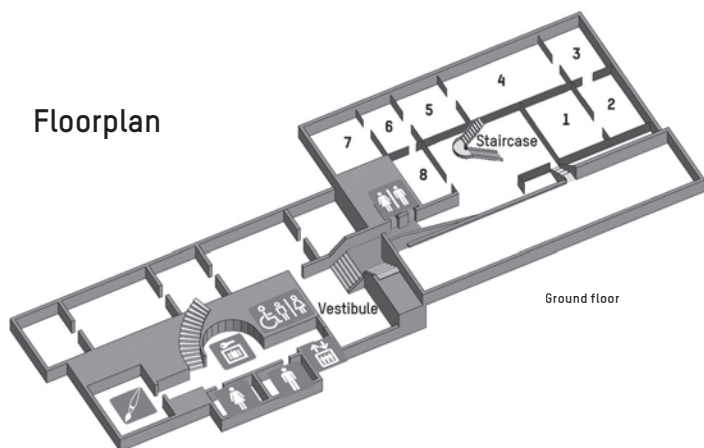


Markus Raetz • Prints • Sculptures

January 31 to May 18, 2014

Markus Raetz (b. 1941) is one of Berne's most famous contemporary artists and a key figure among the generation of "artists investigating perception." Employing an extensive range of media and technique, his highly diverse oeuvre playfully contemplates the experience of reality as a process, making us conscious of the fact that reality changes in relation to our viewpoint. Printmaking holds a leading position in Markus Raetz's work, boasting over 350 prints. The exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Bern is mounting an overview of Markus Raetz's graphic works and follows in the footsteps of the 1991 presentation *Markus Raetz: Prints 1958–1991*. A selection of sculptures are supplementing the prints in the exhibition, illustrating palpably the strong interaction between both media in Markus Raetz's work and giving us the opportunity of experiencing some of the key themes of his art spatially as well.

Floorplan



Room 1

From the very beginning, Markus Raetz has displayed a profound interest in the mechanical processes involved in image reproduction. Sometimes he employs very elementary methods in works such as *Bildnis des Künstlers als Schreibmaschinist* (Portrait of the Artist as a Typist, 1970), which he produced as a copy with the help of carbon paper and a typewriter. But Raetz also produced stamps made from rubber, as we find in the case of *Torus* (1968), which he added to his signature for some time (Room 8); or made frottages with woodcut blocks, as for example in *Dieses & Jenes* (This & That, 1970), a Kunstverein Nordrhein-Westfalen commission (Room 6).

During a longer sojourn at the Rietveld-Akademie in Amsterdam, Raetz learned the professional use of the intaglio printmaking techniques of etching and aquatint. The artworks he produced during this

period have been collected in the *Rietveld-Mappe* (Rietveld Portfolio, 1970). Due to etching's particular qualities it became Markus Raetz's favourite printmaking technique. Very often the artist seeks inspiration for pictures in the potential of printmaking techniques. This is the case in works such as *Böueli* (Little Balls), which are the products of a special process: the pattern of the coarse basic structure was produced with sandpaper, with the halftones and the varying darkness of the small balls arising from how long the different areas of the plates' surfaces were exposed to acid baths.

Together with Peter Kneubühler at his printmaking studio, Raetz realised the seven-part sets of works employing three-colour intaglio printing using zinc plates, which have been put together in the so-called *Dreifarben-Mappe* (Three Colours Portfolio, 1977). Fascinated by his study of the technical scope of printmaking, Markus Raetz works the plates himself in colour offset printing. Normally photo-mechanical transfer is used for this printing method. Three plates were involved for each edition. Respectively the plates print the primary colours red, yellow and blue. For various sheets, however, Raetz used different intaglio techniques. He employed aquatint for the works *Farbenkreis* (Chromatic Circle) and *Männliche Figur ihren Schatten betrachtend* (Male Figure Contemplating His Shadow), because it is suitable for depicting planes. The sheets *Kugel mit Schatten* (Sphere with Shadow) and *Photographie* were executed in drypoint technique, that is, using a hard-pointed needle to incise into the plate without cutting too deeply. This printmaking method is better suited for linear modes of representation. For *Blick aus einer Balkontür* (A Glance through a Balcony Door) he chose soft-ground etching, which typically creates lines that have a very watercolour-like appearance.

Room 2

Physiognomy is a subject that continually crops up in Markus Raetz's art.

The series *Profil III* (1982–1983) presents in 14 state proofs the different stages of an etching of a woman's head in profile. Here Raetz used drypoint technique and modeled the head with sandpaper to roughen up the surface of the metal plate. He then polished the scratches away with a burnisher to create lighter tones.

In the series *Person D* (1985), which comprises nine sheets and is part of the set of works titled *Säureanschlag*, Markus Raetz pursues his subject matter by presenting a sequence of state proofs of the different stages of production—that is, of the proofs made for technical reasons to observe the progress of the plate—and not prints from finished plates. Markus Raetz discovered for himself the advantages of working the plates with aquatint and spit bite (painting acid directly onto the plate with a brush), bringing the technique to perfection (see also Room 4). In the process the artist thought of a family, of interpersonal family relationships, and character development. The individual figures gain plasticity over the sequence of trial proofs while conversely losing the fluid softness of the first sheets. In contrast to the painterly corporality of the faces in the series *Person D*, the two engravings *Auge* (Eye, 1995) and *M.O., nach Man Ray* (M.O., after Man Ray, 1995) evidence Markus Raetz's delight in the line. It flows freely in the compositions, accompanying other lines that echo its movements, swelling to reveal a shadow or suggest spatial depth. Raetz's fascination for engraving lies not only in the

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method's scope for depicting lighter and darker planes and surfaces but especially in the line, which is an essential compositional element of this particular intaglio printing technique. After completing *Wellen* (Waves, 1994–1995, Room 1), the first of his engravings, Raetz realised many more prints using this printmaking method. In 2011 he put together a set of nine sheets in a portfolio, which he gave the title of *MR Inv. & Sculp.* This is an abbreviation for the Latin phrase "Markus Raetz invenit & sculpsit" (this work was invented and sculpted by Markus Raetz), by which he is following a 16th-century tradition when one differentiated between original prints and reproductive prints. Markus Raetz references the artists and engravers of that period and his great admiration of them by giving the portfolio a title in which he presents himself as *peintre-graveur* (painter-engraver).

Rooms 3 + 4

Again and again Markus Raetz addresses the subject of perception and seeing. While he engages with the seeing eye and sight in the artworks *Défense d'y voir* (1980), *Sicht I* (Sight I, 1985) and *Projektion* (1985), he thematises perception in its entirety—the brain's processing of visual sensations—in *Sinne I* and *II* (Senses, 1987) or *Kluge Kugel* (Intelligent Ball, 1985).

The phenomena of visual perception, *fata morgana* and illusion are already present in the work *Sehfeld* (Field of View, 1986). Subsequently Markus Raetz combines them with landscape themes. The title of the object *Zeemansblik* (1985–1987) not only means "sailor's gaze" in Dutch but "sailor's metal" too. The artwork itself is a gently curved and polished piece of metal sheeting in the form of the range of vision we have when we look through binoculars. The artist produces a horizon by means of a kink in the metal sheeting, while reflected and deflected rays of light hitting the metal's surface conjure up, so to speak, a sea and a sky. Virtual landscape representation that is simultaneously a product of chance finds a new mode in the spit bite aquatint *Gaze* (2001) and in the photogravure *Binocular View* (2001). Markus Raetz succeeds in describing water and air in a "painterly" way in a picture comprising only a central horizon as a dividing line.

Perception and landscape have been conflated thematically in an ingenious way in the portfolio *NO W HERE* (1991). The portfolio comprises a set of seven prints engaged with the subject of landscape. They are the product of numerous superimposed observations made by the artist on to a trip to Lofoten at the end of spring in 1991, an archipelago west of the Norwegian mainland, as well as the result of many train trips between Bern and Zurich while working at Peter Kneubühler's printmaking studio. Here again Markus Raetz employs the method of spit bite aquatint: following a set conceptual plan the artist works the plates by painting a few brushstrokes of concentrated nitric acid quasi blind directly onto them. By doing so he achieves the illusion of a landscape. Spatial depth is created by varying the time in which the acid can bite into the copper surface. The parts of the landscape making up the foreground were "painted" first, the more distant parts later. Thus aerial perspective is evoked through subtle tonal gradations resulting from the stages of production that allowed the acid to bite deeper into the metal plate. The images are not imitations of real landscapes, but pictures of imaginary, inner landscapes—products of the respective techniques used and, as the title implies, are of "nowhere" and nevertheless "now here".

The landscapes of the series *Ombre* (2007) were made by photogravure and likewise have a painterly quality. With a brush dipped in a mixture of ink and paste, Markus Raetz prepared glass plates on a light table in a way that could have served Corot in the 19th century for making an image on light-sensitive paper (*cliché-verre*). Whereas in *cliché-verre* the image is produced by scratching away a neutral and opaque film or a thick layer of paint on a glass plate using a needle or a steel brush, Markus Raetz uses the glass plates as if they were slides as projection templates, exposing them directly onto copperplates: he produces a relief by projecting the glass-plate image onto copperplate coated by a light-sensitive film. The copperplate is then put into an acid bath, then inked and printed.

Whereas photogravure transfers an image via a photomechanical process onto the plate in which light plays a decisive role, in other intaglio printing methods the gradation in tonal values from light to

dark must be "manufactured" by the artist himself. The aquatint's tooth or closely spaced texture makes it possible to produce subtle tonal gradations over areas of the plates. The technique is the most painterly in appearance of all intaglio printing methods. Raetz exploits this quality in *See-Saw II (Nothing is Lighter than Light)* (1991). Light is the focus of the artwork. It becomes manifest as a bright oval on the down end of a seesaw and is staged in an unusual context. The sheet illustrates the various tonal gradations from black to white—if we seek a conventional interpretation of the subheading "nothing is lighter than light". But at the same time the picture itself and the subheading zero in on the weight of light, a characteristic that normally has nothing to do with it. The down end of the seesaw bears an oval of light and demonstrates thereby that "nothing" is lighter than light, just as the subheading explains with its play on words.

Room 5

Inspired by Magritte's famous image *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (This is not a Pipe, 1929), Markus Raetz executed a series of works that explore the problem of differentiating between an object and a picture of an object—and the relationship between two and three dimensionality—when an artwork displays a three-dimensional or spatial situation in two dimensions: part of the series are the three photocopies *Nichtfeife* (1990–1991), the object *Nichtrauch* (1990) and the photogravure *Schatten* (1991), as well as *Silhouette—At the Promontory of Noses* (2001) and *Reflexion I–III* (1991).

Schatten (Shadow, 1991) comprises six photogravures in A4 format arranged one above the other. In truth this vertical arrangement creates a very long and unique vertical print. At the bottom of the picture the shadow of a wire structure takes on the shape of a pipe. The five prints above it depict smoke rings. At first glance we might just simply recognize the stylized representation of a smoking pipe. But a second look soon reveals that the clouds are in fact shadowgraph projections of the same wire structure seen, however, from angles that do not resemble the image of a pipe. For the photogravure *The wire frame model* (1991), Markus Raetz positioned the wire structure on a light-sensitive plate differently and thereby illustrates cause and effect using a single instrument. He shows, too, that the same object varies in appearance from different perspectives and sometimes takes on a new meaning altogether. This we can observe in the case of the sculpture *Nichtrauch* (1990) as well.

Like *Schatten*, the other photogravures in this room were produced as photograms of a kind through the shadows left by objects on copperplate glazed with a light-sensitive film. It is significant that an object and its shadow are never one and the same—least of all in *Silhouette – At the promontory of Noses* (2001): the range of hills resembling Belchenfluh near Olten is, in reality, the profile of the artist.

In the photogravures *Reflexion I–III* (1991) the artist presents sophisticated variations of shade, light and reflection. For them Markus Raetz used direct sunlight that shone through the studio window as his light source for exposing his light-sensitive plates. While the face that is depicted in a round mirror is visible as a shadow in a light-toned oval in *Reflexion III*, *Reflexion I* and *II* reveal how the image was made by displaying the shadows of the projected drawing, the mirror and the arm. Raetz exploits the scope of the photogravure method to produce shadow images in a way that would be impossible by means of painting.

Room 6

We find word and image often crop up as subject matter in both Raetz's prints and sculptures. Often an artwork will unite two motifs or words into one. Of some word pairs the artist has even made two and three-dimensional versions. Whereas the beholder can view the sculpture *TOUT–RIEN* (All-Nothing, 2007) from different sides and thereby reads, from one angle, the word TOUT and, from another, the word RIEN, the viewpoint in the copperplate engraving *Croisement* (Crossing, 1997) is fixed between TOUT and RIEN. The beholder can perceive a variety of abstract forms that result from making hybrids of two completely different words. Initially, the translation of three-dimensional letters into two dimensions appears as simple abstract forms insofar the brain has not yet entirely mobilized its

spatial perception. They may remind us of letters but do not make sense. The two terms are united in both the two and three-dimensional versions, but parallel to this it is cleverly made clear that the simultaneity of “everything” and “nothing” is impossible. However, compared to the sculpture, the engraving is more successful in demonstrating the ambiguity of the title “Croisement”: this lies in the intersection of the visual axes being captured from only a single perspective in the presentation, on the one hand, and in the hybridisation of the words TOUT and RIEN into a complex of only four letters, on the other.

However, in the artwork *ME-WE*, we find that the sculpture (2004–2010) and photogravure (2007) function according to the same principle. In a mirror the English word “ME” becomes “WE”. Both words are visible at the same time, whereby one does not exclude the other but is simply a variation of it. Unlike the print *Croisement*, which—like a visual translation of the popular saying “all or nothing”—makes the irreconcilability of the two terms apparent, in the conceptual pair ME/WE all the variations from the individual to the collective are possible and feasible.

Room 7

Just as single words inspire wordplay, Markus Raetz enjoys seeking inspiration in the classics of world literature or in pop culture.

Thus the woodcuts *Jim Strong und John Kling* (1976) are a reference to the detectives and bad guys of certain pulp fiction that one could formerly buy at the newsstands, the etching *Il tonto sulla collina* (1974) to the Beatles’ song *The Fool on the Hill* from the *Magical Mystery Tour* album (1967), the packthread print *Marilyn* (1976) to the famous Hollywood actress, and the photogravure *Elvis* (1978–2013) to the King of Rock’n’Roll.

Describing a totally imaginary Africa, Raymond Roussel’s book *Impression d’Afrique* (1910) was the motivation behind Raetz’s 14 etchings and aquatints, which he assembled together under the playful and ambiguous title *Impressions d’Impression d’Afrique* (Impressions of Impressions of Africa, 1980).

The series *Paar* (Couple, 1980) is related to *L’immaculée conception* (Immaculate Conception, 1930) written by both André Breton and Paul Eluard. In the book both authors attempt to describe different kinds of mental disturbance and simulate them. Love too is named under the title of “Mediation”.

The symbol of freedom in Laurence Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759–1767) inspired Markus Raetz to produce two separate works. The symbol is illustrated in small in the book, an arabesque that is drawn in the air by the protagonist with the point of a walking stick. Raetz imitates it in *Trim’s Flourish* (2001) by sketching with a brush soaked in acid directly onto the plate. For *Flourish* (2001, Room 5) the artist shaped steel wire at the studio of Crown Point Press in San Francisco and held it with his hand over a light-sensitive plate so both hand and wire left a shadow in exposure to the sun. *Flourish* is not only influenced by Laurence Sterne but also by Markus Raetz’s working with engraving. Markus Raetz noticed one day that the shavings he cut from the copper resembled Tristram Shandy’s mysterious line. *Flourish* can be interpreted as an allegory for Markus Raetz’s approach to printmaking methods: how joy in experimentation and the incalculability of the techniques themselves lead to new creations.

Room 8

A great diversity of artworks resulted from Markus Raetz’s long-standing interest in mathematics, geometry and topology—the latter a branch of mathematics dealing with mathematical structures that preserve their properties under continuous deformation.

In the work *Zwei Körper gleichen Inhalts* (Two Bodies of even Content, 1999) made by blind embossing, the artist is concerned about the relationship between form and content. The volume of the two rectangular prisms is identical, even if the dimensions of the outer frame, the length of their sides are different.

Whereas the blueprint with the Dutch title *Vlechtwerk* (Latticework, 1972) primarily engages with counting (the two “threads” that stick out of the latticework at the bottom right-hand side interlace 300 times), the silkscreen print *Schären* (Archipelago, 1967) centers on mathematical and perspective problems. The islands mentioned in

the title have been reduced to abstract forms and arranged according to mathematical principles by which, in ascending order, there are double as many islands in each row than the one below. Toward the upper edge of the picture, of necessity the islands become smaller and smaller, thereby suggesting spatial perspective—a pattern that we imagine can be extended to infinity.

Markus Raetz realised *Torus* (1968) as a rubber stamp and added it over many years to his signature. The torus is one of the most well-known topological figures he uses. In the language of geometry, a torus is an object not unlike the common doughnut or swim ring. Topologically it is the equivalent of a cup—because by stretching, compressing and bending it can be formed into a cup without cutting or gluing. Markus Raetz is equally fascinated by the Möbius strip, which is described in topology as a two-dimensional structure with only one edge and one surface. In *Ring* (2010) the ribbon is reduced to an engraved line. Raetz’s representation of it fully captures the strip’s properties of unidimensionality without an upper and underside. In *Looping* (2012) he painted—in a sweeping Zen-like gesture of his hand—the ribbon with a brush on a glass plate, which was then printed as a photogravure.

Vestibule

Film: *Markus Raetz* (2007) by Iwan Schumacher

Biography

- 1941 Markus Raetz is born on 6 June in Bern (not in Büren an der Aare, as is often written), the youngest of three children. Both parents are teachers.
- 1957–1961 He attends the colleges of education of Hofwil and Bern. During school vacations he works in the studio of Peter Travaglini, an artist from the Ticino region living in Büren. First artistic works (paintings, sculptures and prints).
- 1960–1961 Influences from tachist experiences and action painting: he experiments with abstract painting. Six months internship at a school for children with behavioral problems.
- 1961–1963 He teaches at Brügg (Bienna). In 1963 he receives the Swiss Federal Scholarship for Fine Arts and installs himself as a painter in Bern, Neuengasse 24.
- 1964 He receives the Louise Aeschlimann und Margareta Corti and Kiefer-Hablitzel Scholarship.
- 1965 Swiss Federal Scholarship for Fine Arts.
- 1966 He receives the Louise Aeschlimann and Margareta Corti scholarship.
- 1967 Beginning of a long series of annual stays at Ramatuelle (Var, France). First photographs with Balthasar Burkhard and first colour screenprints. Geometric-decorative experiments. He receives the prize of the Jeune gravure suisse of the City of Geneva.
- 1968–1969 Conceptual experiments.
- 1969–1973 He lives in Amsterdam, Koggestraat 11.
- 1970 Raetz marries Monika Müller. He attends the Rietveld-Akademie in Amsterdam and receives the Dutch scholarship from the Swiss Confederation. He perfects his etching technique and draws a great deal.
- 1971 Longer stays in Spain (Carboneras) and Morocco (Essaouira). He receives the prize of the Jeune gravure suisse of the City of Geneva.
- 1972 His daughter Aimée is born.
- 1973–1976 Raetz lives in Carona (Ticino). He focuses his work activity on “Die Bücher”, a kind of journal, as well as stone objects and sculptures.
- 1975–1976 Longer stays in Italy, Tunisia and Egypt.
- 1976 He establishes himself in Bern.
- 1977 First collaboration with the Zurich printmaker Peter Kneubühler (1944–1999). His Neuengasse studio is destroyed by fire.
- 1978 Studio in Sandrainstrasse 3. Award by the Foundation for Graphic Art in Switzerland.
- 1979 Guest at the Stedelijk Museum. He works in the Prinseiland Studio, Amsterdam.

- 1981–1982 Guest of the Berliner Künstlerprogramm (Berlin artists program, DAAD)
- 1988 His works are selected for the Swiss Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. He wins a prize at the Triennale für Originalgraphik (Triennale of Original Graphic Prints), Grenchen.
- 1990 New studio in Bern.
- 1991 He creates prints in Peter Kneubühler's studio and at Crown Point Press (San Francisco). BCG Prize (Banque hypothécaire du Canton de Genève).
- 1992 Knight of the Ordre des arts et des lettres of the French Republic.
- 2001 Nachdem 1999 der Tod von Peter Kneubühler eine Pause in seinem After the death of Peter Kneubühler in 1999 had caused a break in his artistic work on graphic prints, he now starts working with Michèle Dillier at the studio of the Association jurassienne d'animation culturelle (AJAC) in Moutier. Another stay in San Francisco and further collaboration with Crown Point Press.
- 2004 He receives the Gerhard-Altenbourg-Prize, awarded by the Lindenau-Museum in Altenburg (Thuringia, Germany).
- 2007 Member of the Academy of the Arts, Berlin. He receives the Medal of the Burgergemeinde Bern and the Prix Meret Oppenheim

AGENDA

Öffentliche Führungen

Sonntag, 11h: 2./16. Februar, 16. März, 13. April, 4./18. Mai
Dienstag, 19h: 25. Februar, 4. März, 22. April

Visites commentées publiques en français

Mardi 11 mars à 19h30
Mardi 6 mai à 19h30

Public guided tour in English

Tuesday, February 25, 19:30 pm

Einführungen für Lehrpersonen

Dienstag, 11. Februar, 18h
Mittwoch, 12. Februar, 14h

Workshops für Schulklassen: "FRISCH GEDRUCKT"

Im Rahmen der Ausstellung bietet die Kunstvermittlung stufengerechte Druck-Workshops für Schulklassen an (1. – 9. Klasse). In einem ersten Teil betrachten wir gemeinsam Werke von Markus Raetz in der Ausstellung, anschliessend experimentieren wir im Atelier mit einfachen graphischen Techniken. Dauer: 90–120 Minuten, Preis: CHF 140.00, Anmeldung: T 031 328 09 11 oder vermittlung@kunstmuseumbern.ch

Künstlergespräch: Die Kuratorin Claudine Metzger im Gespräch mit dem Künstler Markus Raetz und dem Autor des Werkkatalogs Rainer Michael Mason

Dienstag, 1. April, 19h
Öffentliche Führung 18h, Ausstellungseintritt genügt.

INFORMATION

Curator

Claudine Metzger

Entrance Fee

CHF 14.00 / red. CHF 10.00

Private Guided Tours, Schools

T 031 328 09 11, vermittlung@kunstmuseumbern.ch

Opening Hours

Tuesday: 10 a.m. – 9 p.m.
Wednesday – Sunday: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.

CATALOGUE (IN GERMAN, FRENCH AND ENGLISH)

Markus Raetz. Die Druckgraphik. Les estampes. The Prints. Band I: Catalogue raisonné 1951–2013. Band II: Texte, lectures, essays. Herausgegeben von Rainer Michael Mason in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Kunstmuseum Bern. Mit Beiträgen von Juliane Cosandier, Julie Enckell Julliard, Josef Helfenstein, Lauren Laz, Rainer Michael Mason, Claudine Metzger, Marie-Cécile Miessner, Didier Semin. Texte deutsch, französisch und englisch. 2 Bände, gebunden in Schuber. Total ca. 840 Seiten, 500 farbige Abbildungen, 24 x 31 cm. ISBN 978-3-85881-410-4, ca. CHF 120.00 / € 105.00

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Further venues of the exhibition:

Musée Jenisch Vevey, Cabinet cantonal des estampes:
26.06. – 04.10.2014
LAC Museo d'arte Lugano: 13.02. – 17.04.2016

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