

## KURT OSCAR WEBER

*I always and I mean always did things because I had the desperate hope that they would transform me. I only did them for that purpose, to be transformed, not to be me any longer. I really didn't care what it was I did, as long as it permitted me for as short a time it might be to escape myself. Therefore Art, paintings afforded me to become someone else. Metempsychosis.*

Kurt Oscar Weber

Kurt Oskar Weber (1938, Zurich – 2011, Basel) was a Swiss-American fine artist, internationally recognized through his oeuvre of paintings, drawings and sculptures. Weber's was a lifetime devoted to travel and discovery. In the arts, he explored everything from the old masters of the Renaissance to Cubism, Expressionism and artistic expressions he witnessed, directly through the post painterly abstraction after the 1950s, while Basel, Paris, New York, Mexico and California were just some of his life stations. With a keen knowledge of art and an open mind, he drew inspiration from the forms, colors, spaces, lights, ambiances and atmospheres of the places he visited. It shaped and changed his creative work, mostly paintings and drawings, in palette and motifs, and led to a specific artistic expression through which various iconographic references, ideas, styles converged. Encouraged at the beginning of his career by the advice of his compatriot Alberto Giacometti that he should experiment, Weber directed his art toward the process as a key constitutive and conceptual element in his work from figuration to color field paintings. "From forms", Weber wrote, "I'll move to void in an attempt to paint out all incidents and influences 'till there is nothing left. I'll defy the gravity, then watch electricity race through a crystal clear bulb; take the deposits of past cultures and give them forms that aren't nameable and have no home. I will live in them"

Kurt Oskar Weber started his art education in Zurich (1955-1958) at the Kunstgewerbeschule and continued his painting studies at the atelier of the famous André Lhôte, founder of the Académie d'Art in Montparnasse in Paris. Weber's formative years in art were also marked by his stay in Italy where he was studying the Italian Renaissance masters as well as by his studies with world-renowned painter Oskar Kokoschka in Salzburg, Austria. As an art historian Andrin Schütz once pointed out "From the Middle Ages to 1960: It would be hard to find a painter that Kurt Weber had not studied", referring to the fact that Weber's eclectic knowledge of art was significantly integrated in his practice. Paris in the late 50s and early 60s, the specific cultural

atmosphere of the city, meetings with reputable artists and philosophers like Jean Paul Sartre, had a huge influence on young Weber. Besides Lhote, Pablo Picasso and Fernand Léger also contributed to Weber's early years in art, but the greatest impact was by his compatriot and friend Alberto Giacometti. It was Giacometti, who advised and inspired Weber to develop his own artistic style and expression, which led him to start with new techniques and painting processes, including the "use of mixed media, pigments, and bright, vibrant colors on various canvasses and placement boards." With the encouragement of Giacometti, Weber traveled to the United States which would become his second home for the next several decades, but it would also open a new chapter in his artistic practice. In New York, Weber was introduced to the fresh tendencies in abstract expressionism or more precisely to the post-painterly abstraction movement which makes a turn toward the exploration of the basic elements of the medium itself. In the same period Weber began visiting Mexico regularly, discovering the historic monument legacy of the Maya and the Aztec civilisations. The breadth and spatiality of American abstract painting, as well as Mexico's luminous colors, introduced Weber to a different approach in painting. If Weber's paintings at the beginning were characterized by grey, umber, blue intonations and massive form constructions, in America they became more and more devoted to experiments with color. With his experience of American everyday life, culture, urban environments came a new motif repertoire and the landscape of the American West would leave permanent traces in his future artistic expression. The visual sensation of this new spatiality and light, led professionals Katherine Cook and Peter Frank, who followed and wrote about Weber's works, to emphasize in his color field paintings which recapitulate strategies of American abstract expressionism but also embody European sensibility. "...being European painter", says Peter Frank, "simply makes Weber a particular kind of American painter, a painter whose eyes may have been Americanized upon beholding American space, but whose hands remain sensuous and intimate, i.e. European in their response. The scale of Weber's paintings may be American – the vastness of his canvases and even works on paper evokes not mural or fresco, but rugged, light-filled terrains- but the elaboration of their surfaces and modulation and interrelation of their colors bespeak the exploitation, not the rejection, of classical harmony and virtuosic craft." Weber's extensive knowledge on art history and especially painting is actually the base of his artistic style, often hard to define and affiliate. "I am skeptical of style", Weber would say, "It is a commodity and pays attention only to the outside. Each time I feel its boundaries, I have to escape. I am too curious about everything else... In the process, I reveal myself." Transversal in its core Weber's expression in art is inseparable of his restless spirit as he once described in a note to Katherine Cook: "And I don't know of anyone, who travelled that much, changed skins that many times, took chances without regrets, absorbed and lived in so many cultures and crossed ideas like crossed continents." Weber's main concern was the synthesis of different elements, the intersection

of painterly legacies from Renaissance to Abstract expressionism with a constant quest to establish “new dialogue with history and reshape it”. The diversity, richness and specificity of the Weber’s production presented in posthumous retrospectives in his native Switzerland, indicate that there is more to be learned about the artist who explored the inbred power of materials, played and experimented with techniques, styles, concepts and finally succeeded in developing his own artistic vision driven by the desire for continuous journey and the (re) discovering of territory of art and painting.