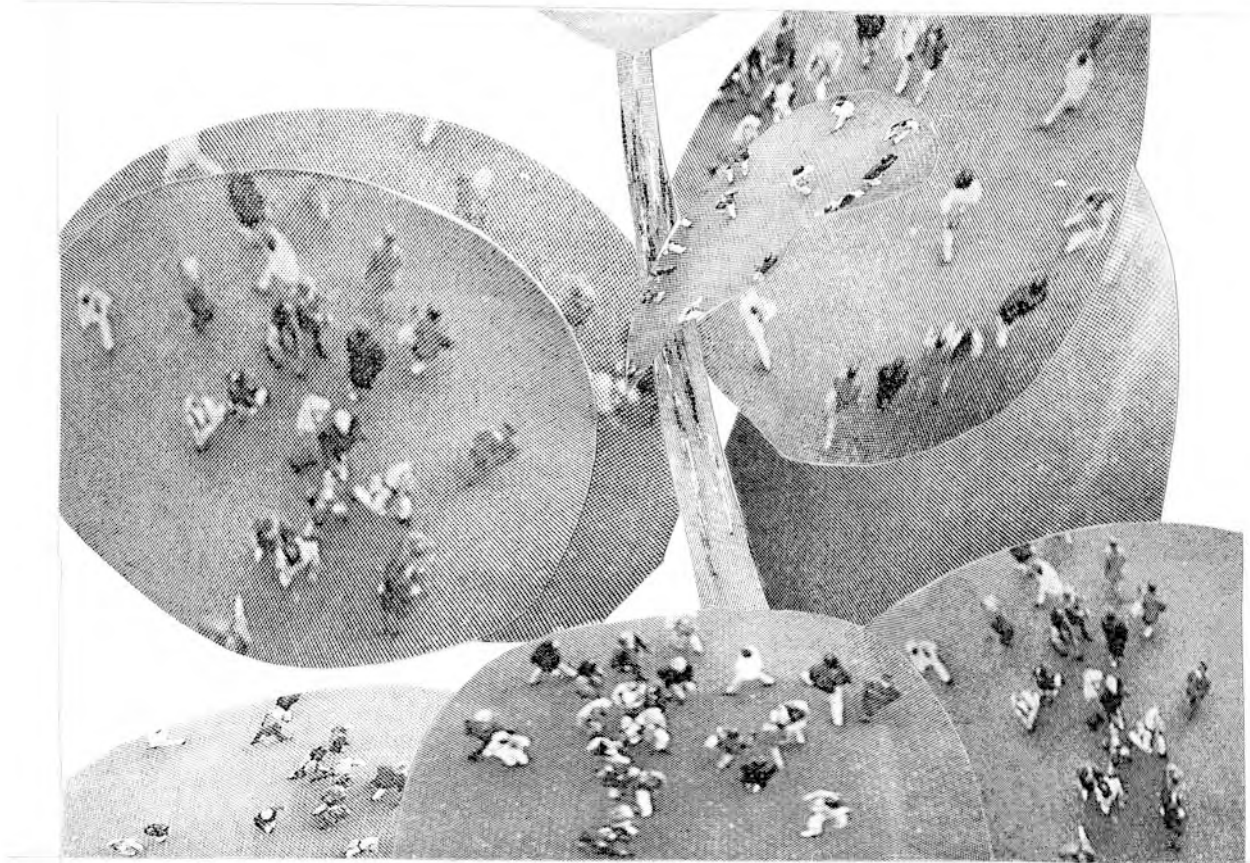
Philip Johnson, 1999, wood, 420 ° — 280 cm. Courtesy the artist

3rd floor – back

Much as Bayrle's distorted images may seem like precursors to the digital revolution, he still favours a manual mode of production, as the working documents presented in this section show. He handcrafts many of his pieces –often in collaboration with his wife, friends or students – using a labour-intensive process of printing on rubber, photocopying and collage. It was only in the 1980s that he incorporated the computer into his work, notably in the production of his films (especially *Dolly and Autobahnkreuz*, presented on the second floor), and of those sculptural reliefs, many on view here, representing brushstrokes.

These working documents also show how each image is coded. According to Bayrle, every image can be regarded as a veritable machine, as a highly structured collection of parts that is akin, in many ways, to the motors presented at the centre of the exhibition space. These, the artist's most recent works, echo his very first machines (see *Ajax*, *The Orgy of Nuremberg* and *Mao and the Schoolboys*, all on the second floor). Taken apart, these car engines show their highly sophisticated mechanism: Bayrle sees them as miniature cathedrals.

In general, Bayrle's work demands close viewing. Even if their forms tend to be immediately recognizable, his images and sculptures invite the viewer to inspect the multiple elements that compose them. For Bayrle, the break that happens between each cell, when taken apart, is incredibly meaningful: he identifies it with the divergences and conflicts between different individualities.

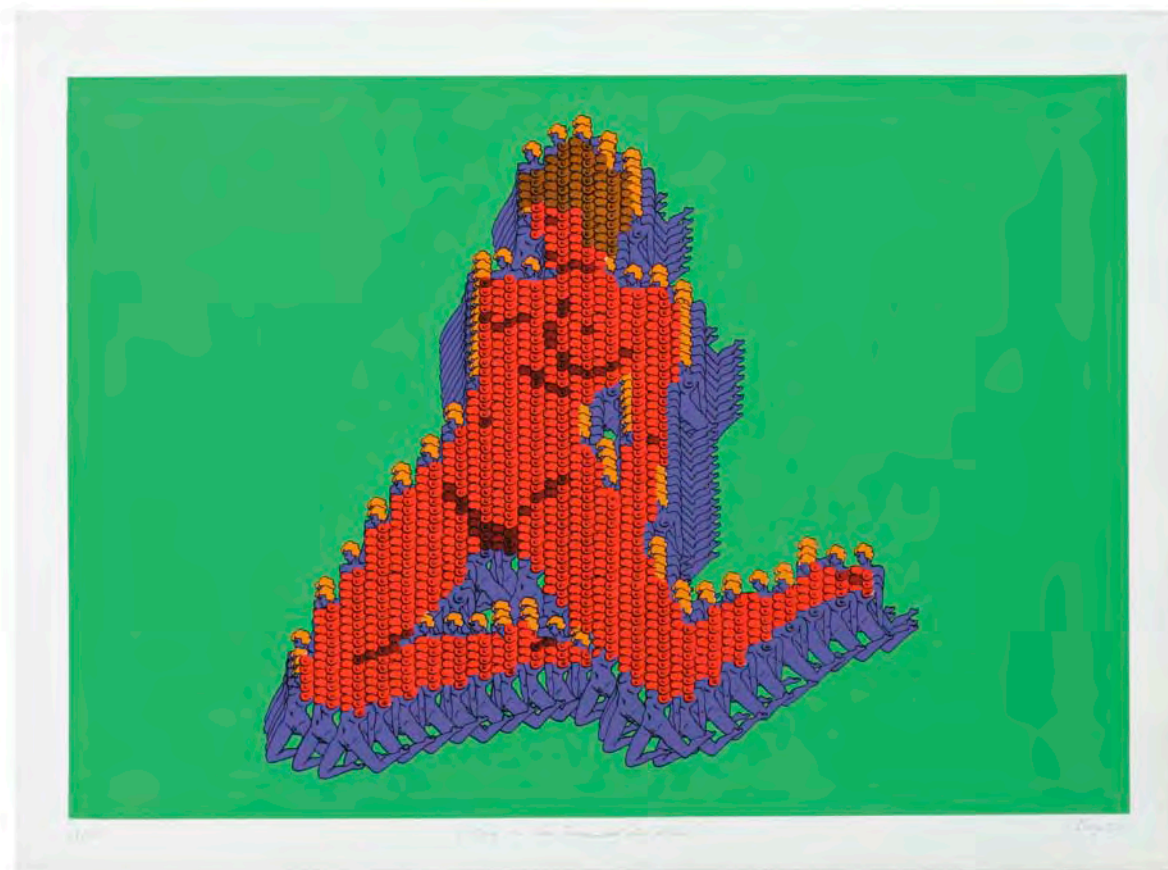


Gummibaum, 1993/1994. 16mm film by Thomas Bayrle and Daniel Kohl

4th floor

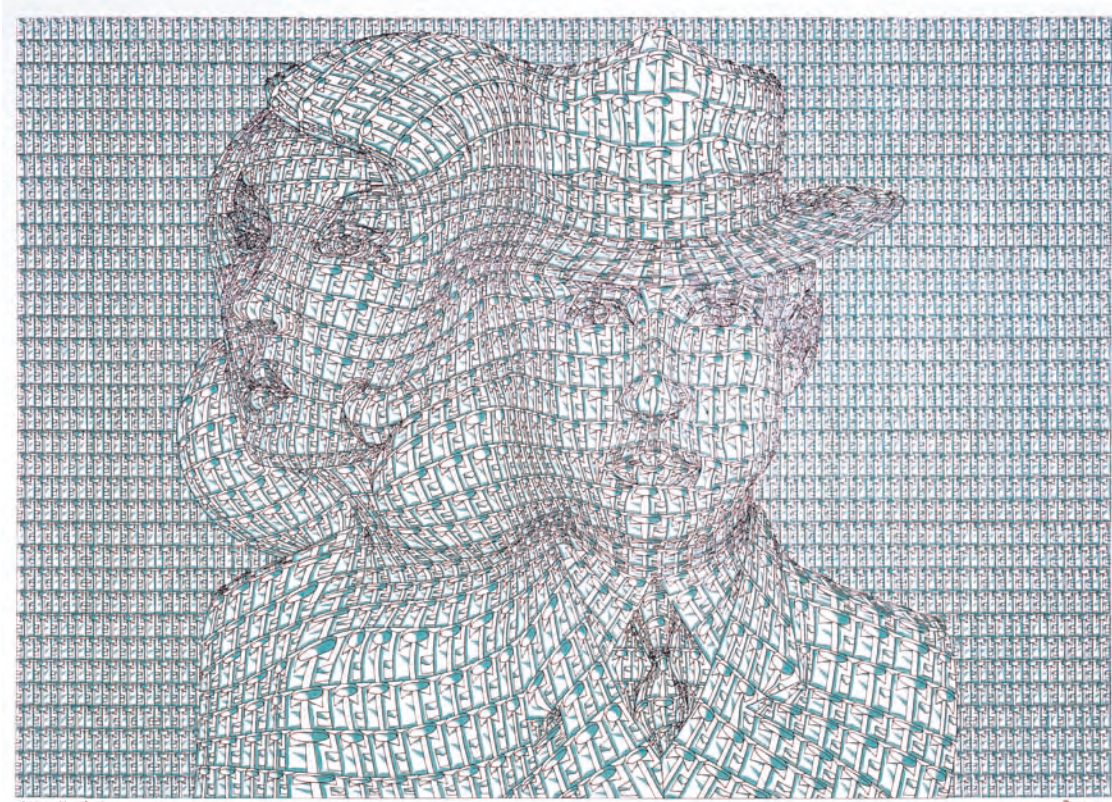
The political struggle that engaged Bayrle in the 1960s went hand in hand with a fight for sexual freedom, and erotic images that fly in the face of bourgeois morality started appearing in his work as early as the 1970s. During that period, Bayrle was also contributing to the left-wing magazine *Sexfront*, which served as a sexual education manual for teenagers.

Feuer im Weizen, the series presented here, first circulated in book form. If the title of the series (translated as "Fire in the wheat" in English) picks up on the idea of fire as a metaphor for uprising, the titles of these provocative images attest to the many and varied issues Bayrle is concerned with: capitalism (*General Electric*), Marxism (*M-Formation*), German culture (*Hansel and Gretel*), the representation of sexual drives in popular culture (*A Streetcar Named Desire*),... *Feuer im Weizen* thus offers itself as a concentrated sampling of Bayrle's central references and work, still in a (pro)creative state.

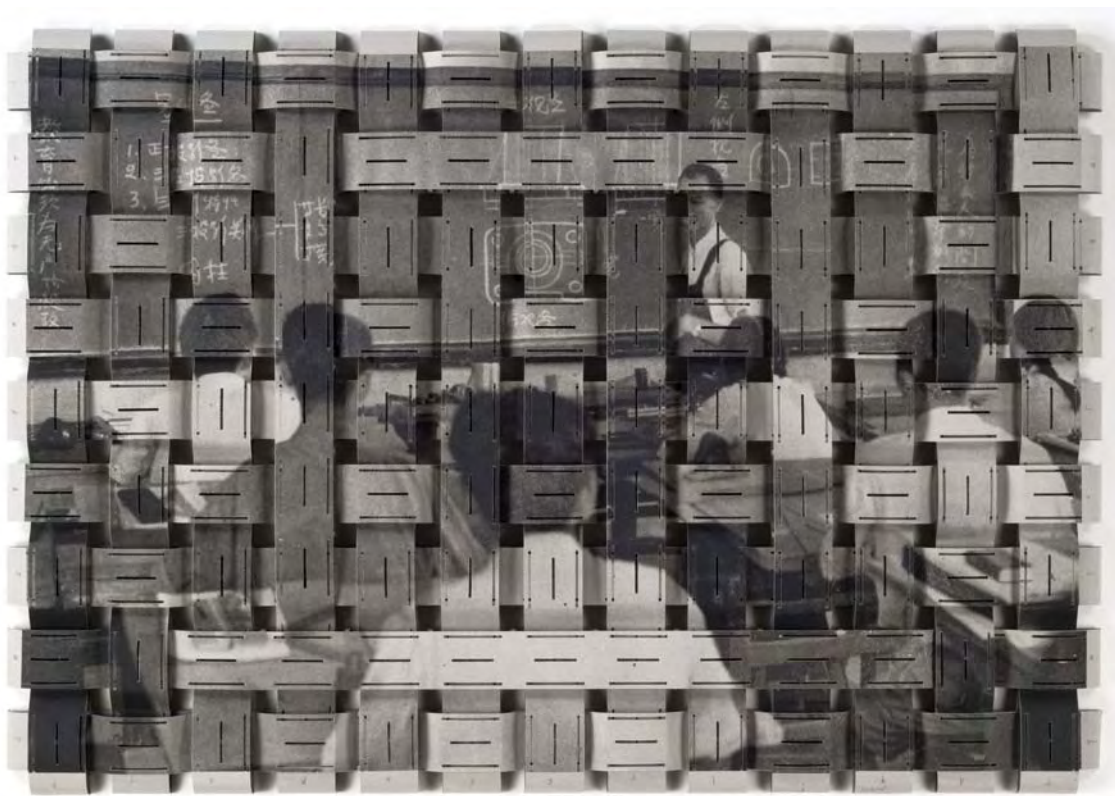


Steig in das Traumbad der Liebe, 1970, from the series *Feuer im Weizen*. Silkscreen print on cardboard, 47 °— 64 cm
Courtesy the artist

Selection of images



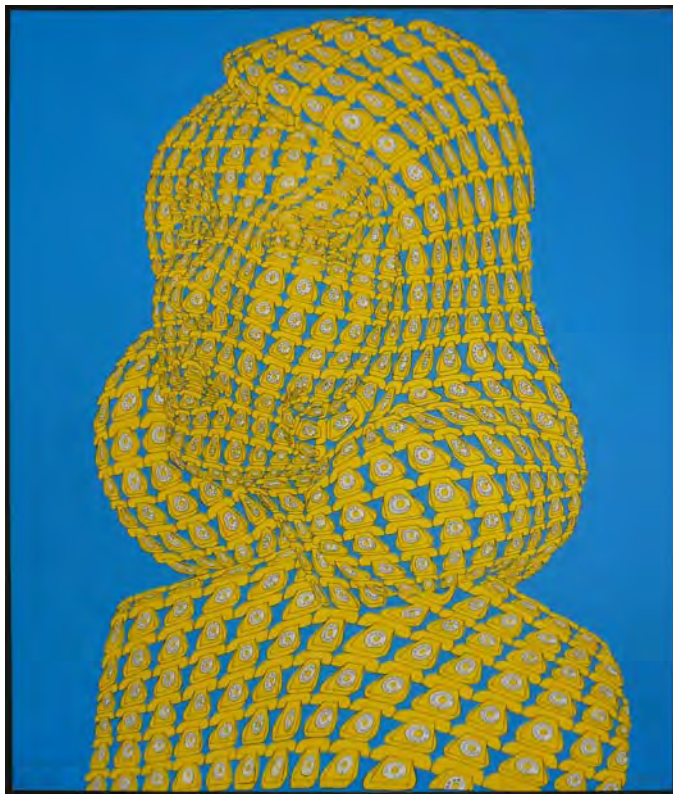
Thomas Bayrle, Hemdenleben (blaue Version), 1970. Silkscreen print on hand made paper, 55 x 75 cm. Courtesy of Barbara Weiss Gallery, Berlin



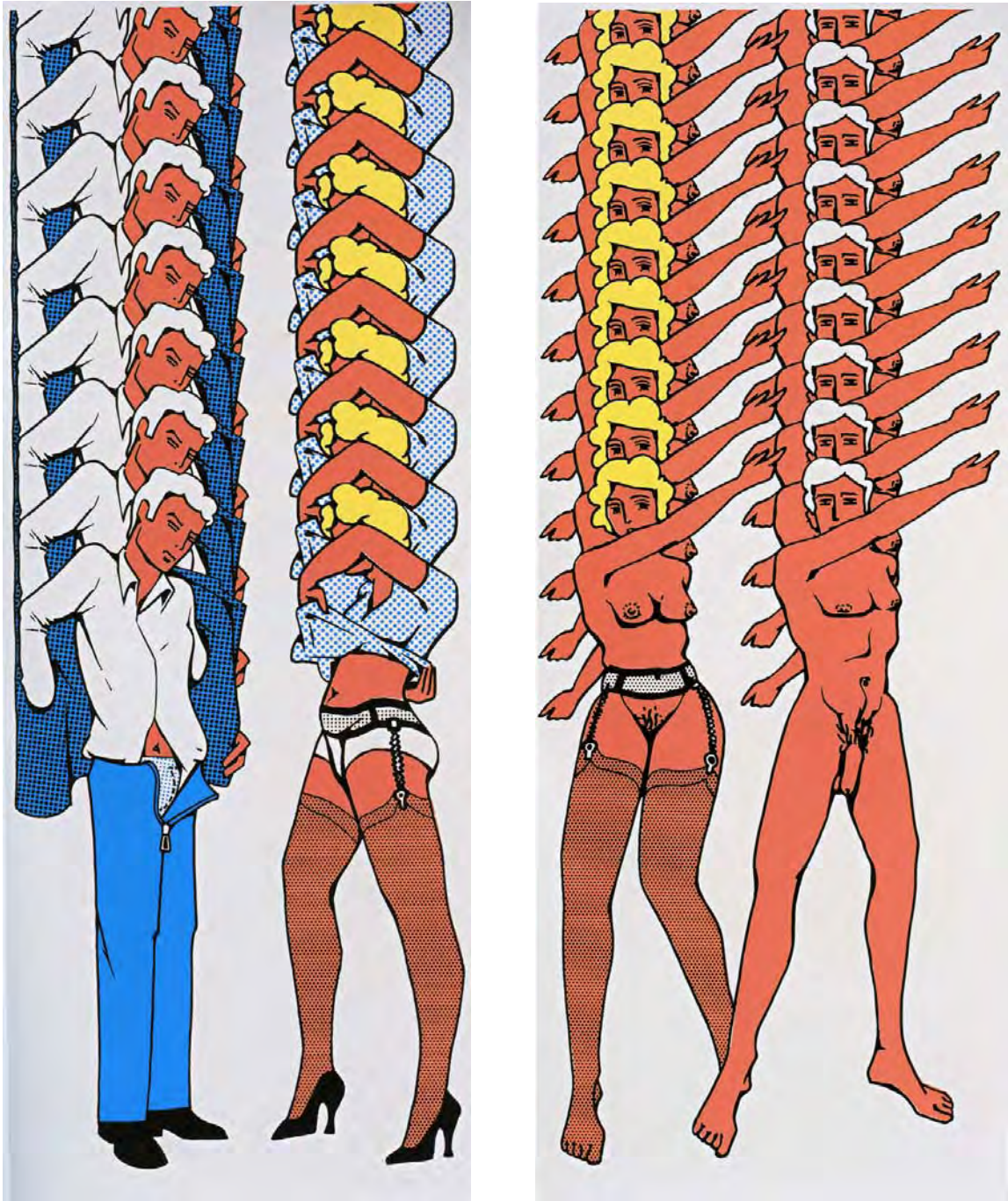
Thomas Bayrle, "School" Container, 2005. silkscreen print on cardboard on wooden grid, 93.5 x 134 x 4.5 cm. Courtesy of Barbara Weiss Gallery, Berlin



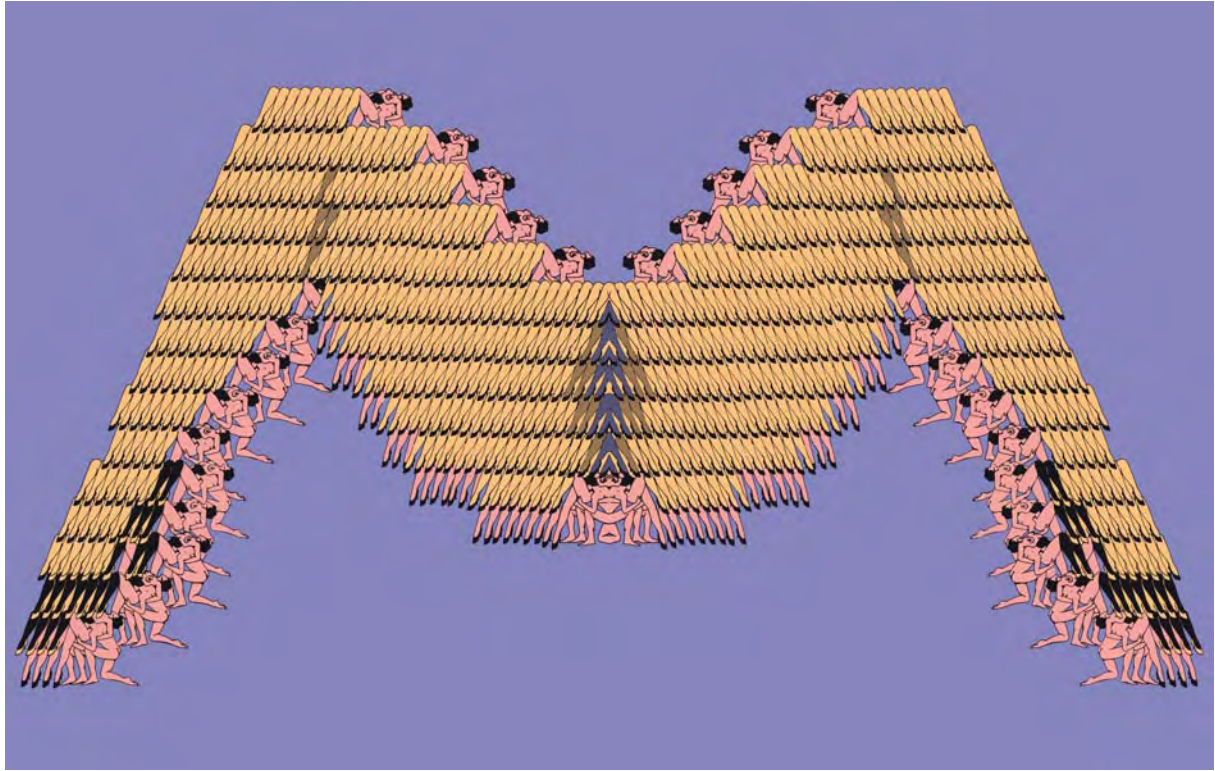
Thomas Bayrle, Detail of Frankfurter, 1980 / 2010
Section of wallpaper. Courtesy of the artist © Thomas Bayrle. Photos: Gerald Domenig



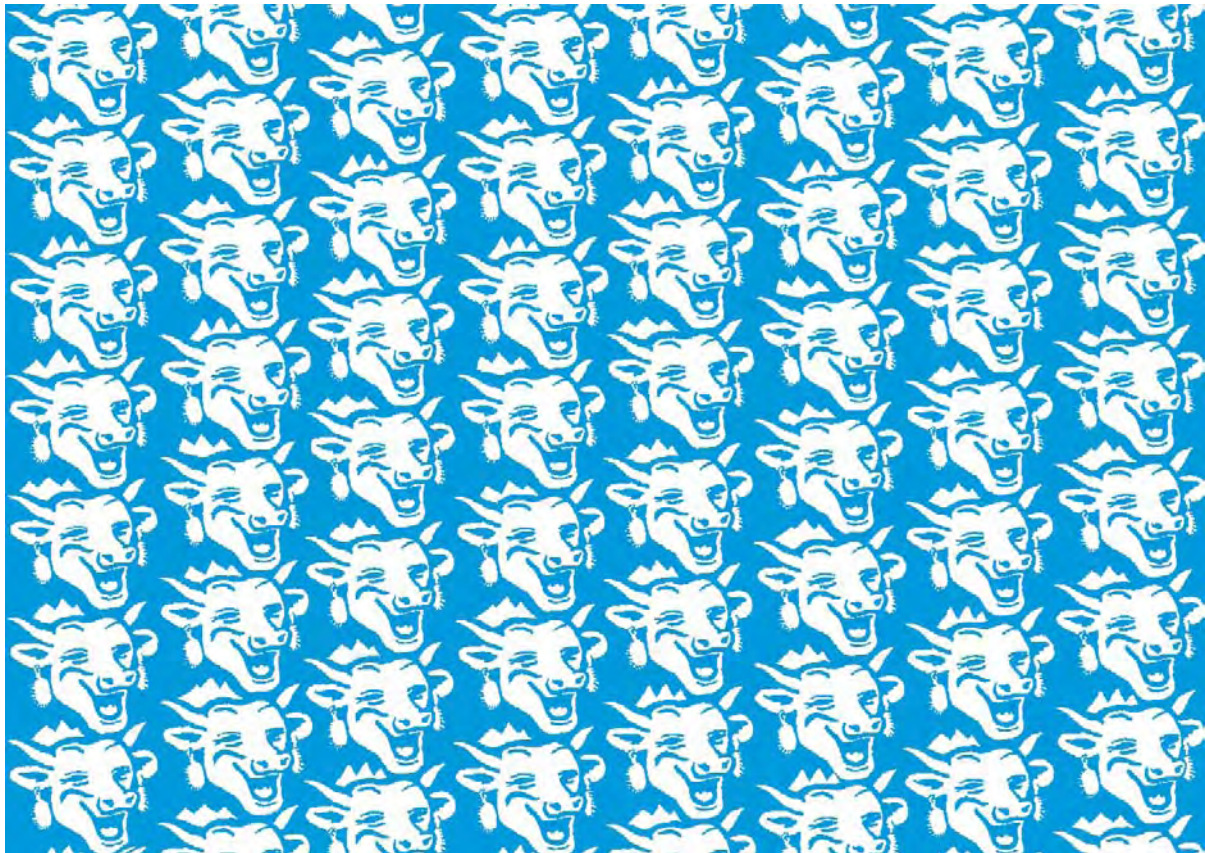
Thomas Bayrle, Christel von der Post Office, 1970
silkscreen print on cardboard , 48.5 x 49.7 cm
courtesy of Barbara Weiss Gallery, Berlin



Thomas Bayle, Wallpaper image from *Feuer im Weizen*, 1970, Maerzverlag. Courtesy Thomas Bayle / Hans Widauer



Thomas Bayrle, M-Formation, 1970, Silkscreen on paper, 60 x 85 cm. Courtesy of Barbara Weiss Gallery, Berlin



Thomas Bayrle, La Vache qui rit, 1967. Silkscreen print on paper. Wallpaper. Courtesy the artist.

Practical Information

Thomas Bayrle : All-in-One

09.02 – 12.05.2013

WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels

Press Conference : Thursday 07 February at 14:30

Opening: Friday 08 February at 18:30

Complementary programme

20.02.2013 (FR) & 27.03 (EN)

Look Who's Talking: Devrim Bayar

Guided tour of the exhibition by the curator

28.02.2013

Talk by Marta Kuzma on the work of Thomas Bayrle

13.03.2013

Look Who's Talking: Thomas Bayrle

Guided tour of the exhibition by the artist (in English)

21.04.2013

Concert: SUD (Sergej Jensen, Stefan Müller & Micha Schulze)

12.05.2013

Finissage with a screening of Helke Bayrle's "Portikus Under Construction".

The film screening will be followed by a conversation with the film maker (in English)

WIELS Contemporary Art Centre

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www.wiels.org

Opening hours

Wednesday–Sunday: 11am–6pm

Nocturne every 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the Month: 11am–9pm

Free every 1st Wednesday of the Month

Closed: Mon – Tue

Tickets

8 € Individual visitor

5 € Students (+18), teachers, seniors (+60), groups (> 10 pers)

3 € Students (12–18), schoolgroups, unemployed

1.25 € Ticket ‘article 27’

0 € Children (12 years old), accompanied by their parents

0 € Every first Wednesday of the month

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