Since the 1970s, US artist Matt Mullican has been interested in models for explaining the world. He has developed a complex system of symbols consisting of various pictograms and colors as a means of tackling the question of the structure of the world, and with his system he aims to portray in symbols every aspect of the human condition in different combinations.

Every color has a specific symbolic value attached to it. For example, green stands for material, blue for the everyday world, yellow for ideas, white and black for language and red for the subjective. The model of perception that Mullican calls the theory of the five worlds serves him as a system of order for his method of working as an artist. It illustrates the relationship between the world and its representation. The artist is particularly interested in how we charge symbols and systems of symbols with meaning.

In order to reach hidden states of consciousness and to render these useful for art, Mullican experiments with the technique of hypnosis. During his hypnosis performances he investigates hidden facets of his own personality. Using his method of procedure, he looks into radically subjective experiences with methods of categorization that can be objectified.

In space-consuming installations that can include all kinds of different media - light boxes, drawings, flags, sculptures and videos - Mullican spreads out his own personal cosmology, thus attempting to investigate the relationship between reality and perception. Very much aware of the fact that any attempts to assemble human knowledge like an encyclopedia is doomed to failure, he collects and categorizes found objects, images and symbols and establishes links between them, thus creating ever new correlations and perspectives. Mullican's strategy for appropriating the world, his interest in interpreting it, also lead to an intense preoccupation with the urban sphere, with the city as the bearer of different systems of symbols and meanings.

text by Nikolaus Bischoff

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