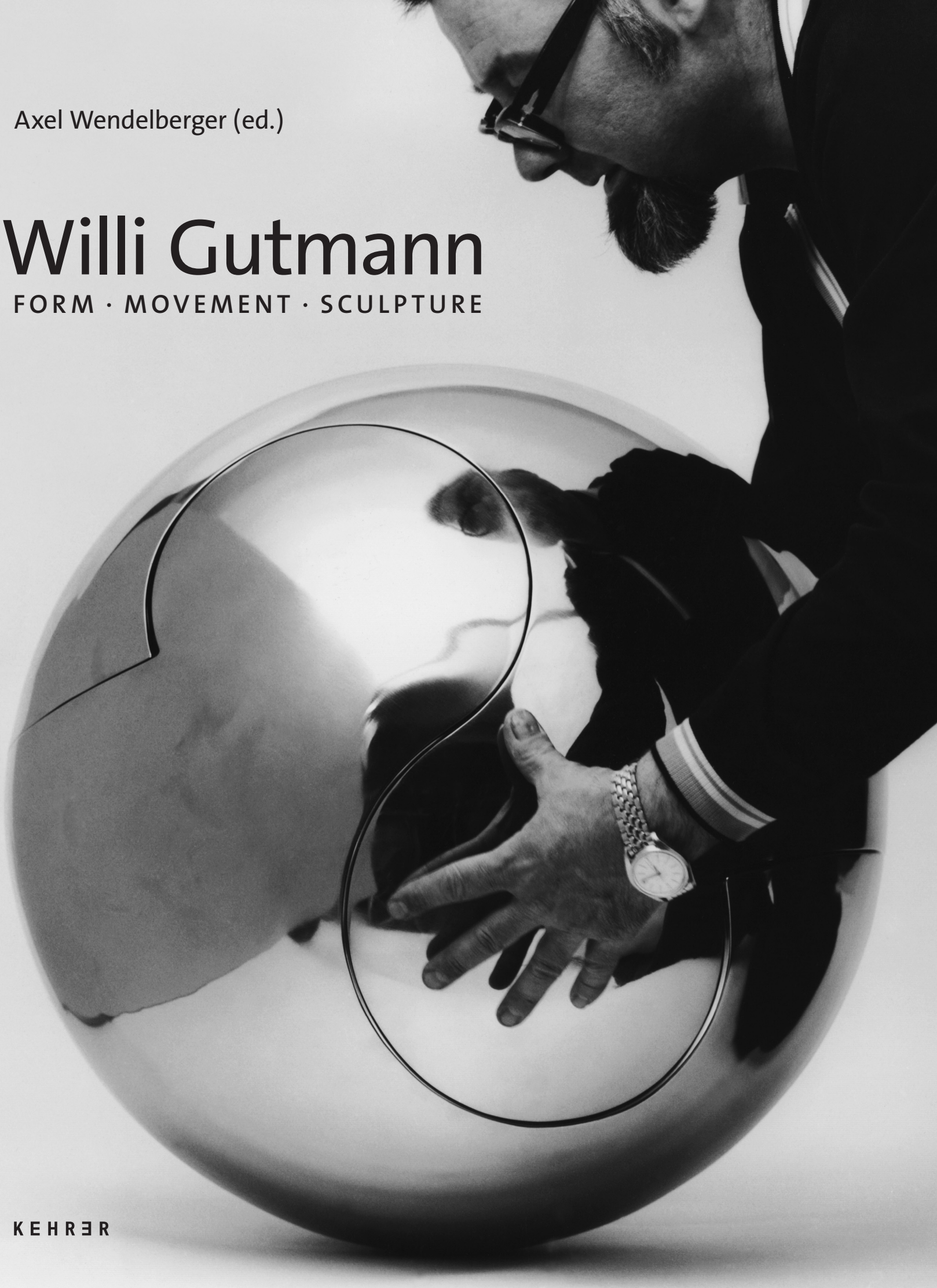


Axel Wendelberger (ed.)

Willi Gutmann

FORM · MOVEMENT · SCULPTURE

KEHRER



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Including an introduction by Haig Khachatoorian
and essays by Pit Gutmann and Axel Wendelberger

KEHRER

I was fortunate to work personally with Willi on projects in Atlanta and San Francisco. I chose him to create pieces that would enhance the human experience of our architecture, and he never failed to cause enthusiasm. His spirit lives on in these wonderful works of art.

John Portman

FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work on this book started in the summer of 2014, approximately one and a half years after the unexpected death of Willi Gutmann. It was an intensive period of discussions about his artwork for all of us. He left behind an extensive oeuvre, as well as numerous documents which had to be examined, put in order, and finally removed to a different place. The large barn-studio, which Willi Gutmann had rented since 1975, had to be vacated and handed back over to the landlord.

Unfortunately, Suzanne Monard, the partner of the artist, cannot celebrate the publication of this book. She passed away on September 6, 2014 due to heavy illness. These strong personalities were company to each other over thirty-five years of a life shared, and they constantly inspired one another. We felt relieved that Suzanne did witness the beginning of this project.

We are pleased to present the first comprehensive publication about the sculptural works of Willi Gutmann. In view of the amount of material that was available and the diversity of his artistic and creative designs, it soon became clear to us that we had to set a limit and concentrate on a representative selection of artworks in order to provide adequate insight into the rich body of work and intellectual world of Willi Gutmann.

Through his mutable sculptures, Willi Gutmann made an original contribution to kinetic art. To engage the viewer in the respective final result of an artwork was an issue of paramount importance for the artist. The viewer should continually become involved in the new, leading to a playful encounter. The subtitle of this book, "Form · Movement · Sculpture," describes the three stages of interaction with the works of Willi Gutmann as described by his longtime friend Haig Khachatoorian: "The confrontation with the object (form) takes place first; the participation, that is, the kinetic interaction of the change of the form comes after (movement); finally the moment arrives when the manipulation is over and the work comes into being (sculpture)."

This book project could only be realized with the help of the family and numerous friends. Walter and Juliane Gutmann (Tlajomulco de Zúñiga/Jalisco, Mexico) played a decisive role in the promotion of Willi Gutmann's artworks, particularly in Mexico and in the United States of America. They are the most important sponsors of this book. We wish to express our gratitude for their continued support. Haig Khachatoorian (Chapel Hill/North Carolina) and John Portman (Atlanta/Georgia) contributed with texts, for which we are grateful. We also wish to extend our special thanks to Edy Brunner (Zurich/Someo).

Over the course of many years, a group of loyal supporters of Willi Gutmann's artwork was formed. Their enthusiastic collection activities also rendered possible the publication of this book. We especially want to thank Thomas and Angela Scherer (Lungern), Peter and Lucy Scherer (Augsburg), Diana and Daniel Rapelli (Geneva), Maria-Carmen Urban-Perlingeiro and Pavel Urban (Geneva), Danika Michele Volkert and Mehrdad Safa (Basel), Verena Bühler (Oberhasli), and Bernhard Locher and Tullio Lorrai (Oberhasli).

For the images of this book, we drew on photographic material from over fifty years. Particularly helpful and useful were the photographs by Paul Guggenbühl (Zurich), a friend and mentor of Willi Gutmann; these images reach back to the time when the works were initially crafted and were taken together with the artist. We also thank Oliver Belin (Atlanta/Georgia), John Dierauer (Steckborn), Michel Gilgen (Zurich), and Urs Schmid and Fritz Hammer (Fällanden) for their sensitive shootings. We appreciate the support of the Board of Trustees of the Ruta de la Amistad in Mexico City for the kind authorization to use the photographs of the sculpture *The Anchor/El ancla* in its current location.

The work of this publication project, as well as the technical editing of the artistic legacy, occasionally posed a challenge that could not have been managed if it were not for the expedite and uncomplicated support given. We also owe a debt of gratitude to Armin Baumgarten (Düsseldorf), Hans and Béatrice Bachlechner (Bergdietikon), Andreas Bauer (Bauer Automobile & Industrielackierungen, Dättwil), Natascha Cartolaro (Königswinter), Christoph, Rebecca, and Florian Froelich (Mechanische Werkstätte Froelich, Untersiggenthal), Roman Füglistner (Cool Logistic AG, Dietikon), Mischa Klaus (Bülach), Conrad Meier and Ursula Wirth (Zurich), Nils Planzer (Planzer Transport AG, Dietikon), and Chriguel Schallner (Bäretswil) for their dynamic assistance. We wish to thank Röbi and Hellen Bolliger (Schalchen), Dr. Sophie Haaser of the Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig (Vienna), Michelle Hevron and Howell W. Perkins of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (Richmond/Virginia), Dr. Jaroslav Sedlář and Dr. Jitka Sedlářová (Brno), Paule Gina Wendelberger (Düsseldorf), and Prof. Dr. Christoph Zuschlag (Heidelberg) for the discussions, as well as for their valuable information and encouragement.

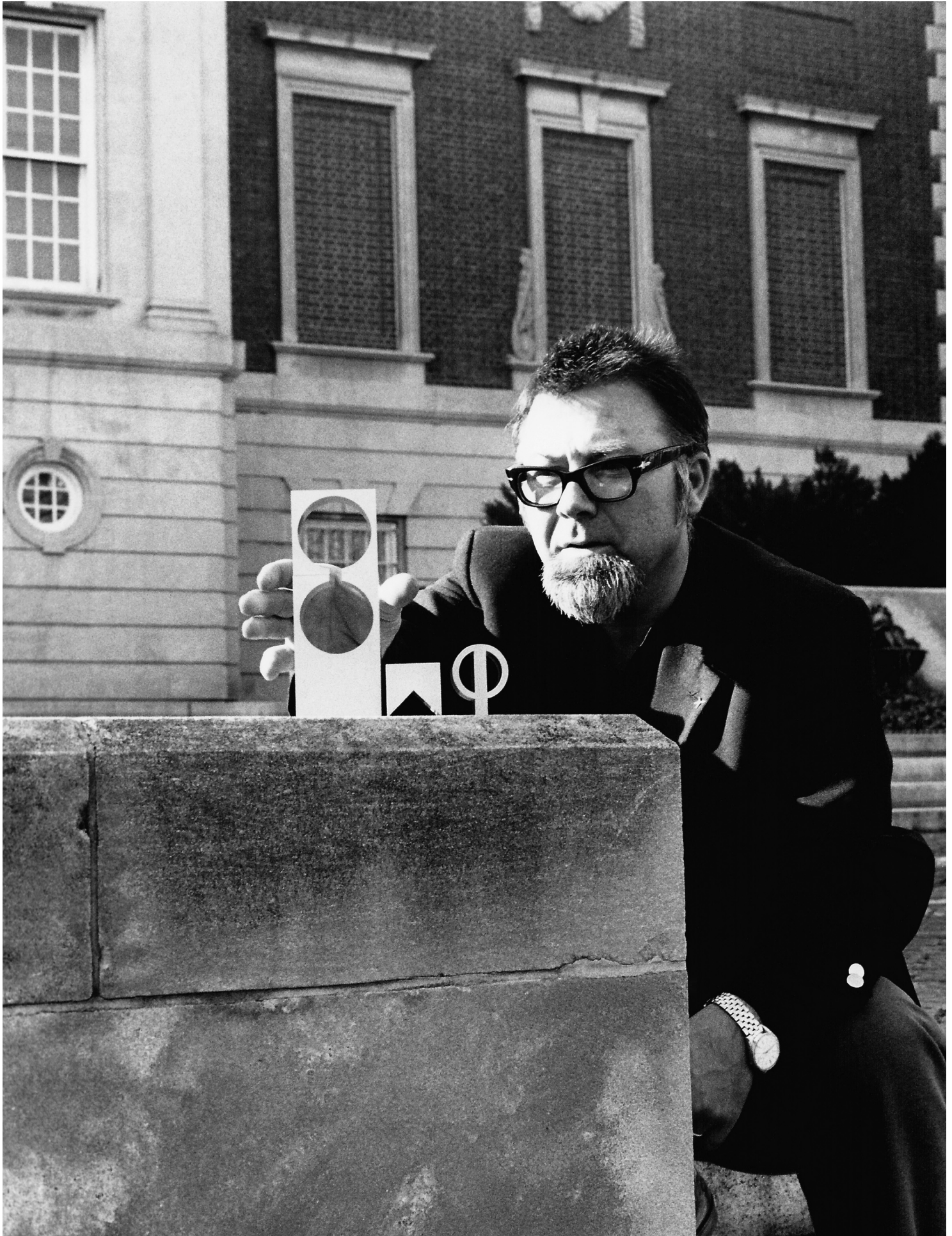
We are pleased that, with Kehrer Verlag, we have selected a professional partner for this project. We are especially grateful to Klaus Kehrer and Daniel Sommer for their warm reception. The project was supervised by Simone Albiez, Katharina Stumpf, René Henocho, Petra Joswig, Andreas Schubert, and Silke Küpperscheeg; we want to express our appreciation to them for their professional and cooperative collaboration.

We wish all readers great pleasure in their encounter with the work of Willi Gutmann and hope that his oeuvre will find many more enthusiastic supporters.

Axel Wendelberger, Pit Gutmann, Myriam Kunz, and Daniel Kunz



Willi Gutmann in the workshop of his barn-studio, 2007



MEMORIES OF AN EMINENT ARTIST

Who is Willi Gutmann, and why is he important to modern European sculpture, as a thinker and maker of three-dimensional forms and experiences? If you have encountered and interacted with one of his pieces, you can begin to realize the unique transformational qualities of each design as it opens, unfolds, and regroups with its other elements, which are all part of the whole. In fact, Willi provokes you to look, play, change, and redesign each piece from any number of vantage points you had not as yet imagined. You then become a part of the sculpture's outcome.

He was born in 1927 in Dielsdorf, a town near Zurich, and died in 2013 in Oberhasli, a nearby village, at the age of eighty-five. Willi had originally studied at the School of Applied Arts, Zurich. Becoming a sculptor in his late-thirties, after a career in architecture, Willi's passion and productivity were driven by both fields. Given the breadth and quality of his works, he can easily be compared with other great Swiss sculptors of his time — Jean Arp, Max Bill and Gottfried Honegger. Willi's body of work can be said to have its origins in the Constructivist, De Stijl, Bauhaus, and Concrete Art movements that emerged in Europe during the twentieth century. However, his work was genuine and not directly influenced by these movements.

Dielsdorf is a small municipality in the canton of Zurich. The name means the estate or farm of Theolf (first mentioned in the year 861 as Theolvesthoruf). The coat of arms displays an image of a bear carrying a branch in the shape of a long "Y." Willi himself, was very bear-like in stature and always carried pieces of inspirational wood, gnarled by natural forces. His environs included the surrounding towns of Niederhasli, Regensberg, and Steinmaur. In effect, Willi did not live and work very far from where his life began, since his home and studio were located in Oberhasli since 1952. However, he grew personally through his design practice, living throughout Europe, and travelling extensively around the United States, Mexico, and Canada.

Beginning his career as an architect for clients seeking home designs and as an interior designer for the well-known Swiss retailers Herren-Globus and others, he had a structural knowledge of materials, an aesthetic background in form, and a spatial sense for small and large objects, and how they would interact in any indoor/outdoor environment. The difference was his innate sense of playfulness, symbolism, and exploration that took him beyond the realm of the commercial to that of the artist, pursuing concepts of a different nature and meaning. His personal projects or form studies allowed him the opportunity to expand his vocabulary of three-dimensional compositions.

Opposite page: Willi Gutmann with his multiple *Symbol* (WG 70 – PM 9) in front of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond/Virginia, 1972

He revealed in an interview¹ in 1981 that he grew up in a very simple way. It was necessary that he discover himself without any external influences of an artistic nature. He began looking at the work of others (e.g. Arp, Calder, and Moore) only after he was certain that he had done his own work, and it was truly his own. Later in adulthood, when he designed and built his own home, he considered it his paradise that his house, his workshop in a converted barn, and his yard were all available for his creative stimulation and output. He would walk across the road after breakfast and begin his day in his spacious studio/workshop. There, he was highly adept at the applications of wood, metal, and paper to be transformed into products of the imagination, spirit, and culture.

His home at Haslibergstrasse 11 was an incubator of ideas; and the barn studio he renovated across the street at Haslibergstrasse 12a was a laboratory, where he experimented and prototyped his concept pieces at different scales and with different materials. Together, these spaces formed his beautiful engine of new and inventive objects — uniquely his. The yard surrounding the home was dotted with his massive geometric pieces, almost as if they were totems placed on a sacred site. It was a test-site to see how these works would look on the land.

On his bookshelves, there were tiny triggers for ideas, found in nature (or man-made), which provided inspiration for larger pieces. He found unique stones, mineral formations, wood bits, and sea shells that were stimuli for his larger sculptural works. These uncommon ephemera were scattered amongst his books, as little reminders of nature's designs. Willi explored how form occupies space and how space is not only displaced, but greatly enhanced by form. He was also interested in reflecting light, particularly with aluminium. This was especially apparent when one manipulated his sculptures' parts. In 1968, Willi stated: "It corresponds to my nature that most of my sculptures happen to be in motion. Always aiming at new perceptions, never stopping, constructive and integrating, from the base and to the base, as life is."² He explored negative and positive forms in relation to one another. Expanding and contracting ideas were a way for him to rethink where he had been and now wanted to go.

Willi Gutmann's pieces have a universal purity and are definitely not provincial in their form or scale. There is the playful side of Willi, who had a tireless energy to create and then engage the viewer to participate in the completion of his sculpture. George Moldovan, a gallery curator, said of Willi's works in 1974: "There is an implicit new set of audience rules — rules which abandon the traditional preciousness of the art object: the viewer is invited to playfully rearrange forms to his own liking; the sculpture becomes raw material for the viewer-participator to make his own creation [...] Gutmann, by sponsoring this new audience-art form relationship, is lowering barriers that have too long existed between the artist and a larger audience."³

I first met Willi in 1972 in San Francisco at his solo exhibition at the Embarcadero Center, an office complex, where he had recently installed his

¹ Khachatoorian 1981

² Grenchen 1968

³ Johnson City 1974

monumental *Two Columns with Wedge* (1969/71). I went with Ed Beyeler, a Swiss photographer, who lived in San Francisco and was trained by Agfa as a fine art photo printer. The sculpture was composed of three elements: The tallest column was 24.5 meters (82 feet) high, the smaller column 13.5 meters (3 feet), and the wedge 2.2 meters (8 feet). The concept was based on a single large column that had been cut into; two sliced parts were removed and now placed in a compositional whole in relation to the larger column from which they came. The sculpture was shown in a short sequence of Francis Ford Coppola's famous film, *The Conversation* (1974). It was eleven tons of stainless steel sheeting wrapped seamlessly around a skeletal steel structure and was formed at a commercial kitchen fabricator's facility in the city. Willi had described it as "Positive and negative, developed from a basic body, [...] displaced, set apart, turned around, and reassembled, according to the object's possibilities to opinion, mood or fancy [...] the forms are cut out from the whole, whereby the single parts fitting together can be put into new groupings, thus considerably enlarging the whole volume [...] It is a game of bodies, lines, light, and space."⁴

Later that week, Willi needed to take down his exhibit and store it at a friend's home in San Francisco, since much of the show would be travelling to other venues in the US. I had a Volkswagen van and offered him transportation, as a gesture of good will. From that moment on, we became good friends, and there were subsequently many years of correspondences, visits, projects, exhibitions, etc. That day, I also received my first Gutmann sculpture, as a grand gesture of his appreciation. Thus began a friendship that lasted over forty years.

After that auspicious meeting, I saw Willi's sculptures in the Peachtree Center in Atlanta/Georgia. He did that commission for the well-known architect and developer John Portman Jr. He also designed an outdoor sculpture for George Weissman, Chairman of Philip Morris, Inc. Located in Richmond, Virginia. The piece is part of a corporate center designed by Ulrich Franzen. At seven meters (23 feet) in height, the stainless-steel sculpture, known as *Symbol* (1969/72), is prominently placed on the grounds and visible from Interstate Highway 95, along with the corporate brands graphics column by Ivan Chermayeff.

I see both every time I drive from North Carolina to visit Washington, D. C. Weismann, a corporate leader and a major patron of the arts, said of his acquisition in 1972: "Willi Gutmann's sculpture is uniquely pleasing in its aesthetics and at the same time makes a strong statement about the technological age in which we live. He has demonstrated that modernism, functionalism, and the use of present-day materials can be blended to harmonize with the pleasures of man and the society in which we live."⁵ I think this statement crystalizes Willi's sensibilities and contributions to form-giving and sculpture. A small-scale version of *Symbol* was produced in a limited edition of 500, as a gift to art patrons and corporate friends. The four-interlocking parts could be assembled and re-arranged for any variety of aesthetic effects.

⁴ Grenchen 1968

⁵ Quoted in Spanish in: Mexico City 1976

Willi appreciated all periods of art and sculpture and felt that each period represented the best of that culture; and it is still the best. He purchased other artist's works and felt strongly about supporting individuals, whose work he admired. He believed that artists should support fellow artists. This is both a mark of his character and his generosity.

In my own fond reflections of Willi's art, I am reminded of his large, thick metal disks and concentric forms that were seemingly immobile, yet hid the fact that they were actually to be manipulated, rotated, and flipped by the viewer. Within the simple purity of his geometric forms, he created a beautiful complexity through these repetitions of concentric cuts. These cuts allowed me to participate in transforming the pieces into further permutations, thus completing the creative-interactive process of experiencing his sculptures on my terms. He cleverly involved me as a viewer, as an agent of change, a participant in the re-creation of his three-dimensional concepts. It was also in this play that he discovered new ideas and new worlds. I was always awed by the precision and Zen-like execution of his work, regardless of the scale, from hand-held to environmental proportions. There is a mathematical exquisiteness and a kinetic elegance to these physical meditations. Unlike others, Willi Gutmann expected and wanted you to touch his art. For his large frame, he was very agile, acrobatic in fact. His mind performed mental gymnastics, his hands performed the result. Switzerland can be proud of its artist-son.

Haig Khachatoorian

WILLI GUTMANN —

THE ARTIST AND HIS WORK

A PERSONAL APPROACH

Every book has its own story and this one does as well. The beginning of this story goes back to 1968. The young Swiss artist Edy Brunner proposed to the renowned sculptor Willi Gutmann to make a group exhibition at the Galerie Brechbühl in Grenchen (canton of Solothurn). Like Gutmann, Brunner also worked at the time on kinetic and participatory designs of three-dimensional objects. While doing research for a book on Brunner, I came across a small and tasteful catalog — nearly twenty-five years old — that Edy Brunner had compiled for the exhibition.¹

In February 2014, almost one year exactly after Willi Gutmann passed away at the age of eighty-five, the exhibition *Spielobjekte – Die Kunst der Möglichkeiten* (*Ludic Objects – The Art of Possibilities*) was inaugurated at the Museum Tinguely in Basel. The public showing included an object by Edy Brunner titled *Strassen-Signalbretter* (*Roadblock Signs*) that had been presented in Grenchen for the first time in 1968. When Brunner was invited by the Museum Tinguely to give a lecture about his work, he dedicated a part of it to the joint exhibition with Willi Gutmann in order to pay tribute to his achievements in the field of kinetic art. Pit Gutmann, Willi's son, was also present during the event. It was then when the first ideas and for this publication were born.

When I went to Zurich in July 2014, Edy Brunner introduced me to Willi Gutmann's family: Suzanne Monard, partner of the artist, Pit Gutmann, his son, and Myriam and Daniel Kunz, the daughter and son of Suzanne Monard. I saw the home conceived by Willi Gutmann himself and the spacious barn-studio for the first time. That was the beginning of an unbelievable journey into the world and creations of a brilliant artist. During the months of intensive research, when the quality and range of his artwork became more accessible to me, I wondered even more why Willi Gutmann is considered more like an insider's tip in his own country up to the present day. On the other hand, in conversation with the American designer Haig Khachatoorian, whose introduction to this book I am very thankful for, I learned about the appreciation of the artist in the US. That he was already offered a project to write a book about Willi Gutmann in the 1980s makes his contribution even more precious.

The family put his artistic legacy at my disposal and arranged everything so that I could work and live in Willi Gutmann's house. This seemed like a stroke of luck, since the work on the remarkably extensive written legacy alone would have been almost impossible under different circumstances. Furthermore, I

¹ Grenchen 1968

was able to gain priceless insight into the intellectual world, the artistic preferences, and inspiration, as well as into the working methods of the artist within the environment that Willi Gutmann and Suzanne Monard had shared. Much to my regret, Suzanne passed away a couple of weeks after we had met, thus leaving me with no further opportunity to have in-depth conversations with her. Nevertheless, after several discussions with members of the family, friends, and companions, a clear image of this artistic personality emerged.

THE ARTIST

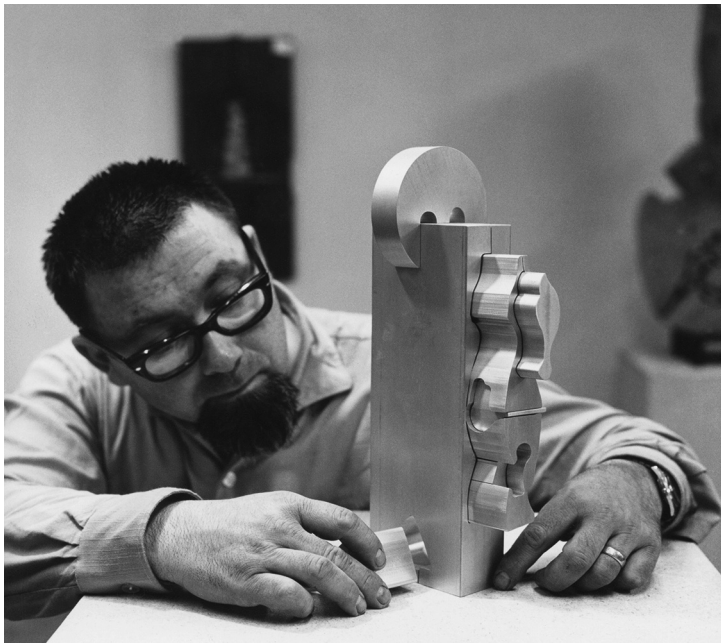
The scope of Willi Gutmann's artistic and written legacy is already a clear indication of his very disciplined and productive working style. He always worked long into the night. His son Pit remembers the nightly sound of the running band-saw in his modest studio in the basement of the house where the "sawn-

out sculptures," as explained by Gutmann, were created. When, in 1975, his working space in the basement definitely became too small for him, the artist rented a barn on the other side of the street and, together with Pit, remodeled it into a studio according to his own needs. It was there where he found the adequate space to work on several pieces at the same time. In an interview with Haig Khachatoorian in 1981, he said:

"I work more or less every day, but not on the sculptures, because I have to write letters, or prepare something or have to clean the studio [...]. So the art work I do mostly in a block. [...] as soon as I'm sure, I go and start the work. I never work only on one piece, as a lot of artists start the painting and then they finish the painting and start another one, I have hundreds of works I work on. And I found some pieces lying around several years, still they have only to be finished by polishing. This is the

problem, when the creative part of the work is done, then the work is no longer of interest to me. I mean it's only work to do, as you please."²

Willi Gutmann seemed to have an almost inexhaustible working energy. From time to time, he worked as if he was driven to produce as many designs as possible. In addition, while working at the same time on various projects with many different pieces, new ideas emerged which then awaited their transformation. Since all of his artworks were realized by him — including the monumental sculptures and various multiples — he sometimes exposed himself to an enormous workload. Quite a few of his conceptions were completed and dated long after having been conceived. This is the reason why, in some particular cases, it might be difficult to retrace the detailed development of certain groups of artworks. However, his predominant creative phases remain



Willi Gutmann with the aluminum sculpture
Die Vielfältige (The Manifold), 1965
(WG 65 – 125 M)

² Khachatoorian 1981

undoubtedly distinct and visible. Moreover, for years, the artist kept a studio record book, in which the majority of the pieces are listed.

With the same clear-headedness and precision that characterized his artistic conceptions, Willi Gutmann also compiled numerous records, lists of exhibitions, and photographic documentation of his works. It was important for him to record and present his most important artworks in a meticulous manner. He invested a considerable amount of time completing the records and did it mainly at night. The artist included in these generally typewritten lists small drawings of the objects which, in the case of non-representational objects, made it almost essential to clearly identify them with titles such as *Drehspiel aus zwei Scheiben* (*Rotating Figure of Two Discs*). His registry contained the numbers of the works that he usually stamped or carved on a not so visible spot. The aforementioned work from 1965 bears the number “WG 65–73 M.” It indicates first the year of its creation, followed by the serial number and a letter that distinguishes the material that was used, in this particular case metal. Gutmann worked primarily with aluminium and non-ferrous metals, but every now and then with zinc, steel, or stainless steel, and also in a few cases with silver.

Occasional inconsistencies when determining the numbers could not be avoided due to the amount of work, but such inconsistencies were then identified by the artist and corrected. Nevertheless, not all works by Willi Gutmann have an entry in his registry. Even principal works such as *Rotating Figure of Two Discs* did not bear a signature, and many of his creations simply carry a stamp with the letters “WG.” In view of the meticulous manner in which the artist usually worked, it seems likely that the numbering and signing of his works was done for practical reasons, and generally carried out in the process of preparing larger exhibitions.

These large exhibitions were important events for Willi Gutmann, and he prepared them with great care. He would gladly put up with the organizational and technical effort required for such an exhibition of voluminous objects, considering that the presentation of his works always meant artistic stimulation. When Gutmann appeared in public for the first time in the one-man exhibition in October / November 1965 at Galerie am Platz in Eglisau (canton of Zurich), he was able to look back on one and a half decades of artistic development. A matured artistic personality thus presented itself with independent works of art. All materials that Gutmann would employ throughout his life were displayed: wood, stone, aluminium, copper, brass, and steel. He also had defined his fundamental design principles by then. Gutmann’s mentor and friend Paul Guggenbühl wrote in the exhibition catalogue:



Drehspiel aus zwei Scheiben
(*Rotating Figure of Two Discs*), 1965
(aluminum, H 34 cm, ø 28 / 12 cm, WG 65 – 73 M)

“For a long time, I have followed Willi Gutmann’s artistic development in his stages, and ascending by leaps and bounds towards mastery and maturity. He was always headstrong. His quest for the unity of the intellect and perception, his seizing of crafts, his irrepressible urge for freedom and individuality, his intuition and his immense creative power determined his human and artistic character. [...] The sculptor has found his personal expression in the so-called sawn-out sculptures that he crafts, from the smallest to the most monumental structures, with their never-ending themes and variations. He is often concerned with the creation of movable figures that are cut out of a block of basic material, cut out, laid out, and put together again. Therefore, he engages the buyer / owner who participates in the design, allowing him to play when he feels like it and to look forward to it.”³

Willi Gutmann was born in 1927 in Dielsdorf (canton of Zurich) as the youngest of four siblings and grew up in a modest environment. His brother Walter, who is almost two years older, remembers that, already in his childhood, he used to carve small animal figures. An artistic influence on the part of the family or the immediate environment did not exist. After an apprenticeship as a cabinetmaker, Gutmann studied Interior Design at the School of Arts and Crafts in Zurich. He graduated in 1949. As elective subjects he chose Scale Modeling as well as Drawing and Painting. It was then when he came into contact with artistic practice for the first time. At that time, Gutmann had a strong interest in Scandinavian design. Therefore, after finishing his studies, he completed a several-month internship with the furniture designer Jakob Kjær in Copenhagen before setting up his own interior design studio in 1950. Possessing solid craftsmanship and artistic skills, he was able to start his professional career with a determination that was characteristic of him. At times, he employed up to five people.

Right at the beginning, he already created a small masterpiece. In collaboration with the architect Hans Trösch, he designed his own house and studio in Oberhasli (canton of Zurich), which was built by himself and where he moved into after marrying his wife Gudrun in 1952. He lived there until his death on February 21, 2013. Gutmann’s house is a reflection of his fine sense for spatial relationships, a trait that would characterize his entire artistic work. What was visible on a smaller scale in 1952 hinted at the large-scale manifestations which were to come in the future. On June 1, 1965, the department store Herren-Globus opened in Zurich and became Gutmann’s major contract in the area of interior design. A scale model of the sales department, which forms a part of his artistic legacy, reveals the mastery he achieved by means of practical experience.

Apart from his business activities as an interior and furniture designer, Willi Gutmann always worked also as a sculptor. After a serious beginning — above all working on heads, busts, and nude sculptures — he soon began to abstract forms without completely abandoning representational references. The wooden toys he designed in the 1960s for the Basel-based toy company Naef, founded in 1954, strike one like miniature sculptures. The moment when Willi

³ Eglisau 1965

Gutmann took the final step into conceptualization cannot be accurately traced. His earliest dated non-objective work is *Architektur in Eiche* (*Architecture in Oak*) from 1962, exhibited at the Galerie am Platz in Eglisau in 1965.

Encouraged by the success of his first solo exhibition and the positive response by the press, Willi Gutmann decided to change his professional focus from interior design to independent sculpting. For some time, he still kept his job at his former studio in Zurich to do correspondence work and to arrange all preparations for his exhibitions. He always mentioned 1965 as the beginning of his work as an independent sculptor. Most of the sixty-three works presented in his first exhibition (according to the list of works) also show 1965 as their year of origin. Since Gutmann's records commence the same year, it seems likely that, in preparation for the exhibition, he also dated earlier works with the year 1965, especially since some of the wooden sculptures are signed with the typical G of earlier years, the logo of his architectural studio. The list begins with no. 57. A note reveals that he divided his artwork into "old" and "new" works, which had been produced shortly before the exhibition. Apparently, he had counted his "old" works, but not documented them. It is possible that quite a few of his works were already in a late state of development and were simply completed for the exhibition.

THE ARTWORK

As a sculptor, Willi Gutmann was, strictly speaking, an autodidact. However, this statement must be put into perspective immediately, since the professions he learned as a carpenter and interior designer and the fine skills that he acquired through the elective courses while studying at the School of Arts and Crafts in Zurich provided a solid foundation for his artistic activities. It is not surprising that Gutmann worked initially mostly with wood before acquiring this professional background. He was thoroughly familiarized with this material and soon began to experiment with increasingly complicated saw cuts, cutting into blocks of wood, cutting them out, and then reinserting them.

He coined the term "sawn-out sculptures" for these works. The band saw became the most important tool for him. He even used the cutting technique on some stone sculptures. He finally discovered aluminum, as well as brass and copper, as further materials to work on in this way.

Formally, Willi Gutmann classified himself into the sculptural expressions of his time. He spoke sparingly about the influence of other artists and art trends, but rather emphasized his own independence. The quality of his individual artistic achievement is undeniable. However, in cases of similar questions related to form and content, it would not be surprising that certain relationships with other artists were revealed. Gutmann never voiced any exclusive claims on innovation anyway. He named Hans Arp, Alexander Calder, and Henry Moore as reference points. All three sculptors dealt in different ways

with the reciprocal penetration of space and sculpture. In Gutmann's early non-figurative wooden sculptures, certain flowing organic forms evoke similarities to Moore and Arp. This "formative grammar" was relatively widespread worldwide at the time and was employed by several artists. Besides the dimension of the changeability which Calder explored through his mobiles, another element appeared in the late 1950s in kinetic art: the manipulability of the object by the viewer, his participation in the respective final result of a piece of art. In this respect, Willi Gutmann has made an unparalleled contribution, the adequate recognition of which is pending to this day. Since this kind of movable art never really had a defined movement, no description has asserted itself up to the present. For his works, Gutmann preferred the concept of "participatory sculptures." Although he also repeatedly crafted objects made out of wood which can be taken apart, aluminum soon prevailed as the preferred material for these works. He developed — mostly out of one piece — ever new and more complicated mechanisms in order to produce changeable three-dimensional objects and to open a wide spectrum of possibilities for the individual participation of the viewer / user by means of fine mechanical precision. The artist wrote in a text about his exhibition at the Galleria del Deposito in Genoa in September 1966: "Intuition, the eye, the leading hand, the exact mechanical execution of the work characterize the sculptures. In most cases, the material will not be added, but deducted, cut out from the whole, made into pieces whereby the single pieces are fitted together again, put into new groups which may considerably increase the total volume. Although I 'reduce,' I can enlarge, while I displace and move round, I can magnify. It is a game of the bodies, lines, light and space."⁴

The work performed by hand was crucial for Willi Gutmann. Provided that it was within the possibilities, he crafted all his works personally. Here is an essential difference in comparison to many other artists who were active in the same field, as these often outsourced the production of their designs. Gutmann could not achieve anything out of the purely cerebral attempt of concrete art or the systematic investigation of its geometrical painting principles. He played intuitively with geometrical and organic forms and moved consciously between simple and complex configurations. His creative ideas developed from the immediate working process. Thus, he could simultaneously create very different works that still carried his unmistakable mark. Gutmann's formal spectrum ranges from objects inspired by natural formations (fossils, snail shells, minerals, root pieces, etc.) and partially elongated and detailed objects to virtually minimalistic and radical geometrical solutions which, in terms of their consequence and severity, join the ranks of the best comparable works in constructivist art.

Willi Gutmann always avoided stylistic typification. Out of a profound conviction, he did not want to limit himself or be monopolized. In 1973, he said in an interview: "The artist is largely an individualist and therefore not suitable for group works, where the team signs collectively. [...] To appear under a group

⁴ Gutmann 1966

name is mostly useful to the leader, historically maybe to all [...].”⁵ He held on to this artistic freedom his entire life, which at times might have led to irritations in the perception and classification of his wide-ranging work.

Such was the feedback from the Argentinian businessman Víctor Bossart, an art lover and friend of Gutmann, in a letter dated July 5, 1968 about an informal conversation he had held during the Venice Biennale with an employee of the Guggenheim Museum in New York: “[...] when I mentioned your work in the conversation (you will remember that I had asked him about an exhibition, in his museum in New York), he said that he found your work a bit too strong, in the line of the Swiss and European ‘Concrete School,’ and due to this reason was not so interesting for them.”⁶

Some weeks later, the Swiss art historian Fritz Billeter gave a more differentiated assessment. On October 10, 1968, he wrote in the feuilleton of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*: “Willi Gutmann may be called a special case within the so-called ‘concrete school,’ together with, among others, Max Bill, Camille Gräser, and Richard Paul Lohse. Not so much a special case because the simple geometrical elements of his small sculptures may be taken apart and then re-assembled to a complete ‘mother form’; a rather unique manifestation within the concrete school because his creations reveal a clearly recognizable, sign-like, symbolic meaning.”⁷

At an early stage, Willi Gutmann had found the overriding creation principle, which would permeate his entire oeuvre in many different ways: the breaking up of a homogeneous original form — a block, a plate, or a disc — and the possibilities of the regrouping or the new arrangement of the parts that result from the process by shifting, reconnecting, folding out, or rather folding up or being rotatable along one or more axes. Frequently recurring motifs are identical positive and negative forms, forms that mutually penetrate each other, fundamental geometrical forms such as squares, triangles, and circles, as well as circle segments which are often eccentrically tapered, ellipses and ocular forms, rings, lamellae, spirals, labyrinth and snails forms, as well as many others which the artist combined consistently in diverse variations.

Regardless of the size — Gutmann’s smallest artwork is a three-part die with an edge length of one centimeter, the largest sculpture reaches a height of nearly twenty-five meters — all his works take on a silent monumentality that originates above all from the intensive confrontation with the specific material. The well-balanced proportions of many works permit a scaling up that is limited merely by the specific technical or economic possibilities. All his monumental sculptures have their origin in authentic works of small or medium format. Large-size planned sculptures drawn directly on the board are not found in Willi Gutmann’s work.

Constantin Brâncuși once said about his own work: “Your hand thinks and follows the thoughts of the material,”⁸ which also applies to the work of Willi Gutmann, who found a deep philosophical sense in the changeability of his works, as well as in the participation of the viewer. On the occasion of a

⁵ Tell 73, p. 89

⁶ Bossart to Gutmann 1968

⁷ Billeter 1968

retrospective exhibition in honor of his seventieth birthday at Galerie Comercio in Zurich in 1997, he said in a conversation, contemplating the past: “One finds subjects of my life path in my work. Mobility, participation, change, and a sense of the beauty of the materials, aluminum, steel, stainless steel, non-ferrous metals, and wood. The positives and the negatives appear symbolically in the disjointed fundamental forms, such as cubes, cylinders, and spheres: symbols of becoming and dying, animus and anima.”⁹

PROJECTS AND EXHIBITIONS IN NORTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA

A highly productive phase began for Willi Gutmann after his successful first solo exhibition. Apart from his sculptural creations, he developed an active exhibition and travel activity. In 1966, his brother Walter, who had been employed by the Suchard company, moved to Mexico with his family where he became independent. He supported his brother by establishing important relationships, searching for exhibition possibilities and helped him arrange the transportation logistics between Switzerland, Mexico, and the US. While still working for Suchard, Walter introduced his brother to the Argentinian businessman and art lover Víctor Bossart, who travelled regularly to Switzerland on business. Bossart immediately showed lively interest in Gutmann’s work and was firmly committed during the following years to its promotion overseas. In 1967, he invited the artist on a tour in the US, whereon important contacts were made.

Atlanta

Willi Gutmann met the architect John C. Portman Jr. in Atlanta / Georgia. Around that time, Portman was well known for his innovative town planning projects and had become the pioneer of a movement for the revival and redefinition of downtown areas in large metropolises in the US. He spoke up to make man and his needs the focus of urban planning. All important areas (office buildings, shops, restaurants, hotels, multi-storey car parks etc.) should be accessible by foot. Tall edifying spaces with water surfaces and bridges, green areas, and works of art should generate a pleasant urban atmosphere. Through these large-scale projects, John Portman was involved not only as an architect, but also increasingly as a real estate developer attaining the required free space for the fulfillment of his ideas. The magazine *Business Week* dedicated the cover story of the issue of February 17, 1973 to the architect titled “Portman: A new force for rebuilding the cities” and cited in it Walter F. Wagner Jr., the publisher of the world renowned magazine *Architectural Record*: “John Portman is having more impact on the city than any other architect in the country.”¹⁰

Starting in 1965, John Portman worked on the development of the Peachtree Center in his hometown Atlanta. He personally selected the sculptures for the

⁸ Quoted in: Read 1985/1964, p. 192

⁹ Quoted in: Kraft 1997

center and placed them with an acute sense of their effect in relation to the surrounding architectural space, as well as to the individual viewer. He preferred pieces of art “that encourage personal involvement; i.e., those that revolve, contain parts that can be manipulated or have a surface that encourages one to touch”.¹¹ It seems that Willi Gutmann’s art perfectly corresponded with this picture, because the architect acquired three monumental sculptures that were placed in the Peachtree Center complex in 1968. John Portman later wrote: “I was fortunate to work personally with Willi on projects in Atlanta and San Francisco. I chose him to create pieces that would enhance the human experience of our architecture, and he never failed to cause enthusiasm. His spirit lives on in these wonderful works of art.”¹²

The Big One (Die Grosse – aus zwei Scheiben), 1967
(aluminum, H 10 m, ø 2 m, WG 67 – 300 M)
Peachtree Center, Atlanta

The Danish-inspired Midnight Sun is a restaurant located below the main level of the Peachtree Street Plaza between the Gas Light Tower and the South Tower. The emphasis of the spectacular design with its upward, tree-like expanding columns is an atrium that stretches to the plaza located across. The sculpture stands in the middle of a square in a water basin with a fountain. It is illuminated from below and, with its ten-meter height, is visible far beyond the plaza.

The Blue One (Die Blaue), 1967
(galvanized steel, sprayed enamel paint, H 468 cm,
ø 362 cm, WG 67 – 373 M)
Peachtree Center, Atlanta

In close proximity of *The Big One*, which stands in the middle of the promenade of the Peachtree Center, *The Blue One* fits in harmoniously with the neighboring artworks and the ambience of the lively shopping mile.

The Spiral (Die Spirale), 1967
(anodized aluminum, H 400 cm, WG 67 – 425 M)
Peachtree Center, Atlanta

The four-meter-high, multipart sculpture is positioned on the edge of a garden adjacent to the Atlanta Merchandise Mart located near the Peachtree Center Tower that was built in 1965. Some enthusiasts did not feel intimidated by the



Víctor Bossart and Willi Gutmann in front of
The Blue One, Lucerne 1967

¹⁰ Business Week 1973, p. 58

¹¹ Lee C. Hiers, quoted in: Robinette 1976, p. 130

¹² John Portman Jr. in an email to the author dated August 8, 2016

monumental size and followed the silent request to participate. The sculpture was mounted and arranged anew several times at night — entirely in keeping with the intention of the artist. As a result, the single elements had to be fixed for safety reasons.

Willi Gutmann's sculptures at the Peachtree Center were regarded in Atlanta as a cultural enrichment for the entire city. The installation of the two-ton-sculpture *The Big One* in June 1968 took place at the same time as an important one-man show of the artist at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, currently the leading art museum in the southeast of the US. This was Gutmann's second museum presentation in North and Central America after his exhibition at the Galería Universitaria Aristos in Mexico City in February of the same year. For Gutmann, the presentation opened the doors for other exhibitions at important art museums in the US.

San Francisco

While John Portman had already acquired three existing sculptures by Willi Gutmann for the Peachtree Center, he commissioned a further monumental sculpture for another large-scale project. Portman designed the One Embarcadero Center, a forty-five-story office building that was inaugurated in 1971 for the financial district in San Francisco in the vicinity of the harbor. He also participated in this project as a developer, together with the Texan real estate developers Trammell Crow and David Rockefeller, the president of the Chase Manhattan Corporation at that time, and had therefore significant freedom of choice about the size and location of the sculpture.

In 1969, Willi Gutmann developed a model that would become the basis of the project. He finally succeeded in releasing parts that could easily be reinserted into a stick — that is to say a column — after experimenting with increasingly advanced saw cuts and by means of complicated rotations on a stick of aluminum with the belt saw while carrying out completely new, spherical cuts. Once disassembled and placed side by side, an interesting sculptural group emerged from three parts, each one bearing a different character and with attractive forms. The principle of *Two Columns with Wedge* had been born. Since the artist had carried out the cuts absolutely intuitively, partially under an extreme load on the saw blade, it was difficult for him to reproduce the sculpture afterwards. He used mirrors that he fixed to the belt saw to be able to control the cutting process better. For demonstration purposes, he produced several multiples in different dimensions and with various materials, which he always took along when travelling in the US.

Two Columns with Wedge, 1969 / 71

(stainless steel, H 24,5 / 13,5 / 2,2 m, WG 69/71 – 600 M)

One Embarcadero Center, San Francisco

John Portman also placed this sculpture in a water basin of an open inner courtyard, from where it rises up eight floors and enhances the effect of the slender architectural scenery similar to *The Big One* in Atlanta. Robert Yick Company, a manufacturer of professional stainless steel equipment for restaurants and kitchens located in San Francisco, was in charge of the construction of the three-part monumental sculpture. A wooden model was provided by the artist on a 1:11 scale as the basis for the enlargement of the original format. High-grade steel plates were formed around a steel structure, welded together and grinded, resembling three bodies cut out from one piece. Due to its placement in an earthquake-threatened area, additional static demands caused technical problems that delayed the production process. Nevertheless, after four years of development, the inauguration of the sculpture took place on schedule and found an immediate positive response. The columns stimulated the imagination of the audience, reminding them of gigantic flutes. *David and Goliath* gradually asserted itself as the final title.

On the occasion of an additional exhibition in the lobby of One Embarcadero Center in June 1972, Willi Gutmann was introduced to Haig Khachatoorian, a designer with whom he would have a long-standing friendship. Khachatoorian, who at that time worked as an Associate Professor for Architecture at the College of Architecture & Planning of the Ball State University in Muncie / Indiana, organized a large exhibition with works by Willi Gutmann for the university art gallery in 1976. The exhibition was set up by William Storey, the manager of the gallery, in collaboration with the artist. When Haig Khachatoorian later became Associate Professor for Industrial Design at the College of the Arts of Ohio State University in Columbus / Ohio, he participated in the organization of an exhibition at the university's Sullivan Hall Gallery in 1981. He conducted an extensive interview with Willi Gutmann for the *Ohio Arts Journal* related to the exhibiton.¹³



Two Columns with Wedge, 1969 / 71
(stainless steel, H 24,5 / 13,5 / 2,2 m,
WG 69/71 – 600 M)
San Francisco, One Embarcadero Center

Mexico City

Walter Gutmann was able to establish important contacts for his brother in Mexico. Soon after he moved to Mexico City, he became acquainted with the internationally active sculptor and installation artist Helen Escobedo, who played an important role in the cultural life of Mexico. For many years, she held various important posts: Among others, she served as director of the Museo de Arte Moderno in Mexico City, was in charge of the university museum, and

¹³ Khachatoorian 1981

also organized international exhibitions. Walter Gutmann introduced her to the work of his brother, thus laying the foundation for Willi Gutmann's first important museum exhibition, which was inaugurated in February 1968 at the Galería Universitaria Aristos in Mexico City under the leadership of Helen Escobedo.

Another important endeavor for Willi Gutmann developed from the acquaintance with Helen Escobedo. In 1966, preparations began for the XIX Summer Olympics, which took place in Mexico in October 1968. The well-known Mexican architect Pedro Ramírez Vázquez was the President of the Organizing Committee, and Escobedo drew his attention to the artwork of Willi Gutmann. As part of the Cultural Olympic Games,¹⁴ an International Sculptors' Meeting had been planned, to which eighteen sculptors from sixteen countries were invited. The objective was the artistic embellishment of the Periférico Sur, a three-lane ring motorway connecting several sports venues and the Olympic Village, which resulted in the Ruta de la Amistad (Route of Friendship), to this day one of the longest sculpture routes in the world which measures seventeen kilometers and exhibits a total of nineteen monumental sculptures. Mathias Goeritz, a German-Mexican architect, painter, sculptor, and art writer, was the artistic leader of the project.

Willi Gutmann was invited as the only sculptor from the German speaking countries. The Austrian Bauhaus artist Herbert Bayer had also been invited to participate, but he had been living in the US since 1937. The artists were asked to send models of the monumental sculptures to be erected at heights between six and eighteen meters. A jury under the chairmanship of Pedro Ramírez Vázquez and Mathias Goeritz made the final selection of the models. The International Sculptors' Meeting took place in June 1968, in which questions regarding the technical implementation and location of the sculptures were also discussed. The work by Willi Gutmann was the second station along the sculpture route after *La herradura*, the artwork of the Mexican sculptor Ángela Gurría.

The Anchor / El ancla, 1968
(armature with concrete, ø approx. 8 m)
Ruta de la Amistad, Mexico City

From the models delivered by Gutmann, the jury selected his *Ankerscheibe* (*Anchor Disc*). The sculpture would be built by means of concrete casting with a fifteen-meter diameter and a width of three meters. It would have been twenty meters long if it had it been laid out and rearranged. However, while it was being created, the artist had to discover in situ that it was by far quite different from the original plans. The diameter had been reduced. The sculpture was not casted, but a steel mounting was formed, on which shotcrete would be applied. In a letter from Mexico City dated July 15, 1968, he wrote to Victor Bossart: "[...] basic construction made out of an iron-wire framework, shotcrete,

¹⁴ Olimpiada 1968

an absolute dummy. At the beginning, this annoyed me so much that I was almost ready to leave. While putting up the first ring, I noticed immediately that the iron armature had been built wrong, because the final dimensions and the concrete application had been included.”¹⁵ Once the concrete had been applied, the surface of the sculpture was scraped manually. The typical surface character of casted concrete as desired by Gutmann was not achieved. The large sculpture deviated from the original model in several essential points due to the way it had been constructed. Nevertheless, thanks to the characteristic perseverance of Willi Gutmann, the technical mistakes were substantially eliminated. Furthermore, a last minute decision of the Organizing Committee was to give color to all works on the Ruta de la Amistad. Gutmann’s sculpture was impregnated with blue color.

Nonetheless, an impressive work arose, and its fundamental statement still remains: “Symbolically [...] one can envision this disc segment, which has a negative cut-out in the form of an anchor that stands outwardly as a version of the male-female principle, but above all as an abstraction of the cosmos that has found a firm ground in the anchor.”¹⁶ In the meantime the Periferico Sur had to be widened due to the ever-increasing amount of traffic; as a result, in 2012, the sculpture was removed from its original location, renovated, and relocated to another site. Today, it stands visibly at the intersection of Periférico Sur and Insurgentes Sur, two important arterial roads in Mexico City.

After the exhibition at the Galería Universitaria Aristos and the installation of his sculpture in the Ruta de la Amistad, Willi Gutmann attracted the attention of the Mexican art world, which did not remain concealed from collectors and art dealers. In October 1969, the gallery owner Merl de Kuper arranged an individual exhibition at her Galería Mer-Kup in Mexico City. From then on, a successful collaboration developed throughout many years, in which Walter Gutmann played a determining role. When Merl de Kuper celebrated the tenth anniversary of her gallery in December 1971 and mounted a group exhibition, Willi Gutmann was among the twenty-eight artists whose works were presented, and his sculptures constituted an important part of the artistic program. The gallery owner made an outstanding contribution to the promotion of Gutmann’s work in Mexico. Today, many of his works can be found in private collections and public museums, such as the Museo de Arte Moderno in Mexico City, designed by Rafael Mijares Alcerreca and Pedro Ramirez Vazquez, which dedicated a large solo exhibition to Willi Gutmann in 1976.



The Anchor / El ancla, 1968
(armature with concrete, ø approx. 8 m)
Ruta de la Amistad, Mexico City

¹⁵ Gutmann to Bossart 1968

¹⁶ Billeter 1968

Richmond

Willi Gutmann received another major contract from the American tobacco group Philip Morris, which was building a new research center in Richmond / Virginia, designed by the German-American architect Ulrich Franzen. George Weissman, the president of the company at that time, was very much interested in art and culture. From the middle of the 1960s on and under his leadership, Philip Morris increasingly emerged as a patron of the arts. He once said to *The New York Times*: “We wanted to demonstrate to our own employees that we were an open-minded company seeking creativity in all aspects of our business.”¹⁷

Willi Gutmann met George Weissman for the first time in New York, presumably in 1967 (or in 1968 at the latest). The encounter led to a sincere acquaintanceship. Weissman even acquired a sculpture by Willi Gutmann later on, *Rundscheibe – Verdichtung zum Quadrat* (*Round Disc – Reduction to a Square*, ill. p. 26) for the garden of his house in Rye / New York, which he renamed *Window on the World* and, in an interview in 1986, called his “favorite work.”¹⁸

Weissman visited Willi Gutmann together with his wife Mildred at his home and studio in Oberhasli on July 26, 1969. During their visit, they also discussed the sculpture planned for Philip Morris, Inc. In a letter to Weissman dated August 9,¹⁹ the artist presented several sketches of ideas and model examples.

Willi Gutmann had never dealt before in such an intensive way with any of his major contracts. He circled the subject in numerous sketches to give a form to the sculpture that would correspond perfectly to the planned location and in which the enterprise could rediscover itself. He developed a combination of the letters PM in different variations based on the company's logo. A solution soon took shape in which a form that alluded to the stylized red M on the packages of the cigarette brand Marlboro became prevalent. The artist developed the P out of a circular form cut by a perpendicular (ill. p. 44).

The resulting forms of a square, triangle, circle, and line were embedded in a modular system of cubes and discs with circular segments respectively. In its finished form, the sculpture consists of two cubes, each of which have a square and rectangular front and towards one side show open cuttings within a circle into which the bodies of the letters P and M can be inserted. The perpendicular P connects both cubes. All four elements can be combined in different manners.

Once Philip Morris, Inc. selected this form, the sculpture was first transported to a company in Rümlang, near Gutmann's place of residence, where



Willi Gutmann and George Weissman at the headquarters of Philip Morris, Inc. in New York, ca. 1970

¹⁷ Quoted in: Martin 2009

¹⁸ Woller 1986

¹⁹ Gutmann to Weissman 1969

it was constructed and afterwards to Richmond in the spring of 1972. The sculpture was exhibited from June 2 until July 7 at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, together with other works by the artist, before it was installed in the newly built research center of Philip Morris, Inc. In the exhibition catalogue, the architect Ulrich Franzen praised the sculpture: “Its contemporary metal construction and modular concept reflect the forward looking work of the research scientist.”²⁰ James M. Brown, the director of the museum at that time, wrote: “Philip Morris is to be congratulated for this great acquisition which symbolizes their concern for the quality of our aesthetic and humanistic environment.”²¹

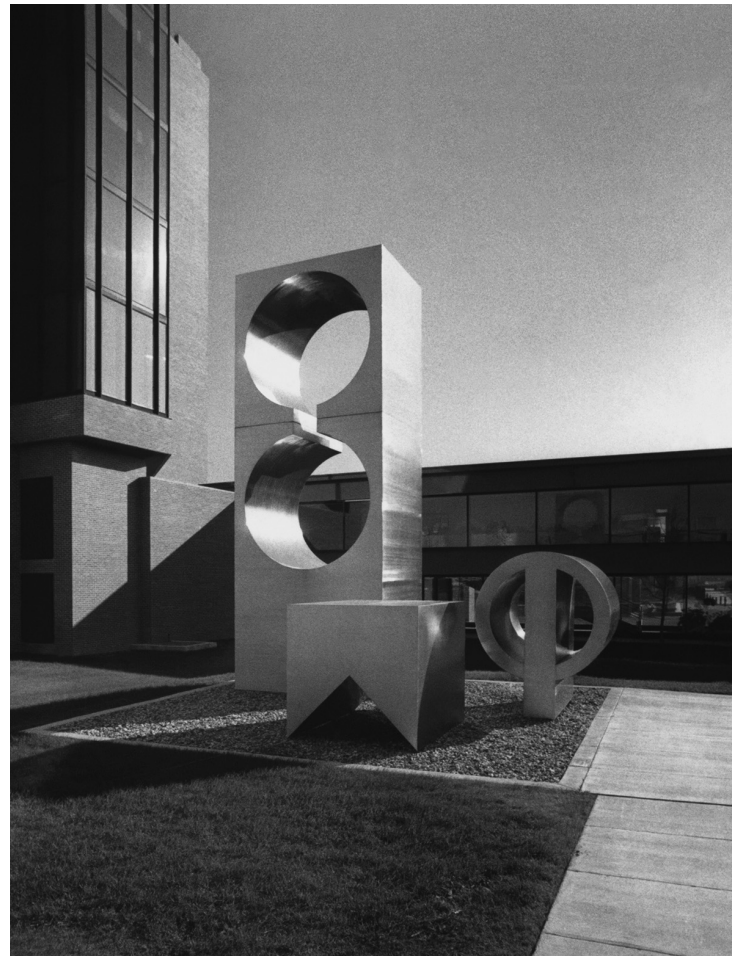
In a letter dated February 5, 1990, George Weissman — who, in the meantime, had stepped down from his role as president of the company and now, among other things, managed the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York on a voluntary basis — informed Willi Gutmann that the sculpture on the lawn at the main entrance of the factory in Richmond had been changed and combined anew: “The new location is more prominent where it comes well across”.²² An enclosed photograph depicts the sculpture in its new location.

Public Attention

Willi Gutmann’s large-scale projects in the US and Mexico, as well as the numerous exhibitions in famous museums and institutions, attracted the attention of the art scene and strengthened his reputation as an internationally renowned artist. From 1968 until the 1980s, he developed lively exhibiting activities, especially in the US and Mexico, which brought him in some cases ardent remarks in exhibition catalogues and the media. Appreciated were notably the element of the viewer’s participation, as well as the aesthetic charm and the perfect implementation of his works. His last large exhibition took place in 2003 in Solana Beach / California. These positive experiences stimulated Willi Gutmann to keep creating new interesting projects — from small-scale multiples to monumental visions.

MULTIPLES

Willi Gutmann could effortlessly move within different dimensions while working. The majority of the medium and large-scale works are based on smaller formats, sometimes even on miniatures. It is part of Gutmann’s distinctive trait that his design concepts can be applied across all sizes and scales. Good



Symbol, 1969 / 72
(stainless steel, 700 x 260 x 190 cm)

The sculpture at the Research Center of Philip Morris, Inc. in Richmond / Virginia where it was placed from 1972 to 1990 before it was installed in another prominent location.

²⁰ Richmond 1972

²¹ Ibid.

²² Weissman to Gutmann 1990

examples are the models and multiples that he produced for his large-scale projects in San Francisco and Richmond. In photographs, they appear as monumental as their large-scale counterparts. The idea of the artist to engage the viewer in the respective result of a work of art through his playful interaction complies more with the small works than the larger ones. Even though the changeability of the monumental sculptures is factual, it is difficult to be accomplished or cannot be fulfilled at all. Even Gutmann's largest work, *Two Columns with Wedge*, could theoretically be assembled again into a column. In this case, the viewer must carry out this "play" mentally.

Willi Gutmann always worked simultaneously on several works that he also partially modified easily. This working method suggested the creation of objects in editions. The first series originated already in 1966, a five-part figure made of brass that snaps together and can be assembled in different ways. Four parts are sawed from a thin rectangular plate. A small circular plate

with two incisions serves as a connector. The multiple is based on the zinc sculpture *Steckfigur mit zwei Halbkreisformen* (*Interlocking Figure with Two Semi-Circular Forms*), 1966 (WG 66 – 250 M, ill. p. 97). It was crafted afterwards using different materials and in various sizes and exhibited at Artmongers & Manufactory, Inc., New York in 1969 under the title *Cross-Plates with Circles* in a version made of aluminum. The impressive minimalism of the sculpture makes it possible to be disassembled and sent in a flat parcel. When assembled, the spatial construct has a downright dead-like character.

Gutmann's multiples represent his main groups of works: snap-together figures and blocks, rotational and swiveling figures, pivotable discs made out of rings or circular segments and frame figures made of segments of a circle, S-shaped interconnected objects (*Zwillingsfamilie* / *Twin Family*), blocks and discs with eccentric circular forms (*Tonschlüssel* / *Key in Tune*) and *Vibrationsscheiben* (*Vibration Discs*), laminated swiveling bodies (*Meditationsobjekte* / *Meditation Objects*), spirals made out of circular segments, and others.

In his registry book, the artist makes a distinction between series (multiples in limited or unlimited editions), variations of unique works, and variations of multiples that once again change into unique pieces when worked on individually. Most multiples were produced by Willi Gutmann himself, often using the belt saw, later with specially fabricated tools. These are in some cases relatively complicated kinetic objects that differ from unique works neither in their production nor in their impression. Some prototypes of editioned objects belong to the most splendid works of his oeuvre. Beyond the participation of the viewer, for the artist it was also about the aesthetic formation of the viewer by means of his varied works: "The viewer is inevitably drawn by



Willi Gutmanns first multiple: *Steckfigur* (*Interlocking Figure*), 1966 (brass, 12,8 x 6 x 6 cm, WG 66 – S 1)

the mobility, and — through the manipulation — he or she starts to deal with the three-dimensional trait.”²³ Some multiples that Willi Gutmann crafted in large editions for international organizations and companies were distributed in more than seventy countries, which brought him contentment in terms of education.

Zwillingsfamilie (Twin Family)

As early as 1966, Willi Gutmann had developed the principle of a circular disc composed of two identical parts created from two smaller circles that touch each other in the middle axis of a circle. This gave origin to an S-form which is reminiscent of the Chinese philosophical Yin-Yang symbol. He called these and all other works based on the same principle the S-disc. Moreover, the first “S-disc” was made up of four interconnected discs. The artist developed a sphere as the first multiple based on the fundament of the S-disc in 1969. What followed was a whole work group which he named *Zwillingsfamilie (Twin Family)* and whose development he described in 1973 as follows:

“The ‘mother piece,’ a suspended S-disc, a four-part brass sculpture with two S-discs of different thicknesses, was created in 1966 and was entitled *2 x 2 verhängt in Schleife [2 x 2 Interconnected in a Loop]*. The first two small series made out of aluminum, also composed of four parts, were developed in 1968. These precursors were all sawn-out. I decided to order the first mould in 1969, especially since a full disc could be crafted from one piece and was therefore more economical. This was the time when the concept of the ‘Twins’ came into being: A unity out of two identical parts. Another advantage was the fact that, through the constant production of the aluminum profiles, it was possible to produce a so-called family-sculpture-creation, whereby individual types may be combined optionally with one another. [...] Whilst producing the different twins of the types that were available, the so-called variation sculptures were formed, i.e. through a single cut, the multiple becomes a unique piece.”²⁴

The following multiples were created up to 1973: *S-Scheibe (S-Disc)*, 1969 (WG 69 – S 25), *Zwillingskugel (Twin Sphere)*, 1969 (WG 69 – S 27, ill. p. 114), *Oval Twin (Long Twin)*, 1971 (WG 71 – S 34, ill. p. 114), *Doppelte Zwillingskugel (Siamese Twin)*, 1971 (WG 71 – S 35, ill. p. 114), *3 Zwillingssscheiben konkav, konvex, konkav-konvex (3 Twin Discs Concave, Convex, Concave-Convex)*, 1971 (WG 71 – S 36), *Zwillings-Halbkugel (Twin Semi-Sphere)*, 1971 (WG 71 – S 46), *Zwillings-Halboval (Twin Semi-Oval)*, 1971 (WG 71 – S 47), *Zwillings-Tropfen (Twin Drop)*, 1971 (WG 71 – S 50),



2 x 2 verhängt in Schleife (2 x 2 Interconnected in a Loop), 1966 (brass, wood, WG 66 – 244 MH, whereabouts unknown)

²³ Gutmann 1967

²⁴ Spiegel-Bern 1973, p. 98

Zwillingshanteln (Twin Dumbbells), 1973 (WG 73 – S 72), and *Drillingskugeln* (Triplet Spheres), 1973 (WG 73 – S 73). Willi Gutmann varied discs and spheres with additional labyrinth or spiral-shaped cuts in some small-sized series. In 1971, he produced two samples of twin spheres made of chrome steel with a diameter of sixty centimeters (WG 71 – 616 M1 and M2, see cover page).

Tonschlüssel (Key in Tune) and *Vibrationsscheiben* (Vibration Discs)

When, in 1975, Willi Gutmann discovered the sound qualities of some of his aluminum sculptures together with his son Pit, a whole series of sound objects originated, on which the percussionist Pit Gutmann plays to this day in con-

certs (p. 158 ff.), including *Glocken in Vierkant* (Bells in a Rectangular Block), 1975 (WG 75 – 790 M), *Fisch und Vogel* (Fish and Bird), 1967 (WG 67 – 416 M1), *Vibrationsscheibe* (Vibration Disc), 1975 (WG 75 – S 75), and *Tonschlüssel* (Key in Tune).

Willi Gutmann developed the process of subdividing blocks or discs either intuitively or according to geometrical rules. In particular, he often subdivided circular discs into other discs, rings, or segments of a circle with decreasing diameter — namely either concentrically (from a mutual center point or heading towards it respectively) or eccentrically (with central points that move along a line of circle segments, see ill. p. 53 — the boreholes in the center mark the central point of the individual circle). Both principles can be observed in Gutmann's work since 1965 / 66. This kind of the segmentation and enlargement of volume is not new. Alexander Rodchenko already dealt with this issue in Moscow around 1920. He cut plywood panels and reassembled the individual segments with wire to create three-dimensional objects.²⁵ However, the intervention of the viewer in these constructions was not planned. It cannot be proved whether Willi Gutmann

was acquainted with Rodtschenko's works from that time or not. Around 1973, he developed the groups *Tonschlüssel* (Key in Tune) and *Vibrationsscheiben* (Vibration Discs) based on his early eccentric blocks.

Keys in Tune are blocks from which eccentric elements are cut out, whereby each one has a different sound (ill. p.116 ff.). The keyhole form of the object inspired the artist to define the title; with regard to the sound qualities, he wrote in 1987: "The tune is determined by the shape. Just as the design is harmonious and diminishes proportionately in size, so the sound descends a scale. In order to create a sound, the piece should be held by two fingers in the neutral zone in the center."²⁶ Sometimes I hang the main piece on my forefinger, hit it, and walk around in my studio: After the tone



Left: *Tonschlüssel in Block mit Klang* (Key in Tune in Block with Sound), 1975 (aluminum, 23.5 x 11.5 x 6 cm, WG 75 – 789 M)

Right: *Tonschlüssel* (Key in Tune), 1987 (multiple, aluminum, 13 x 10.5 x 5 cm, WG C 2 – A 1055)

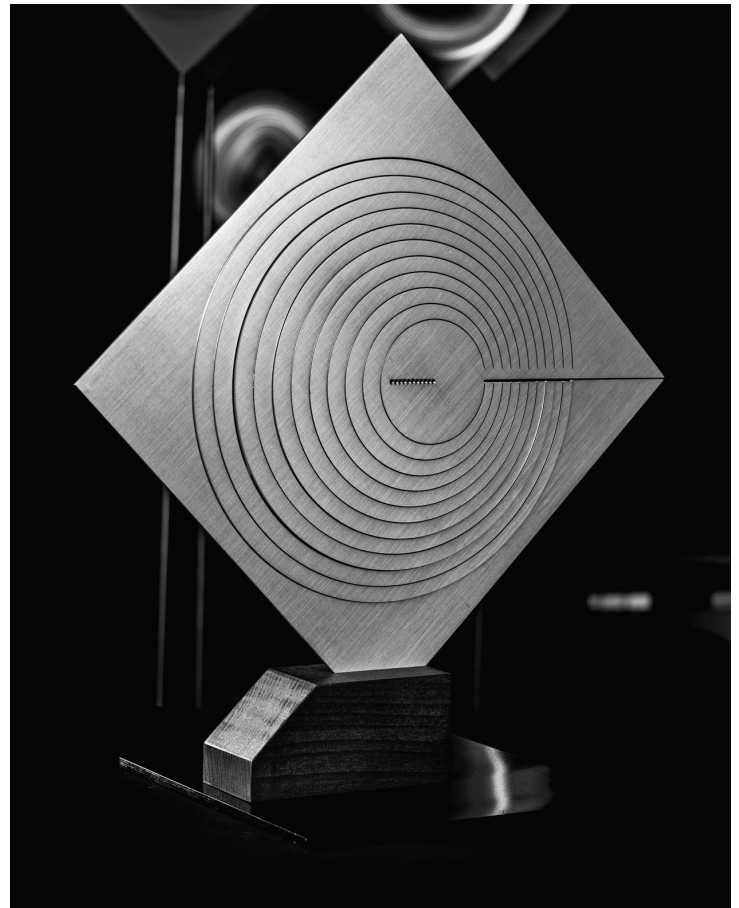
has faded, the room is filled with a fairy-tale sound. It's astounding how long it continues!"²⁷

Vibration Discs are square plates or discs (mostly aluminum, but also in silver) into which a geometrical pattern of a circle is sawed. When contemplating a *Key in Tune* which is not taken apart (ill. p. 117), the formal relationship becomes evident. The *Vibration Discs* appear to be a special case in Willi Gutmann's work, because their kinetic qualities are not disclosed at first sight. There are no variable parts. The movement begins by striking individual segments with a drumstick which then start to vibrate — and in the case of the larger discs (40 x 40 cm) to subtly resound. The visual effect, the soft play of the light modulated by the vibrations, places these works closer to kinetic Op Art. The fact that the *Vibration Discs* are suited as music instruments by way of their astonishing sound qualities makes them especially precious. Their geometry is reminiscent of *Proun 93* (ca. 1923) by the Russian constructivist El Lissitzky and may have possibly been inspired by it.²⁸ It is, however, far more condensed and elegant than El Lissitzky's arrangement. In terms of the minimalistic creation, their conceptual profoundness, and the rigorous technical conversion, Willi Gutmann's *Vibration Discs* could be characterized as his most radical works.

Meditationsobjekte (Meditation Objects)

Finely cutting plates made of aluminum sheets to craft variable sculptures was a logical step for Willi Gutmann. He piled them on top of one another in blocks and set his work forth by cutting them vertically according to different principles. He first cut the blocks into two identical halves along an S-shaped line. The artist locked them on top and below by means of several unsawn plates that were glued together to flat blocks. Once the whole was fit together, he drilled two vertical canals into which he inserted the axis that allowed the movement of each individual plate. Consequently, the viewer is given countless possibilities to participate and play with the changeability of the object (ills pp. 54 ff., 124 ff.). The simple geometrical basic body, its fine lamination, and the virtually meditative concentration state to which the changeability of these objects can place the viewer / user immediately suggest the title *Meditationsblock (Meditation Block)*.

Willi Gutmann produced the first series of *Meditation Blocks* in 1969 in an edition of nine (aluminum, H 11 cm, WG 69 – S 22). In 1971/72, several series were produced in which the artist cut the stratified blocks according to different principles in order to extend and refine the possibilities of participation. Soon the cubic blocks were complemented with spheres, double spheres, ovals,



Vibration 25 über Eck auf schwarzem Sockel
(*Vibration 25 at an Angle on a Black Base*), 1975
(multiple, aluminum, 25 x 25 cm, WG 75 – S 74)

²⁶ Also known as "dead spot."

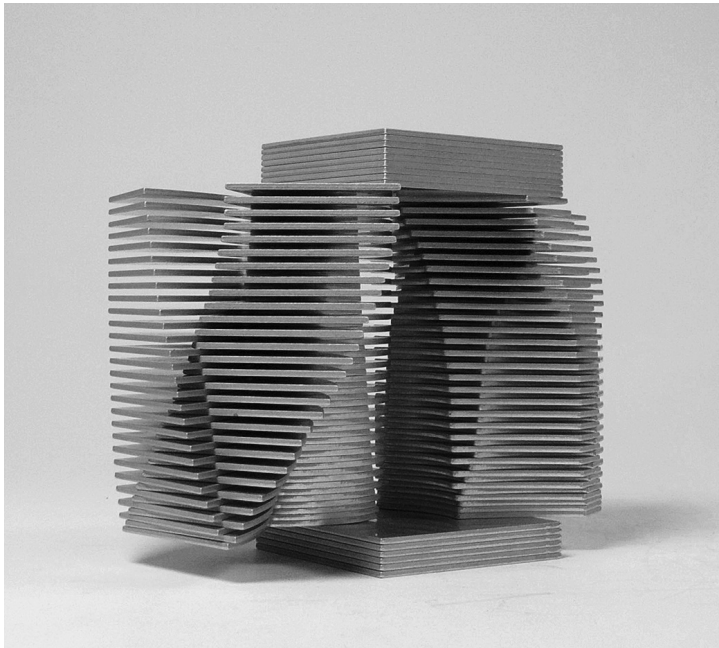
²⁷ Gutmann 1987

²⁸ Lissitzky-Küppers 1967, pl. 33 (illustrated here turned counterclockwise by 90 degrees)

and cylinders. Additionally, he developed *Meditation Objects* with more than two axes and several with various rotation levels. The material he used beside aluminum was brass (in isolated cases also gold-plated). The *Meditation Objects*

could measure up to thirty centimeters with a diameter of up to forty centimeters. With these measurements, however, the technical limits had almost been reached, because the weight of the stacked discs impeded the rotational capacity in the lower areas. Some of the large *Meditation Spheres* were restored and crafted smoothly with today's means in preparation for the large retrospective in 2016.

Time and again, the range of possibilities when displacing these *Meditation Objects* surprises in new ways. The individual "stacks" of a block can be twisted as an entire unit. Through the relatively easy manipulation, astonishing, extensive results can be reached. When dividing the "stacks," alternating the displacement of the individual plates into transparent bodies interlocked with each other and shifted against each other, suddenly the impression of a complicated, almost dance-like movement emerges (ill. pp. 124 ff.). The imagination is limited merely by technical possibilities. These objects account in a peculiar way for Willi Gutmann's striving for the aesthetic formation of the viewer



Meditation / Bühne (Meditation / stage), 1971
(multiple, aluminum, 14.3 x 7.5 x 7.5 cm,
WG 71 – S 41 – V)

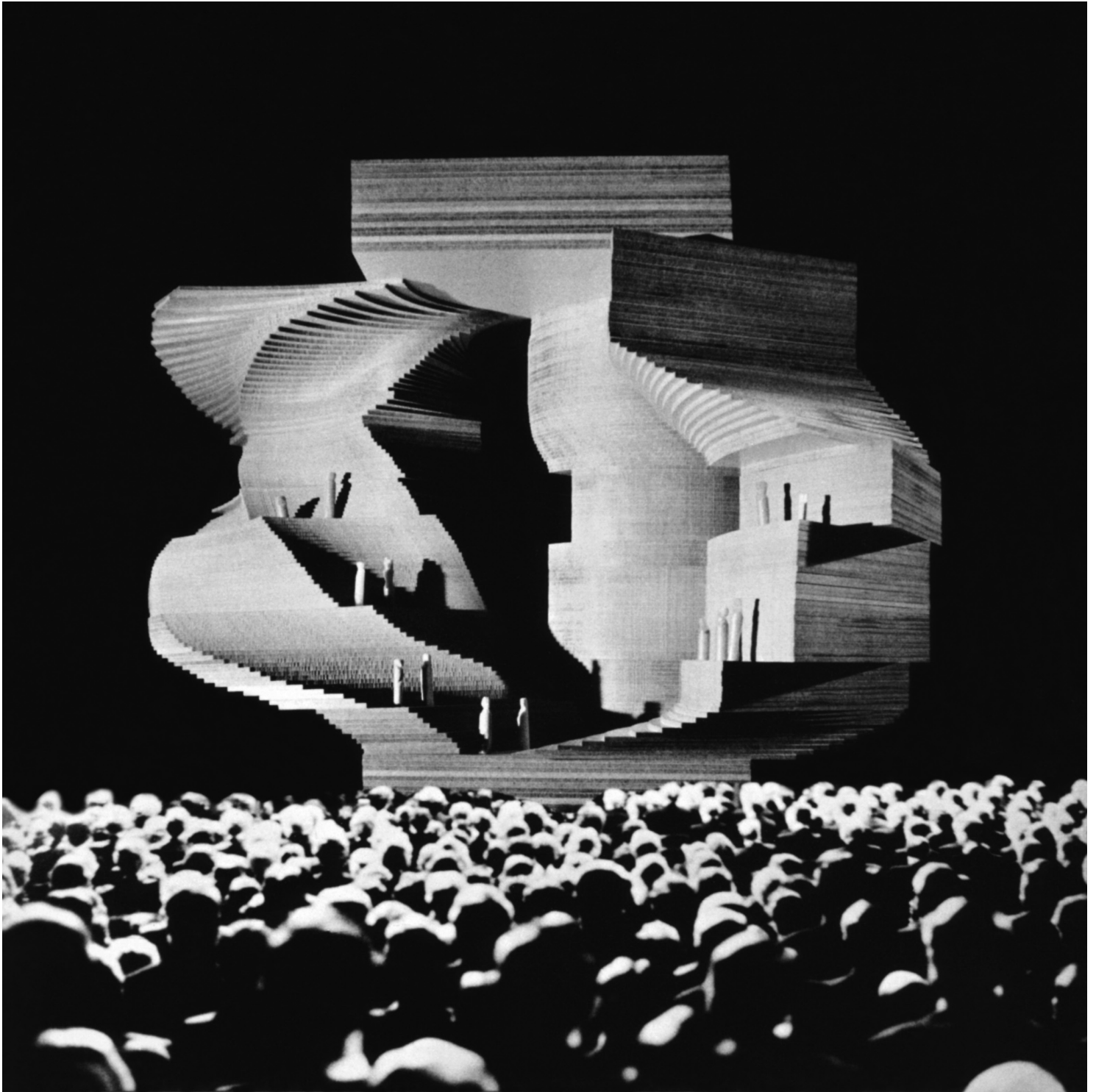
MONUMENTAL VISIONS

Willi Gutmann was also fascinated by the *Meditation Objects* and always found new variations, which he recorded in numerous photographs. The upright standing cubes in the closed state are reminiscent of architectural creations which inspired qualified interior designers to develop the idea of a monumental stage with movable levels. As of 1971, the notation "stage" appears occasionally in the titles of these objects.

His experience with the work on the large-scale projects in the US might have reinforced the artist to think in vast dimensions and to impose on himself no restrictions other than those of technical feasibility. He thus developed the project of a stage with movable, individually driven levels, which he called *Spheric Visions of Moveable Stage Levels*, in which the stage itself could become the actor, opening up completely new possibilities for performing arts: "Almost unlimited possibilities open up for plays — operas — movable sculptures in itself — combined with music, light and color projections, 'living theater' — the audience gives the impulses."²⁹

Willi Gutmann consulted an engineer and a computer expert to prepare the technical implementation. A draft was available after a long development

²⁹ Johnson City 1974



Spheric Visions of Moveable Stage Levels, ca. 1971/72 (concept, design study of a stage with moveable levels)

period. However, the expectations of the artist could not be fulfilled. Certain technical and financial limits could simply not be overcome: “It came out over 22 meters high, but only half of the size I really would like. It would cost 100 million Swiss Francs with the computer program.”³⁰

Through the idea of a movable stage with various levels, Willi Gutmann — at least in conceptual terms — had offered a solution for a problem that the Russian artist Vladimir Tatlin had already formulated in 1935: “The main difficulty consists in the fact that the artist is also anxious to create a stable stage set [...] as dynamical and flexible as possible, to present the action on stage on many levels and to provide mobility to the decoration that comes close to the ‘sequence’ of a cinematographic film strip.”³¹ To the present day, Gutmann’s stage conception has not lost any of its freshness. A similar project with such dimensions has yet to be executed.

NEW IMPULSES WITH WOOD



Doppelfächer auf Metallfuss (Double Fan on Metal Base), ca. 1990
(wood, steel, 36 x 40 x 20 cm)

Once aluminum became the preferred material for Willi Gutmann towards the end of the 1960s, he sporadically produced wooden works. Nevertheless, larger work groups were not created. Rather, he processed found material that interested him, such as the wood of a millennial moor oak or a piece of weather-worn fir with a magnificent structure. These are unique pieces in which the use of forms in his early woodwork often took shape again. This changed in 1989. Suzanne Monard, Willi Gutmann’s partner, had a small farmhouse with a garden in Toggenburg (a region in the canton of St. Gallen), which they both visited on a regular basis. It was there where he felt a longing for a new work group, of which the first examples were to be exhibited in his barn-studio already at the end of the year.

On the invitation to the exhibition he wrote: “It began during the early summer in the garden in Toggenburg with a young ash which had become too overgrown. The triple forked branch of the tree’s crown inspired me — sawed off and turned on its head to be used inversely as a foot, laminated the tree stem like a fan, thus producing a sym-

bolic figure ‘as on top as below’! The ‘mother’ of the work group was formed. The wood-cutting technique is the same — a creation that is as diverse as it is rich in variations: in line with the corresponding work piece — be it a tree top, stem, branch, or block board. When laminated, the perspective and insight are revealed, the matter becomes transparent!”³²

Through these works (ills. pp. 140–50), Willi Gutmann set forth his research about the fragmentation of forms or bodies by means of lamination and

³⁰ Khachatoorian 1981

³¹ Shadowa 1984, p. 401

³² Gutmann 1989

diversification and incorporated wood as a material in this process. In this case, his knowledge about materials allowed the artist to once again reach stunning results. When working with wood, the kinetic element that he had tried out on the early rotation objects, on the reduction discs of the late 1970s (ill. p. 137) and on the *Silhouettes* of the 1980s (ills. pp. 138 ff.) was discarded in favor of other conceptions. The point was to trace the internal regularities of the wood and thus to uncover certain forms of the wood, so to speak, and to make the material “transparent” as he defined it. It was Willi Gutmann’s nature to create finely segmented works and compact bodies at the same time, in which he simply exposed the wooden structure. If these bodies showed any splits, he simply welcomed the natural lamination as a part of the artwork (ill. p. 153).

THE LATER YEARS

In 1986, Willi Gutmann accompanied his son Pit to an event on the occasion of the “Cortona Week” organized by the ETH – Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich. This international, multidisciplinary conference on “The Natural Sciences and the Wholeness of Life” was founded in 1985 by the chemist Pier Luigi Luisi and took place every year near Cortona (Tuscany). Willi Gutmann was enthusiastic about it, since these subjects interested him anyway. For many years, he attended the conference together with his partner Suzanne Monard. Soon both even became engaged as workshop-leaders. Suzanne Monard taught the course subject “mask work” as she defined it and Willi Gutmann the study of materials in practical work and the fundamentals of creative work with wood, iron, and stone. The artist was appointed associate professor at the ETH and continued giving the workshop from 1997 to 2007 in the department of Material Sciences. For his eightieth birthday, the department awarded him the Studinger-Durrer Medal for his considerable merit and active teaching.

Shortly before his seventieth birthday in 1997, Willi Gutmann suffered a stroke. Despite physiotherapy treatment and disciplined training, he could not regain certain fine-motor skills. For the rest of his life, the filigree work on the belt saw remained impossible for him. Later on, he began to work with wood again. The artist who had once been immensely active turned more and more silent. Suzanne Monard remembered: “In his last years, Willi was very pensive and withdrawn, his personality became subtle. He certainly was more and more concerned with the issue regarding his artwork and the barn and their destiny. He often repeated the sentence: ‘I have simply worked too much...’ Willi Gutmann prospered spiritedly again during his last weeks and simply did not wake up again one morning. He left this material world peacefully and fulfilled and lives on in his works and in the spiritual world.”³³

³³ Monard 2013

SUMMARY

On February 21, 2013, a fulfilled artist's life came to an end. Willi Gutmann followed his own path with admirable consistency, creating an extensive and highly diversified oeuvre. In November 1965, he decided to earn his living as an independent sculptor. Two years thereafter, his monumental sculptures were displayed at exhibitions. Between 1965 and 1967 alone, he created more than 400 works which are recorded in his studio registry.

Besides sculptures, the artist also crafted painted works, creations on paper, and large-size embossed printings. The range of his oeuvre can hardly be grasped and can only be outlined briefly in this book (accompanied by more than a 100 illustrated works included here). Willi Gutmann never yielded to the fashions and temptations of the art market. He was loyal to his independence and developed an explicit individual style, in which the constructive and the organic combine in a harmonious way.

The game of contrasts — breaking up and assembling, positive and negative, animus and anima, becoming and fading away — was important for Willi Gutmann and is the essence of his art. "In my opinion, a work not supported by a philosophy barely contains a relevant statement," the artist expressed in 1972 in an interview with Sybille Herzfeld for the magazine *Schweizer Illustrierte*, which described the artist as a "lyric poet of the form."³⁴

The immense technical amount of work in Gutmann's sculptures is not noticeable. His mastery in craftsmanship allowed him to create complex works that not only stand up to the changing intervention of the viewer/user, but also make the interaction a joyous pleasure. Willi Gutmann created impeccable works of fascinating beauty. One of Goethe's thoughts contained in his *Maxims and Reflections* could not be more accurate for Gutmann's works: "Perfection is when the necessary has been achieved, beauty when the necessary has been achieved, yet remains hidden."³⁵

Axel Wendelberger

³⁴ Herzfeld 1972

³⁵ Goethe 2016, p. 128

THE BARN-STUDIO — A PLACE OF CREATIVE ENCOUNTERS

THE ORIGIN / THE SPACE

Willi Gutmann's barn-studio, not far away from the studio of my parents' house at Haslibergstrasse 12a in Oberhasli (canton of Zurich), had its beginning in 1975. The landowners Max and Margrit Furrer-Schibli had a double barn that they no longer used and thus my father, whose studio at home had long-since become too small, grasped and shook his neighbor's hand, agreeing on an unlimited rental contract in the old fashioned Swiss way. Shortly after having passed my university qualification exam, and anxious to carry out manual-technical activities, I was engaged as a laborer in its reconstruction and remodeling for approximately one and a half years.

The more or less windowless building was first installed with windows, which Willi had found shortly before being demolished. Then the wooden floors of the former hay store had to be strengthened by an additional layer of chipboard and finally covered with a robust grey carpet. The roof had to be insulated with soft Pavatex panels. Until this day, I do not like recalling the very itchy stone wool that had to be mounted in the summer heat directly under the barn roof. The relief came in the evening thanks to a soothing bath in the nearby Hasli-Lake. Unfortunately, the Pavatex panels proved not to be the optimal solution, since, over the years, numerous martens made holes in the cover and all kinds of "garbage" fell down into the studio.

The opening of the hay crane in the so-called "Brügi," a floor located above the threshing surface and elevated above the actual hayloft, was sealed with two cover boards which could be easily opened so that the crane could move different materials to the upper floor, even pianos and heavy sculptures. The winch of the crane was activated by means of a rope. However, this relatively imprecise steering mechanism had its pitfalls, since a short delay could not be avoided when lifting and lowering loads.

In the course of the years, this once proved life-threatening for me when an approximately 2.5-square-meter and three-centimeter thick aluminum plate, which we had not fastened properly, loosened itself due to a hitch half way upwards and struck me in the hip while falling down. In the end, we were fortunate, because there were no serious injuries to the persons involved — the plate, on the other hand, had some permanent bumps and scratches...

The barn on the floor-level, which led to the main workshop, was remodeled. All smaller and larger machines that were previously crowding the old studio at the house, which was much smaller, could now be installed in the

spacious barn-studio. The generous spaces made it possible to craft sculptures of completely different dimensions. In addition, there was a small provisional kitchen that became permanent, and a not entirely odor-free urinal built with a converted tin funnel, which was connected by means of a garden hose directly to the cesspit of the former cowshed. A part of the former stable was transformed into the entrance area with a staircase leading to the actual studio. The rest of the barn was transformed by Mr. Furrer into a garage for the tractor and other equipment.

The second, smaller part of the double barn was used in earlier times as a granary for wheat, rye, oats, and barley. A newly built staircase and a door opening in the small part connected it to the large part of the barn. Thanks to this change, it was possible to make a veritable tour through the whole build-

ing with visitors, starting in the workshop, then to the small barn-studio and finally through the door to the large studio area. This always constituted a small yet not entirely unintentional highlight of the visit to the barn-studio, but not the only aspect that left a fairly lasting impression on most visitors. Time and again, guests were fascinated by the ambience of the spaces, by the artworks of Willi and Suzanne and, last but not least, by the active encouragement of both of them to their own creative work.

The hayloft in the larger part of the barn had the largest floor area and the maximum height of the entire barn space, where I, as a child, romped in the hay with René, the farmer's son. Willi also benefited from the height of the space by adding a narrow gallery about two-thirds of

the height along the walls, which offered an additional exhibition area and also served as a spectators' platform, especially on festive occasions. Behind this main part of the building, there was a one-storey, open extension, hardly used by farmer Furrer, which Willi gradually occupied for the storage of all kinds of material, "different to its original purpose." Without hesitation, he built a door in that wall, so that it was easy to pass to this part of the barn without having to leave the building.

Last but not least, there was also a solution for my necessity of a space for my "percussive exercises." For this purpose, the lower part of an unused silo of about two and a half meters in diameter and height offered space for this activity. It was lined with sound-absorbing mattresses; a lockable lid was placed over it, and the nearby window was temporarily sealed by means of a foam-rubber mattress mounted on a rail. This rather unusual drum training room offers the stuff of which legends are made: "His career as a drummer began in a feed-silo..."



Suzanne Monard in the barn-studio,
December 1, 2013

STUDIO / OPERATING MANNER

In addition to the renovation of the studio, I also helped Willi with the preparations for the large exhibition in Mexico City, which was to be inaugurated at the Museo de Arte Moderno in the summer of 1976. A lot of work had to be done, in particular the completion of numerous sculptures that had been designed, but still had to be filed, abraded, plastered, and polished, then brought to get anodized and picked up again. For the transportation, we finally packed the artworks in crates suitable for sea transportation.

In that time of joint work, my father and I grew into a well-functioning team. I took a lot of the time we shared together for myself and for my own path. I had been exposed to this inspiring influence already in my early childhood, especially while being in nature, together discovering special stones, branch forms, alluvial woods and many other things. While growing up, I was also accompanied by a very peculiar “sound”: the sound of my father’s screeching band saw in the studio of our house when he crafted his sculptures – mostly at night, often with supplementary strong words of insulting character every time a saw blade was torn, which happened relatively frequently.

I was probably one of a few people who could work together with Willi for a long time without any misunderstandings or other disagreements. As with most artists, he had peculiar ways and manners and precise ideas, especially talking about the style of working. He worked very independently and many things were explicit for his spiritual eye. However, it was not easy for him to make this understandable to others and required a special mixture of imagination, empathy, and serenity from the other party...

The discussions about the development of prototypes, the creation of works, the possibilities of implementation, or technical questions were very enriching for both of us. Together, we discovered the surprising sound qualities of some of his sculptures. Today, as a professional drummer and percussionist, I always explore every imaginable object with regard to its sound and acoustic characteristics by striking it, etc. It was therefore quite logical that some objects such as *Glocken in Vierkant* (*Bells in Rectangular Block*) or *Fisch und Vogel* (*Fish and Bird*) were converted into percussion instruments and integrated into my existing arsenal of instruments.

Later on, the multiple known as *Tonschlüssel* (*Key in Tune*) was added to my collection. The *Vibrationsscheibe* (*Vibration Disc*) could certainly not be lacking — and a real Willi Gutmann set-up was complete. For the exhibition in



Pit Gutmann playing on sculptures by Willi Gutmann, 1976

Mexico City, I created a phonogram entitled *Sounding Sculptures — Six Themes and Variations* using two borrowed Revox multi-play recording devices. At that opening, as well as on other occasions, I also played the sound sculptures live and use them in concerts to this day. The soundtrack I did for the film about the barn-studio, *Willi Gutmann — The Gallery*, shot by John Dierauer in 2014, was also played on these “sounding sculptures.”

EVENTS / EXHIBITIONS

Almost since the beginning, a fortepiano stood in one corner of the barn-studio (more precisely a square piano built in the nineteenth century by Henri Hüni & Fils, Zurich & Rapperswil) which had been restored in the old home-studio by Willi and Walter Wechner, a piano tuner and builder and a friend of the artist. The piano was saved from a fire in Sünikon (canton of Zurich) and ultimately became the trigger for numerous concerts in the barn-studio.

Kaspar Guyer, a friend of the family, pianist, and gifted improviser, discovered this gem. Soon, the idea of an evening concert was born and became real. Further concerts, even one with the pianist Ruth Hiltmann, were organized

shortly thereafter. I was the lucky one to do the very first concert with my Jazz band Nabul in July 1979. Finally, cultural events took place on a regular basis, usually every year at the beginning of the spring. It could happen that after such an event, the seemingly unsentimental Willi, deeply touched and with tears in his eyes, could hardly pronounce a word to express his gratitude. Beyond the wonderful event, such moments were extremely impressive, not only for myself.

The intonation of the “Leitton” (leading note), as defined by Willi, was a must on such occasions, when he struck on the roughly eighty-centimeter-high solid aluminum sculpture *Fisch und Vogel* (*Fish and Bird*) with a rubber hammer. This gave an imposing and penetrating bell sound, which slowly faded after several minutes.



Celebration of Suzanne Monrad's 75th birthday
in the barn-studio, 2009

Over the years, Willi established himself as the master of ceremonies through this small ritual, which was important for him. As a result, the guests were even more intensely attuned to the cultural program that was already fulfilling thanks to the sculptures and the ambiance.

Occasionally, we also organized exhibitions for our artist friends. Among these were Gaspar Santos Garvalho (Canada), Helen Bickham (Mexico), Giovanni Huber (Switzerland), Martin Spühler (Switzerland) with his sound sculptures and sound-space installations, Pia Burri (Switzerland) and Irmengard Fausch-Horvath (Switzerland), who also wrote poems about Willi's sculptures, which had been published in earlier exhibition catalogues. Permanently



Willi Gutmann in his barn-studio, ca. 1976

exhibited were Suzanne Monard's pottery works entitled *Suzito*. The relatively small, but very impressive presentation was located in an intimate space just above the former "drum silo."

The cultural events in the barn-studio, mostly concerts, were very popular and therefore well attended. With at times up to 120 guests, even the large spaces were full and almost to the limits of their capacity. The unique ambience also facilitated the planning of numerous other events, especially birthday celebrations for Willi, as well as those for his long-time partner Suzanne Monard and close friends of the family.

POST MORTEM

Willi Gutmann passed away unexpectedly on February 21, 2013. After the first shock, the clearing of the barn-studio had to be planned and organized relatively quickly. One can imagine how much material can accumulate in such a vast period of time of almost forty years — not to mention the extremely comprehensive artistic work he left behind. In addition, Willi very reluctantly let go of things that still served a purpose, especially the parts of finished artworks, from which new, wonderful, and independent works repeatedly emerged and which which we posthumously, and only with a great deal of insider knowledge, detective work, and at times a stroke of luck, were able to reassemble.

The last big ceremonious occasion in the barn-studio was the commemoration ceremony for Willi on June 15, 2013, which we organized for the surviving relatives in lieu of a funeral. This emotional celebration was at the same time the last tribute to the extraordinary place, because the barn was to be rebuilt into a two-family house for the Furrer family. The landowners had informed Willi about their intention while he was still alive, which was drastic for him, but included generous option that the complex moving-out process could take up months, if not years.

FINALE

We managed to organize several "last" exhibitions in the barn-studio. Our dynamic team was made up of Suzanne Monard and her daughter and son, Myriam and Daniel Kunz, as well as their partners and children, and myself. Nevertheless, without the help of numerous friends and acquaintances of our family, whom we owe a debt of gratitude, it would have been difficult to accomplish.

We were very pleased about the lively attendance of these exhibitions. There were also many people from the surroundings who wanted to bid farewell to Willi's work and the barn-studio and who also acquired pieces of art which relieved us in view of the extensive artistic legacy.

Apart from these activities, we created the Internet gallery “Willi Gutmann — The Gallery” with the support of John Dierauer and Rolf Müller to continue offering insight into Willi’s artworks. The encounter with the gallery owner Hanns Bachlechner was a stroke of luck. While visiting the barn-studio for the first time, he was so impressed that he spontaneously offered to take a representative selection of works for a large exhibition in his gallery at Bergdietikon.

Unfortunately, Suzanne Monard passed away after heavy illness on September 6, 2014, shortly before her eightieth birthday. Two days later, on September 8, 2014, we handed the empty barn over the landowners. This was the end of a nearly four-decade-long era, which will remain in not only our best memory.

Pit Gutmann



Willi Gutman with the sculpture Ovalscheibe – Reduktion zu einem Rhombus (Oval Disc – Reduction to a Rhombus), 1979 (WG 79 – 961 M)

BIOGRAPHY

1927

Born as the youngest of the four children of Jules Gutmann (1884 – 1949) and Berta Gutmann, née Volkart (1897 – 1981)

1946 – 1949

After primary and secondary school and an apprenticeship as a cabinet-maker, studies Interior Design at the School of Arts and Crafts in Zurich, attending elective courses in Scale-Modeling and Drawing/Painting

1949

First stays in Paris and London

1950

Freelance interior designer and sculptor with a studio in Zurich

Sojourn in Paris at the end of the year

1951

Studies and work in Denmark (Copenhagen), Norway, and Italy (Rome)

1952

Construction of his house with a studio in Oberhasli (canton of Zurich)

Marries Gudrun Wittig

Active work in interior design, model making, ceramics, and sculpting

Sets up his own architectural office in Zurich

Study sojourns in Germany, France, Italy, and Austria

1954

Birth of his son Pit

1965

First solo exhibition at Galerie am Platz, Eglisau

Numerous solo and group exhibitions in Switzerland, Europe, and overseas

Since 1965

Works exclusively as an independent sculptor

1967

First trip to Canada, the US, and Mexico

1968

Participation in the “International Sculptors’ Meeting” (as part of the Olympic Games in Mexico City)

Construction of a three-part monumental sculpture at the Peachtree Center, Atlanta/Georgia

1971

Construction of his largest sculpture, *Two Columns with Wedge*, a pair of chrome steel columns of approx. 25 and 13.5 meters in height for the new Embarcadero Center in San Francisco/California

Production of the 16-mm documentary *Willi Gutmann*

Series of *August Pictures* — geometric paintings in acrylic

1972

Construction of *Symbol*, a four-piece sculpture group for the new research center of Philip Morris, Inc. in Richmond/Virginia

Embossed printings in large formats

1973

Spritz pictures — contrast-colored abstract landscapes dissolved into one another

1978

Meets Suzanne Monard, his partner until his death

1982 – 2008

Regular spring concerts, exhibitions and events in the barn-studio

1989

First laminated wooden sawn-out sculptures in the summer

1997

Stroke shortly before his seventieth birthday in November, loss of fine motor skills

Working activities with wooden sculptures

1997 – 2007

Lecturer at the ETH – Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich as a workshop leader in the field of Material Science (Practical Laboratory Course)

2007

Awarded the Staudinger-Durrer Medal by the ETH Zurich

2013

Passes away on February 21 in Oberhasli

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