

GALLERIA CONTINUA

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CARSTEN HÖLLER

Method

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"Divide each difficulty into as many parts as is feasible and necessary to resolve it."

-- René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method* (1637)

Galleria Continua is pleased to present **Method**, an exhibition of new and recent works by Carsten Höller.

To inhabit the world is to divide it. For Carsten Höller, this is not so much a political fact as a mathematical reality. Fascinated by partition principles, the artist, who received his training in the natural sciences, explores how lines cut through surfaces and incessantly yield captivating new shapes. In **Divisions (Sphere and Carpet)**, the first line divides the carpet into two parts of the same size, and every following line further divides the subsequent squares of one divided part into equal halves. Höller's discourse on method is an eminently practical and productive one, giving rise to infinite shades of colour and a panoply of geometrical objects. In *Divisions Circle (White Lines on Carmine-red and White Background)*, white dots placed at

strategic intersections open up ever-new subdivisions.

The video work **Punktefilm** reveals that twenty-four dots in motion suffice to capture the flowing movements of a dancing couple. As the dots disappear one by one, the artist challenges the audience to question the foundations and the limits of their own perception. How do we divide the world to make sense of it? And is giving form and meaning to an inchoate mass of sensory data not tantamount to filling in the dark blanks of ignorance between the few luminous spots of serendipity? With its two live canaries in spherical cages revolving around a central axis, the new work **Circle Division Canary Mobile (Black Outside, White Inside)** even seems to suggest that life itself follows the logic of an endlessly continuing division that both separates and brings into

contact. Yet far from merely observing nature, the scientific mindset continuously transforms it. Science intrudes upon nature, while also competing with it, as evidenced in *Birds*, a series of two-colored engravings on paper. All birds depicted were bred in captivity; the natural world has never been their habitat, which, like their very existence, is entirely the product of man-made activities. By printing the engravings at a midpoint between color and black and white, Höller articulates the brittle status of these bird hybrids, halfway between nature and culture and not fully belonging to either. If Höller astutely multiplies divisions, he also relishes exploding binary oppositions when they threaten to stymie his inquisitive investigations.

In *Decimal Clock (White and Pink)*, Höller's rationalist instincts turn to the division of time. The functional clock, accounting for 10 hours, 100 minutes and 100 seconds, reminds us that the global homogenization of time occurred only recently as a response to the unprecedented degree of planetary interconnectedness. *Decimal Clock (White and Pink)* gestures towards experiments with decimal time during the French Revolution and pays tribute to efforts aiming at temporal comparability and regularity. Yet it also acknowledges various non-Western ways of measuring time and, rather than seeing them as a threat to the empire of reason, celebrates them as an enriching expression of the diversity of our existence in time.

Höller's rules for the direction of the mind draw on an expanded concept of insight and discovery. The geometer and the laboratory engineer are only two of the artist's many incarnations.

His quest for knowledge also relies on a psychedelic epistemology: altered states of mind that can enhance our understanding of the world. For Höller, mushrooms embody these sensory journeys, not just because of their supposedly 'magic' effects but also because of their complex structure, much of it underground, which sparks the curiosity of this artistic researcher. The polyester *Giant Triple Mushroom* stands as a towering testament to the wonder felt at those living, meandering organisms science has still not understood. Höller's enlarged mushroom replicas brim with an Alice-in-Wonderland-like excitement over the brightly-colored worlds to which they give access. A passionate classifier, Höller reintegrates even the mind-expanding fungal universe into a scholarly order of things, as he demonstrates in *Double Mushroom Vitrine (Twenty-Fourfold)*, a meticulously arranged visual taxonomy with a twist: Upon closer inspection, each mushroom specimen turns out to be a montage, with one half representing a variety of wild mushroom and the other the fly agaric known for its poisonous and psychoactive properties. On full display here is the mischievously subversive wit that is one of the indispensable instruments in Höller's artistic laboratory.

The *Soma* series – each setting composed of representations of a reindeer, a female model, and a fresh fly agaric mushrooms – alludes to the mythical substance mentioned in the Vedic writings. Both a gateway to the world of the gods and a source of spiritual Enlightenment, soma was said to be a crucial component of the ritualistic practices of the Vedic people. Humankind, however, forgot about the plant, which can no longer be identified (even though some

believed the Vedic ritualists relied on the fly agaric mushroom to open the doors of their perception). With this series, the artist points to an elective affinity between the researcher and the sage. In the medium of art at least, a reconciliation of modern science and ancient wisdom appears tantalizingly within reach. Höller gives us the *Method*.

BIOGRAPHY

Carsten Höller was born in 1961 in Brussels, Belgium and lives in Stockholm, Sweden and Biriwa, Ghana.

Collections include Museum of Modern Art, New York; Tate, London; Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Belgium; Musée d'Art Contemporain Lyon, France; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt; Fondazione Prada, Milan; Cal Cego – Colección de Arte Contemporáneo, Barcelona; PinchukArtCentre, Ukraine; and 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Japan.

Institutional exhibitions include the 50th Biennale di Venezia (2003); "One Day One Day", Färgfabriken, Stockholm (2003); 7th Biennale de Lyon (2003); "Carsten Höller: Half Fiction", Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2003); "7,8 Hz", Le Consortium, France (2004); "Une exposition à Marseille", Musée d'Art Contemporain, Marseille (2004); 51st Biennale di Venezia (2005); "Carsten Höller: Test Site", Tate Modern, London (2006); "Amusement Park", MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA (2006); "Carrousel", Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria (2008); "The Double Club", Fondazione Prada, London (2008); 28th Bienal de São Paulo (2008); "Double Slide", Museum of Contemporary Art, Croatia (2009); 53th Biennale di Venezia

(2009); 8th Gwangju Biennale (2010); "Divided Divided", Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam (2010); "Soma", Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin (2010); "Carsten Höller: Double Carousel with Zöllner Stripes", MACRO- Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Roma, Italy (2011); "Carsten Höller: Experience", New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (2011); 11th Sharjah Biennale (2013); "LEBEN", Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna (2014); 8th Berlin Biennial for Contemporary Art (2014); 10th Gwangju Biennale (2014); "Golden Mirror Carousel", National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (2014-15); 56th Biennale di Venezia (2015); "Carsten Höller: Decision", Hayward Gallery, London (2015); and "Doubt", Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan (2016). Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Høvikodden, Norway (2017), "Reason" at Gagosian Gallery, New York City, United States (2017). Y. Centro Botin, Santander, Spain (2017). Miami ArtBasel, "Prada Double Club Miami", with Fondazione Prada, Milan. Miami, United States (2017).