

The black square as a representation of the define feeling and death.

The black square is a re-occurring symbol in art and religion. The color black throughout (art) history and in various religions is a symbol of (in) finity, death. The square is a geometrical shape which re-occurs throughout history as a symbol in depictions of various religions, primitive cultures and paganism.

In this essay I will review three works of different artists over the past decade and describe how the representation of the black square is used as a portrayal of death and pure divine feeling.

### **Black square Malevich 1915**

At the last futurist exhibition of paintings 0.10 in Petrograd in December 1915 to January 1916 Malevich presented The black square form. The black square is the most discussed artwork of this exhibition. <sup>1</sup>

In his text “From cubism and futurism to suprematism: the new realism in painting”, written in 1915.

To achieve an absolute creation Malevich believes that he must free all art from vulgar subject matter and teach his consciousness to see everything in nature not as real forms and objects, but as material. He writes that in order to achieve an absolute creation, a form which is unconscious and without response and will reveal intuition, the artist must shed his artwork from the impression of the wholeness of objects. The academic form of painting where the artist bases his forms on the forms of nature, uses figuration which is a depiction of the realistic world, is a sign of a primitive artist. <sup>2</sup>

“The Suprematist square and the forms proceeding out of it can be likened to the primitive marks (symbols) of aboriginal man which represented, in their combination, *not ornament, but a feeling of rhythm*. Suprematism did not bring into being a new world of feeling but, rather, an altogether new and direct form of representation of the world of feeling.”<sup>3</sup>

In his text Malevich tears down Futurism and cubism as more primitive types of art because of the figuration derive from impressions from nature. With his text he seems to imply that more primitive art has to die in order for a new art, suprematism, to be born. Furthermore Malevich is ordering the artist to release himself from the idea of depicting the real world. In order to transcend to a higher plane of art, which propagates a pure and divine feeling, it must kill the ruling body of thought about how to produce an image. It is as though this realization he himself also feels how he has died and reborn when he writes how he has transformed himself into the zero of form. He saw the square not as a subconscious form. But as the creation of intuitive reason. He believed it was the face of a new art. <sup>4</sup>

Malevich saw color and texture in painting as ends in themselves. The essence of painting, but this essence was always destroyed by the subject. Malevich searches for a liberating non-objectivity where nothing is real except feeling. X

*Malevich himself regarded his minimalistic geometrical forms as the secular equivalents of Russian icons, a form of painting which aspires to present the divine as pure or unmediated reality. Tate*

*Suprematism for Malevich is about ends it is the end of futurism, the end of the*

*material, the end of the blurring of the divine feeling of the artwork with subject matter. Furthermore the feeling that the artwork is supposed to bring across is a supreme feeling. A feeling of rhythm.*

### **Cube Venice 2005, Gregor Schneider**

After a two year period of research on the cube. Initially inspired by the muslim religion of Schneiders friend and collaborator the Tunesian engineer Helmi Ben Boubaker Helal the cube commissioned by curator Rosa Martinez for the 2005 Biennale was censored by city authorities of Venice because it might have provoked or offended Muslims. <sup>5</sup>

Fascinated by the power the Muslim religion gives Helmi Ben Boubaker Helal and the Kaaba, a cuboid building at the centre of the Islams most holy mosque, of which the inside is not documented. Initially the idea was to reconstruct the Kaaba to scale in Germany, but to avoid offence Gregor Schneider planned to build an abstract cube. <sup>6</sup>

Gregor Schneider says that his aim with the cube was not to provoke. The cube would have been an approximation towards an unfamiliar space. He was interested in the interrelation of unfamiliar and isolated spaces.

*“Die Kaaba ist eines der unfassbarsten, geheimnisvollsten und schönsten Gebäude der Welt. Sie ist ein aus Stein gemauertes Raum und steht unverrückbar da. Kein Mensch wird jemals in der Lage sein, dieses Heiligtum zu transportieren.“<sup>7</sup>*

The cube would have been about a dialogue between religions. It would have been an autonomous sculpture, the form material sight and function would have been different to that of the Kaaba in Mekka. The cube would have been an opportunity for Christians to see a structure inspired by a site which they are not able to visit. <sup>8</sup>

The censorship of the cube was due to fear of harming religious feelings of the Islamic community and fear that it might make Venice vulnerable to terrorist attacks. <sup>9</sup> In Schneiders eyes the censorship was based on a misinterpretation of the cube and was a closing of an opportunity to talk about religion. <sup>10</sup>

The censorship of the Cube amounted a media revolt. The main topic of the discussion was if the censorship was due to political grounds. Instead of the cube being an opening for people to talk about religion and politics in a time where muslim religion was difficult to discuss because the ongoing Iraq war, it became the symbol of the finiteness of the artists idea. Cube Venice 2005 became a symbol for the censorship that was executed and the fear of raising political discussion. It is the symbol for the death of an opportunity to open up a discussion.

### **Triptych May-June 1973, Francis Bacon**

Triptych May-June 1973 is a work which is one out of a series of three triptychs. Painted around the suicide of his former lover and model George Dyer between 1972 and 1974. Dyer committed suicide on the eve of the artist's retrospective at Paris's Grand Palais on 24 October 1971. <sup>11</sup>

Francis Bacons aim is to paint a portrait or his subject in an unillustrational way. **1** He wants to create a visual shock. He believes the first mark made in painting has a vitality due to the physical sense of painting. **2** in his eyes translating involves a loss of terms of the original meaning **3**

In an interview with David Sylvester 19 he talks about how the releasing of form which is more close to depiction of a person a pure feeling. More poignant than an illustration because it has a life completely of its own and therefore transfers the essence of the image more poignantly. You want to open so many levels of feeling. Cut down to the most elementary state.

The depiction of the door in Francis Bacon's triptych 73 is a black rectangle always surrounding George Dyer. It is a representation of his suicide. It is as if Bacon intuitively depicted the doorway to the afterlife or the death that may come.

He stated once that

"[people] are always trying to defeat death by leaving images, but it won't make any difference; we'll just be dead, though the image may live on"

Also the period of time in which Bacon painted the black triptych series is a period of time in which he was confronted with "losing your friends". "and all the people I've loved are dead". 4

"[people] are always trying to defeat death by leaving images, but it won't make any difference; we'll just be dead, though the image may live on"

2

In the triptych in each of the three panels George Dyer is already on the other side of the door in the dark. It is as though the black rectangle is the tragedy which has already taken place. Dyer is already on the other side of the mirror, he is dead.

This is the last Triptych in the series of three. It is the end of a series it is as though the realization of the death of his friend has kicked in and is shown in this work.

- 1 WIKIPEDIA (2014) 0.10 exhibition. [Online] Available from:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/0.10\\_Exhibition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/0.10_Exhibition) [Accessed: 6 October 2014].
- 2 MALEVICH, K. (1915) From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: the New Realism in Painting . [Online] p 2,3,8. Available from:  
<http://www.mariabuszek.com/kcai/ConstrBau/Readings/MlevchSupr.pdf> [Accessed: 6 October 2014].
- 3 BOGUSLAWSKI, A. (1998-2008) Suprematism [Online] Available from:  
<http://myweb.rollins.edu/aboguslawski/Ruspaint/suprem.html>[Accessed: 6 October 2014].
- 4 MALEVICH, K. (1915) From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: the New Realism in Painting . [Online] p 1,8. Available from:  
<http://www.mariabuszek.com/kcai/ConstrBau/Readings/MlevchSupr.pdf> [Accessed: 6 October 2014].
- 5 Harris, G (2005) Art in the global age of terrorism. *The art Newspaper*. [Online] July-August. p.7. Available from: [http://www.gregorschneider.de/articles/20050701\\_the\\_art\\_newspaper.pdf](http://www.gregorschneider.de/articles/20050701_the_art_newspaper.pdf) [Accessed: 5 October 2014].
- 6 (2005) Art in the global age of terrorism. *The art Newspaper*. [Online] July-August. p.7. Available from: [http://www.gregorschneider.de/articles/20050701\\_the\\_art\\_newspaper.pdf](http://www.gregorschneider.de/articles/20050701_the_art_newspaper.pdf) [Accessed: 5 October 2014].
- 7 Haubrich, R (2005) "Wass kann man noch zum Islam sagen?". *Die Welt*. [Online] 16 june. p.25. Available from: [http://www.gregorschneider.de/articles/20050616\\_die\\_welt.pdf](http://www.gregorschneider.de/articles/20050616_die_welt.pdf) [Accessed: 5 October 2014].
- 8 (2005) Art in the global age of terrorism. *The art Newspaper*. [Online] July-August. p.7. Available from: [http://www.gregorschneider.de/articles/20050701\\_the\\_art\\_newspaper.pdf](http://www.gregorschneider.de/articles/20050701_the_art_newspaper.pdf) [Accessed: 5 October 2014].
- 9 (2005) Art in the global age of terrorism. *The art Newspaper*. [Online] July-August. p.7. Available from: [http://www.gregorschneider.de/articles/20050701\\_the\\_art\\_newspaper.pdf](http://www.gregorschneider.de/articles/20050701_the_art_newspaper.pdf) [Accessed: 5 October 2014].
- 10 Haubrich, R (2005) "Wass kann man noch zum Islam sagen?". *Die Welt*. [Online] 16 june. p.25. Available from: [http://www.gregorschneider.de/articles/20050616\\_die\\_welt.pdf](http://www.gregorschneider.de/articles/20050616_die_welt.pdf) [Accessed: 5 October 2014].
- 11 WIKIPEDIA (2014) The Black Triptychs. [Online] Available from:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Black\\_Triptychs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Black_Triptychs) [Accessed: 7 October 2014].  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Black\\_Triptychs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Black_Triptychs)