

## **Accolade for Uwe Loesch by Kurt Weidemann**

The Gutenberg Prize, having been presented annually for half a century now, is awarded by Leipzig City in 2009 to the communication designer Uwe Loesch.

There is no need to remind ourselves of Leipzig's tradition in the art of book and print production. It lives and breathes here and has done so for centuries. Nor is there any need to list the prizes, awards and publications attributable to Uwe Loesch. They are already more than transitory.

The citation emphasises that his illustrative typeface and his typeface illustrations inspire the onlooker to think, so that what is read and seen has a lasting impact. This is as true of his designs for books and exhibition catalogues as it is of his posters.

The poster sets out to ambush passers-by. They haven't gone out looking for it, but it stops them in their tracks, reveals itself in the hope of attracting their attention. It does so with an eye-catcher, as the Anglicism has it, with a visual message that introduces a product they don't need, or an exhibition they haven't been to. Uwe Loesche works predominantly for museums and cultural institutions.

And now and again he publishes "non-commission posters", which he describes as "political interferences". And which are somewhat more effective than the messages issued by the politicians.

The "laudator" who presents an accolade is not here to document. The listing of exhibitions, prizes and publications achieved by the individual concerned belongs in a catalogue of works, though they are evidence of entire periods of creativity, of industry and applications across different areas and of the international attention such as can be expected of a commissioned artist.

Yet artists and designers are different professions and vocations. "The artist creates what he wants. – The designer wants what he creates."

Those are the different characteristics. Whereby the designer – as a creative man on the ball – is often better placed than the artist.

Although by no means as well placed as the handful of footballers who are millionaire goal-scorers.

The fact that no unifying spirit reigns among mankind at this time, nothing that inspires it as one, nothing that holds it together, this too is expressed in Uwe Loesch's works. Universal human rights have long since been proclaimed and have been disregarded for just as long. The law of the jungle prevails. The precepts of the idealists remain unheeded.

It is not just the three elements and the climate, water, energy, that can transform a unified will into action. An asteroid roaring around in

space can put an end to the whole thing, this tiny globe, with a single kick.

That was it then.

Even the western world, the Old World – improperly described as the First World – is not united in its aspiration and representation by a spirit of the times, an era of shared objectives. Diversity is declared as the order of the day and misunderstood as freedom. Whereby helplessness would be the more precise description.

Freedom is more of a luxury than a necessity. A luxury that strides forth, but advances not at all. Not in cooperation, but in confusion. It is more than a century since an epoch – limitedly summed up as Art Nouveau – triggered an intellectual-academic-artistic movement that flooded over and across then still existing barriers, breaking into a new epoch. Those who can break into a new world of ideas are what we lack today. But they will have to come. As long as we can remember, that has been the way of the world.

Summed up as "globalisation", the trend of international and rational solutions for existing problems and threats progresses more slowly than awareness of them. Grass does not grow faster when you pull at it. Patience is a virtue that we should all have learnt from nature. And: "Art is only art-as-art and everything else is everything else", is a definition from the American painter Ad. Reinhardt. The organisers of the Gutenberg Prize must forgive me if I pay particular attention in my accolade to Uwe Loesch's posters, although many of his exhibition posters accompany catalogue books designed with the same value profile.

In the case of his posters, it is not hard to call it *poster art*. His posters prevent our power of judgement from wasting away. From lack of use. That is: they challenge us to take a stance, to show assenting approval or a critical reflection. Something happens between the transmitter and recipient.

Poster as message needs the simplicity of truth. It cannot want to be something it is not. It must be able to invalidate prejudices. It must endow a new validity. And it is not that easy to do that. There are fewer than half a dozen such experts in our republic.

A poster must first reach our eyes. And via them, our reason. That does not have to mean immediate agreement, at the most just taking notice – fleetingly in most cases. It's better still when an affirmative empathy is inspired, a liking. And even better if it can persuade us of its credibility, and in conclusion, even gain our trust. Trust achieved is the foundation of friendship, of love, of respect and esteem. It cannot be achieved with clever patter and truisms, nor with trite puzzle pictures and empty words.

Good design – in whatever dimension – should trigger an oh-I-see! effect. It should communicate its remarkability without being asked to. There should be no need to understand previous considerations,

the outcome must virtually leap out at the viewer. That is the lifeblood of the poster creator's quick-fire art: the aspiration to be able to ambush, to make the viewer take a look, understand and enjoy, as far as possible all at once. A car driver does not want to get to know the certainly interesting, perhaps even surprising umpteen thousands of bits in a car; he just wants to be sure that it all works when he gives it enough juice to guzzle on.

Art and freedom cannot be considered separately. Not even applied artistic activity, that is commissions and work done to earn a living. Not, at least, if it means something and acquires meaning. That has never been very easy in Germany, neither west nor east. For most, it has headed off into a diligent bread-and-butter business. Only a few works have retained a noteworthy quality linked to their time and mission.

Among the most remarkable bodies of work is that of Uwe Loesch. And it does credit to this city that once suffered so much from west/east German destinies, that it chooses to honour him. The contribution made by this city in the grassroots movement that led to reunification, has not been forgotten. Uwe Loesch was not spied on, what was within him, he could create in freedom.

With his pictures and titles, Uwe Loesch constructs an arena of constructive tension. He goes by what he has felt instinctively in the heart-and-head interaction and what roughly corresponds to what is expected from a briefing. "The gradual composition of thoughts while speaking" (an insight from Heinrich von Kleist) comes too late in this process. Speaking or composing should wait until thoughts have achieved clarity and certainty. In the words and comments, Loesch finds the decisive testimonies, the serviceable images, simply and directly, unconcealed and uniquely new.

Every one of Uwe Loesch's posters is like blotting paper: it absorbs away the superfluous and leaves behind what matters.

Nor does he need to protect himself from himself, as Jenny Holzer feared:

"Protect me for what I want."

Nor does he need protection from asking too much of himself. "Pieces of work" are what he calls the works he has created. Let us go back again to Gutenberg's time. Half a millennium ago, so about 15 to 20 generations ago, Johann Gensfleisch zur Laden did not – as we were inaccurately taught in school – invent the art of printing, because that already existed. His invention was the manual casting instrument for type-setting and with it, the invention of industrial production.

Because with this device it was possible to produce a product in exactly the same quality and in any quantity: the metal letters, set alongside one another by hand, to form a line, a page, a book.

The likes of us live hand to mouth. He lives from hand on the table and on the wall, to and onto his Loesch-papers. His posters stop my power of judgement from wasting away.

That means, they challenge me. Taking a stance, assenting in approval or stopping for critical reflection. Something always happens. And there is never indifferent boredom. As a poster, his messages need the immediacy of the banality of truth. No more than that.

He does not want to be what he is not. Nor to do what he cannot. The Loesch-blotting paper deletes all that is superfluous. Too much is never good. Prejudices are disarmed or endorsed as judgement. That is by no means easy. The art is simply to make it look easy.

It does not debase the solemnity of this moment if I just read out one, or three definitions of the word "Laudatio" [or "accolade"] – which I once wrote down a long time ago for a similar occasion:

#### Laudatio

1. To present a "Laudatio" is the art of so transfiguring someone who is to be praised and whom every knows and everyone understands, that then no-one knows him and no-one understands him any more.

2. Or: a "Laudatio" can also be the art of describing someone who is to be praised and whom no-one knows, but who interests everyone, in such a way that (although) everyone understands him, no-one is interested in him any more.

3. Or: presenting a "Laudatio" is the art of so glorifying someone who is to be praised, whom some know and some do appreciate, that no-one appreciates him any more and everyone forgets him.

And so on: in other words, dubious meanings and outcomes for a "Laudatio" are legion.

This 21<sup>st</sup> century – it is often said – will belong to women, in other words, there will be a matriarchy after a strongly patriarchal century with its many calls to arms. You, dear Uwe, with your wonderful wife Young Sook, two daughters and a black female dog called "Agasi" (Korean for "distinguished young lady") have already made the handover.

With your pieces of work, your handcraft, your tongue, your shoes and your travels, you have made an applied art college into a university centre of learning, without truncating or silencing the art. I should like to be the first to congratulate you on this award and in so doing, to demonstrate the respect between the recipient of this prize and the presenter of this accolade.

Thank you for listening.