

EGON ZIPPEL @ ROTATION: "I DON'T ADD, I TAKE..." Opening Sat. 25.05.2024

"Traditional pictures like paintings have lost their historical quality of being an image... They have become pure commodities. The subversion of the commodity structure of the image is only possible within media images... one of the strategies of subversion is to acknowledge that the signs have lost their function... since all objects have been replaced by commodities, we have a new category of signs which relate to commodities instead of objects. The new class of signs is called logos." (Peter Weibel 1988)

In layman's terms, traditional art has become commercialized, and the only way to challenge this is to recognize its own lack of authenticity and connection to the real world, instead representing the commodified world we live in through corporate logos and commercial branding.

For Egon Zippel's show at ROTATION, we present two distinct series of works:

An installation of 'devandalized' stickers collected, organized, and arranged into complex groupings (ongoing 2024) and videos of exhibitions and works from 1989-1995, documenting his early light pieces that appropriated graphic symbols from signs, logos, and words.

Zippel studied graphic design in Mannheim, Germany, and received a Fulbright scholarship to study in the U.S. Over the next few years, he studied computer graphics at the New York Institute of Technology, and continued with postgraduate studies at the newly formed Institute for New Media at the Städel Art Academy in Frankfurt 1993-1994 under Peter Weibel.

To understand Zippel's current work, it's essential to review his early development in the 1990s, when graphic design, new media, and the growing German art scene merged.



Egon Zippel, "LIGHT, WORD, SIGN" (1993)

For example, his installation "LIGHT, WORD, SIGN" (1993) at Fondazione MUDIMA in Milano embodies a multitude of everyday graphics - copyright symbols © ® dissolve into smiley faces 😊 which transform into ☯ peace signs, then ying/yang ☯ (or is that Pepsi?), Mickey Mouse, Mitsubishi, crosses, swastikas, etc., creating a new hyperspace that in the 90s seemed like the future. Perhaps we all have now become accustomed to LOGO = SIGN in the post-internet emoji generation.

Today, when Zippel walks out of his Lower East Side loft, he is confronted with an urban mix of graffiti, ads, stickers, and tags littering buildings, signs, and surfaces. Much like a 19th century 'Flâneur,' he wanders the city to experience it as a detached observer. ***"I enjoy roaming the streets, sometimes in the wee hours of pre-dawn Manhattan, equipped with my ladder, hunting stickers."*** A small booklet or brochure, always on his person, serves as Zippel's repository for the stickers and tags he collects. To Zippel, the PROCESS of collecting these stickers is as important – and more fun – as utilizing them: The way is the goal.

With an anthropological approach - **“I DEVANDALIZE and PRESERVE. To formulate my street harvest into art, I manipulate the tags and stickers as collages or paintings, using the city's colors (the stickers!) as my palette.”** Zippel started to arrange and classify his collection into small groups and later began to arrange them on paper, walls, and canvas.

Stickers are used to ‘tag,’ to sell products or services, publicize events or online sites, or offer social critique. These stickers are quick, cheap, and easy to distribute. Therefore, stickers have become a staple in the street art landscape. Zippel has traveled to numerous cities, such as Montreal, Detroit, Berlin, Milan, etc., to collect them. Perhaps Zippel’s approach is similar to Aby Warburg’s when he described his *Bilderatlas* (Picture Atlas) as a *Denkinstrument* (Thinking Tool) when Zippel says, **“I used to hunt and collect berries and mushrooms in the forest, now I hunt and collect stickers. I don't add, I take.”** So, if you want to subvert a sign, you can no longer just use it, you must take it - you make it your own tool for thinking 🤖.

For the exhibition at ROTATION, Zippel displays strings and conglomerates of stickers, which can be grouped together to form longer content chains. Sometimes, these arrangements look like museum displays from a graffiti museum, while other times, they appear more organic and intuitive - more like unorganized systems such as city maps or biological structures, where smaller elements combine to make a larger whole.



Egon Zippel, assorted found stickers and tape on food delivery carton (2017)

Egon Zippel (Born in Romania, currently lives in NYC). Selected exhibitions include *Gold & Grime - The Art of Appropriation* at Climate Control Projects, NYC (2022), Art Ort, Heidelberg, DE (2021), Kunstverein Schwäbisch Hall, DE (2018), Kunstverein Heppenheim (2017), DE, Makershift Museum, Los Angeles (2017), Mykonos Biennale (2017), and Orchard Windows Gallery, New York (2013).

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