

**Klaus-Peter Busse - Thierry Greub: Cy Twombly. Inscriptions. Paderborn 2022. Book Launch on 01. July 2023 at the Fondazione Nicola del Roscio in Rome (together with Richard Leeman)**

Dear Signore del Roscio,  
Dear members of the foundation,  
Dear Thierry, dear Krystyna,  
Dear peers,  
Ladies and gentleman.

Thank you very much for inviting me to introduce the book "Inscriptions" that Thierry Greub has published recently. Before talking with him later on, let me say some words on these six volumes and more than 2000 pages. It is .... an impressive achievement.

Thierry Greub's work belongs to the German speaking academic research on Twombly's work - beside the early essays by Katharina Schmidt in the museums of Baden-Baden, Bonn, Zürich and Basel. Her work was very important in building up a reception of Cy's work in German speaking countries during the 80s and early 90s.

Academic research on Twombly developed in 3 phases. The first PH.D. on Cy's work took place in 1985, followed by the impressive research of Richard Hoppe-Sailer at the University of Bochum, my hometown then and now. The art department (very famous at that time because of Max Imdahl) supported academic research on contemporary art, what was not a given at that time. After 1995, three dissertations were published, including the important work by Achim Hochdörfer, the current director of the Museum Brandhorst in Munich. Now young people are doing their academic qualifications.

Thierry Greub, with a doctorate on Jan Vanmeer, entered the scene of Twombly research in 2014 with a report on a Twombly symposium at the University of Cologne and in 2017 with a monographic publication that already points in the direction of his current book. At that time he was already occupied by the literature Twombly used. He began to read the work of Twombly.

Because of Twombly's inscriptions, many people think his work is hermetic. The inscribed words, sometimes illegible, often painted over, repeatedly unclear in their origin, make it difficult to access his paintings, drawings and sculptures. Thierry Greub now

opens the literary workshop of Twombly, deciphers all lines inscribed in his works and explains his pictorial practice in dealing with literature and writing. His project is not only a catalog of all inscriptions, but also an insight into the library and the artist's notebook: a scan of his literary discourses.

Greub looks for the literary sources of Twombly's work, similar to the attempt of the French National Library to reconstruct the material from which Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* is made. The working practises of Marcel Proust and Cy Twombly were often compared. It is the palimpsest that combines the creation of the novel by Proust and the pictorial works of Twombly: lines are crossed out, overwritten and connected in layers.

At first glance, much seems to be unsettling in these inscriptions. Greub proves to be a scientific tracker when he is reading these words in the context of Twombly's work. He presents Twombly as a painter who knew exactly what he did.

When Twombly began to include literary documents in his pictures in the late 1950s, his intermedial "re-mixing" of literature, painting and drawing began. In very early paper works, Twombly scatters hard-to-read fonts on a white image surface. At that time, he was influenced by Stéphane Mallarmé and his ideas for the design of book pages, as well as by comparable concepts of the American poet Charles Olson. In fact, Greub can decipher the words inscribed in a very early drawing and assign it to a poem of Mallarmé. He proves that Twombly was influenced by poems and that they had an important significance in the creation of his works. And even more: As the French art historian Hubert Damisch noted, the artist said goodbye to the concept of the picture as a perspective window on the world and turned to the scene as a field of action of the drawing and painting hand. So Damisch quotes Mallarmé: "Twombly's work needs to act".

Twombly himself said for him there was never any difference between literature and art. For him, poems in particular were springboards or "jumpstarts" into the artistic process, and the series of artworks appeared to him like the pages of a book.

Travel experiences had a similar influence. Twombly's works are hardly understandable without the places of their creation: the weather in front of the windows of his house in Gaeta, the landscape of the Greek islands or the hustle and bustle by the sea on the

Tyrrhenian coast in Sperlonga. Even fictional trips could trigger images. Greub is tracking them. In the series *V Day Wait* (1980), Twombly designed a stay in the border city at the western end of the Chinese Wall based on a travelogue in *National Geographic* that he had read. Here he quotes Arabic and Chinese literature, which Greub deciphers and which describes a pastoral idyll, a leitmotif in Twombly's art: Twombly quotes on a piece of paper: "One more cup of wine for our remaining happiness. There will be chilling parting dreams tonight."

How Twombly is handling literature? Greub was one of the first who had a rare and unique insight into Twombly's library, which his family and his foundation granted him. There he discovered, classified and photographed the books that Twombly had read.

He proves over 200 literary sources that Twombly used. So he can prove that the artist was an editing reader, or let me say: he is an attending reader of poetry. Cy's inscriptions show a dialogue between him and the poetry that is unique in the history of literature, not only in the history of art. That is very remarkable, even for literary scholars.

In his publication Greub - together with his wife Krystyna - presents photographs of opened book pages from Twombly's collection. They show Cy's markings, inscriptions and changes of the original. That alone is a gift for the research on Twombly's work.

In this way, Greub can not only identify the inscriptions in the drawings, paintings and sculptures, but also assign them to their sources - a perfect basis for recognizing how Twombly worked when he planned, devised and then painted pictures. As a result from this there are three questions in terms of art history that Thierry Greub answers: What do these inscriptions look like, where do the used lines come from, and how does Twombly deal with lines?

First, Greub realizes that Twombly did not use exclusively poems or references to ancient mythologies. Very interesting is this paper work in which a four-line written text appears, that is supplemented with the letters JCR. Greub could find the reference work in *The World's Body* (1938) by the American philosopher John Crowe Ransom. He quotes: "The image cannot be dispossessed of a primordial freshness, which ideas never can claim." - a very important phrase that Kirk Varnedoe discovered on a notesheet in Twombly's studio. To paint and to draw means to look for phrases and metaphors. This is essential to understand Twombly.

This paperwork documents the manifesto of the artist and also shows an important way of Twombly's working: In addition to a painted or drawn iconic sign (that is a document of Ransom's primordial freshness), there is a text that explains and complements it. An intermedial interplay between word and image is created. In his commentary volume, Greub can describe this procedure as a key feature in Twombly's work.

Now another example how Cy was working with literature. The artist loved the poems of Rainer Maria Rilke, whom he quotes in many works. He had several translations in his collection of books. One work by Twombly shows the inscription of the epitaph of Rilke's grave in Switzerland. This three-lines poem is very difficult to understand. "Rose, oh the pure contradiction, delight / of being no one's sleep under so many / lids." Greub discovered that Twombly transformed the three-line original poem into a five-line, exactly how the lines are written on Rilke's grave - as if Twombly had known this place. So Greub's book once again illustrates Twombly's literary workshop. The artist changes his templates and sometimes edits them to adapt them to the visual events.

How extensive these editorials can be is proven by Twombly's intervention in the Three Secret Poems of the Greek poet Giorgos Seferis. He edits the lines, and he designs color samples for the painting *Inverno* (1991-1993) on the pages of his personal book copy. Since Greub knows the book Twombly worked with, he can even show the book page with Cy's markings and reading types. Twombly arranges lines until a condensed phrase is created. Twombly himself said that the work in advance could take longer than making the painting itself.

Greub basically documents his research in three ways. The illustration of Cy's works (on the left book-side) is followed by the transcription of the text written by Twombly on the right book-side. This transcription transforms Cy's handwriting into a typographical layout, which reflects the arrangement of the text and its color. Then the reader will find the documentation of the sources that Cy used.

In the famous paperwork *Petals of Fire* Greub succeeded in transcribing these lines completely for the first time. The artist used three different texts from three different ages: a ancient text by the Bion of Smyrna (100 BC), another ancient text by Vestinius (100 AC) and a poem by the American author Philip Walden from 1959. Twombly quotes from a book in his collection: *Greek Pastoral Poetry* by Anthony Holden. The ancient words

are written in black, while the poem by Walden is written in red, corresponding to the painted petals. Obviously Twombly saw the written words himself as an image and at the same time as text.

See the complex layout Greub arranged together with his book-designer. Please note the dancing lines he used, very complicate for the layout that is a typographic mirror of Twombly's handwriting. Here another example how Greub works with the sources. You find the body of the text, and the lines Twombly used are printed bold.

Greub maintains this three parted documentation in all volumes of his publication. So you can see how Twombly's works were created: from the poetic verse to the painted picture.

In the early 1950s, Cy Twombly studied at Black Mountain College in Asheville/North Carolina. There he not only got in touch with other artists, but also with the writer Charles Olson. At that time Olson was working on his theory of the projective verse, and Greub confirms the influence of Olson's poetry on the development of Twombly's work. For Olson, the design of poetry is a reaction to the author's experiences: to landscape, body and perception. Poetry is a performative act. So does Twombly: When he was asked by his friend Lucio Amelio, the important gallery owner in Naples, to take part in an exhibition about the terrible earthquakes in southern Italy in the 1980s, he drew blindly with colored chalks on large papers. The painter's body translated the perceived energy of the event into traces of the drawing.

Greub found a note from the artist who gives this process (and the first volume of his edition) a name: "Remanence": an energy that had influenced the artist in the form of a landscape, an event or a verse.

Greub's publication complements the existing Catalogues Raisonnees which Heiner Bastian and Nicola Del Roscio are responsible for. Dear Nicola, we all appreciate your work and books on Twombly's work. They are recourses for academic research and for any approach to his work. Thank you very much, to all at the foundation.

Greub's publication is an independent supplement of these books. His project is similar to the work comments by Vladimir Nabokov on Alexander Pushkin's Eugen Onegin and

to the works comments on *Finnegans Wake* by James Joyce that the German author Arno Schmidt completed. This underlines the cultural-historical relevance of his publication.

For research, essential narratives about Twombly's work change with it: it shows that the artist is not exclusively attached to Mediterranean literature and mythology. His enrollments testify to a very global approach to world cultures. With the expansion of global conflicts, Twombly's view on the world also changed.

Greub shows that Twombly's image practice was not an exclusively intuitive act, but followed understandable ways. Greub thus clears up very dominant stories about the artist.

The typographic design of the many materials and inscriptions was a great challenge. In cooperation with Andreas Langensiepen, a book layout with convincing clarity was created.

The extensive material presented by Greub is a basic work for libraries in galleries, museums and other places of research. It has a huge effect, because the publication shows many possibilities to show the work of Cy Twombly with innovative exhibition concepts. In this way, such exhibitions would become reading places between art and literature. Twombly wants to mark reading literature as a cultural fortune.

For me personally Greub's project is very important to understand Twombly's art between literature, painting and drawing. Thank you, Thierry. You will help us to re-tell Twombly's story for future generations.

