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Autor: Matter, Annina

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ANNINA MATTER

The Vorkurs (basic course) was absolutely great, my very best year! I felt in good hands there, in the midst of like-minded people pursuing the same interests as I was and dealing with questions that were also important to me. I felt satisfied on all counts. ... At the same time, I enjoyed the enormous liberty granted us. Although expected to fulfill certain basic requirements and hand in various assignments, my main feeling was that I was simply allowed to do whatever I wanted to do. ... I found that very motivating, even if in some ways it meant starting all over again. After all, as a graduate of a teachers' training college, I already had a profession. Now I was obliged to reorient myself and decide which direction to follow career-wise. So it was a year that furthered my career while at the same time providing all sorts of new openings. Suddenly, so much seemed possible once more. ... That is the way it was on a smaller scale as well, where we were encouraged to develop our projects in autonomous fashion, which I really appreciated. No longer, as in former times, were we expected to advance small step by small step; instead we were called upon – and learned – to define our goals, and to draw up and carry through a project on our own. ... That the Vorkurs opens our eyes and sharpens our perception is easily said, but following it myself was a truly intense experience. ... During that time, I learned what designing really means. I was able to get a clear picture of the various professions I had in mind, because we were put into contact with professionals from outside the school, who helped us carry through a «real life» project. ... Actually, it was there that I finally decided on the studies I wished to pursue, something I could never have done without such a foundation. Now I knew what I wanted – in that sense, the Vorkurs was truly an eye-opener.

Roberta Weiss-Mariani

skill. Considering also that more and more women are seeking to pursue a career in art and design, it can also be noted that they in particular are affected by such measures.

A similar trend is likewise making itself felt among the «comprehensive» (traditional, academic) universities. In Zurich, for instance, the idea of tripling tuition fees was recently broached. Both academic universities and UAS art schools share the same problem, since neither – contrary to technical, business and industrial institutions of learning – can count on powerful sponsors. Finally, the dismantlement of the higher education system not only encourages the erosion of the equal opportunities principle, but also represents a waste of one of Switzerland's main resources – namely, the high-quality and internationally renowned level of education in all the national schools at the students' disposal. And it is this very education which, in the final analysis, we will be needing the most in the future, if we are to tackle the long-standing problems in the art realm, as already explicated in the 1975 Clottr Report¹:

«During this century, just about everything has become technologically feasible. However, the environmental changes brought on by progress have fallen out of step with the developmental needs of Nature and Man. Moreover, only rarely are the multiple interventions arising from technology deliberately designed, so that the people of Western civilization have become increasingly destabilized in their relationship to the most vital facilities of their environment. Indeed, some of today's commonplace phenomena are no longer understandable to our contemporaries, who are being flooded with visual impressions that they no longer even seek to read nor, consequently, to use. Literature on education refers to «visual illiteracy.» It is important to counter such illiteracy, and who better than the art and design schools could take up this challenge? The education and training they provide lead to deliberate creative intervention on Man's environment – intervention that consists of contributing to the recognition and solution of various tasks involved in environmental design.»

ANDERS GUGGISBERG

It is as somewhat of a greenhorn that one embarks on the Vorkurs (basic course) – in my case, much like I was after finishing junior high (Mittelschule). And no sooner embarked, than already the scales fall from our eyes. It is in fact a year of budding perception, a year that heightens our awareness to the point that, everywhere, we start seeing little colored dots that went unnoticed before. ... The Vorkurs offers a grab bag of starters – here a bit of video, there a bit of photography. And this is precisely what gives you a better basis for deciding which branch to follow: film, design or, perhaps after all, drawing. Undeniably, it helps in this respect. ... In the olden days, young people were packed off to a farm for a week or two, which was a meaningful event in their lives. You could say that as far as encouraging perception, the Vorkurs is a super, modern-day version of that tradition. ... I was lucky enough to take the course during a «Langjahr» (four terms instead of three), which even gave me an extra quarter. It remains a memorable year for me, in contrast with the specialized courses I took afterwards. Indeed, the Vorkurs was an enjoyable time with much to learn. ... One simply has to open one's eyes and allow a certain sense of perception to awaken – that's actually all it takes, and nothing more. ... Not that it is anything you could acquire at a Migros Club school. The two are worlds apart. ... Naturally, it represents an investment, but to me, one well worth the while. ... Moreover, it would be hard during the following years of study to catch up on the wide-ranging knowledge and experience to be gleaned from the Vorkurs.

¹ A group of experts commissioned by the Department of the Interior to prepare a national report on Swiss cultural policy. The report was published in 1975. Still today, it represents a major reference in discussions dealing with questions of culture.

Annina Matter, currently enrolled at the HGKK in Berne (in visual communication), completed the Vorkurs in Zurich last year (excerpt from an interview with Laurent Schmid).