

Zurich, 26 March 2019

Press release

Through Walls and Layers. Cross Sections in Art and Science 2 May – 30 June 2019

Opening: Tuesday, 30 April 2019 (doors open 6 p.m., introduction 6.30 p.m.)

What is revealed when something is simply cut right through the middle? The exhibition at Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich presents many different answers to this profoundly human question – delivered by scientists and artists alike. Their works clearly show how the cut acts as a fundamental principle of insight, while almost incidentally – or quite deliberately – astonishing the beholder by unveiling unexpected worlds of forms and colours within.

The best way to find out what holds the world together at its very core is to cut it open. Cathedrals, skulls, the hulls of ships, the circles of hell, volcanoes, blossoms, caterpillars or even entire mountain chains – nothing and nobody can escape the exploring cut. Be it a cross section or a longitudinal section, the most important thing is that it runs right through the middle. The world opened up in this way is presented as images, models or at the object of curiosity itself. In order to quench such thirst for knowledge, the curator, Dr. Susanne Pollack, selected corresponding works from the holdings of the Graphische Sammlung ETH Zurich. In addition, there are important loans from a total of eight other collections and archives of ETH Zurich, for example, the clastic model of a horse's head (Collection: "Anatomy of Domestic Animals"), the agate slice from **Thomas Mann's** writing desk (Thomas Mann Archives) (Fig. 5) or a profile relief of the Säntis Mountains, rendered with remarkable precision by Professors **Arnold Escher** and **Albert Heim** in the nineteenth century (Earth Science Collections) (Fig. 9).

The method of obtaining certainty about the structure or function of one thing or another by cutting clearly through it, is inextricably linked to the transmission of knowledge through images. Ultimately, there is no section that does not contain some kind of information; sections are inherently informative images. That is why, for many scientist, the section has been and still is such a popular vehicle for the visualization of their findings. This widespread use is reflected in all the works in the exhibition that can be clearly assigned to a specific subject. That includes sections through buildings, for example by the architects **Gottfried Semper** (1803-1879) (Fig. 6), **Le Corbusier** (1887-1965) and **Peter Zumthor** (*1943); sections through the human body, such as those by physician and anatomist **Jean Marc Bourguery** (1797-1849) who both shocked and fascinated his nineteenth-century peers with images of the human body's inner workings, rivalling in accuracy the very latest MRT scans also on display (Fig. 8). The field of biology is also well represented, with exquisitely detailed sections of countless apple varieties, a termite hill, shells, fungi or exotic fruits on which the pioneer of modern entomology, **Maria Sibylla Merian** (1647-1717), presented her butterflies (Fig. 4). Of course, the art of engineering also features here, as in the example of a cross section of a well published in the 1588 treatise *Le diverse et artificiose machine del Capitano Agostino Ramelli* (Fig. 3).

The works in the exhibition tell an exemplary story of the symbiotic relationship between art and science. While scientific researchers adopt many of the established methods, techniques and compositional strategies of art in order to visualize their findings, artists, in turn, appropriate the specific visual syntax of the sciences in a way that at times seems to verge on expropriation. For instance, referencing technical drawings, the image by **Tomi Ungerer** (1931-2019) printed on graph paper shows a complex construction of rails, springs and wheels (Fig. 7). It connects a halved woman with the pram pushed by her, also halved, and serves no less purpose than to set the dildo in the woman's vagina in motion as she walks. And then there is **Regula Dettwiler** (*1966): She shows a *Magnolia made in China* and presents the plastic flower, dissected, in the traditional manner of the herbarium in which a cross section of parts of the plant is a firmly established given. For his oil-stick *Rubbings*, American conceptual artist **Matt Mullican** (*1951) used illustrations from the 1808-1830 *Edinburgh Encyclopædia* as his templates. Here, as in all the encyclopaedias of the Enlightenment era, the cross section plays an extremely important role. Through the abrasion technique, which blackened all grey graduations, he counteracted the essence of section-images and their very function of being images of insight. And no fewer than three artists in the exhibition even use a cross-section as an actual printing plate: **Peter Emch** (*1945) prints slices of tree trunks (Fig. 2), while **Ian Anüll** (*1948) prints a halved cabbage and **Stefan Gritsch** (*1951) uses sawn-though volumes of acrylic paint built up layer by layer over several years (Fig. 1).

The exhibition at the Graphische Sammlung shows works that want to tell their story. Each and every one of them reveals the secrets of a hidden inner world. They are supported by artists and by the curators of the collections and archives who make their treasures available: visitors to the exhibition can listen to their commentaries on selected works via a QR-code.

Practical information

Curator	Dr. Susanne Pollack, Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich
Events	Accompanying the exhibition, there will be two guided tours by curators , three lunchtime guided tours , an Artist Talk and an In Focus event. In keeping with the character of the cross-section, this programme of events is decidedly interdisciplinary. For details, see: https://gs.ethz.ch/agenda/
Opening hours	Daily, 10 a.m.– 4:45 p.m. Closed: Wed., 1st May 2019 (International Workers' Day), Thurs., 30th May 2019 (Ascension Day), Sat., 8th June to Mon., 10th June 2019 (Whitsun)
Entrance	free
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