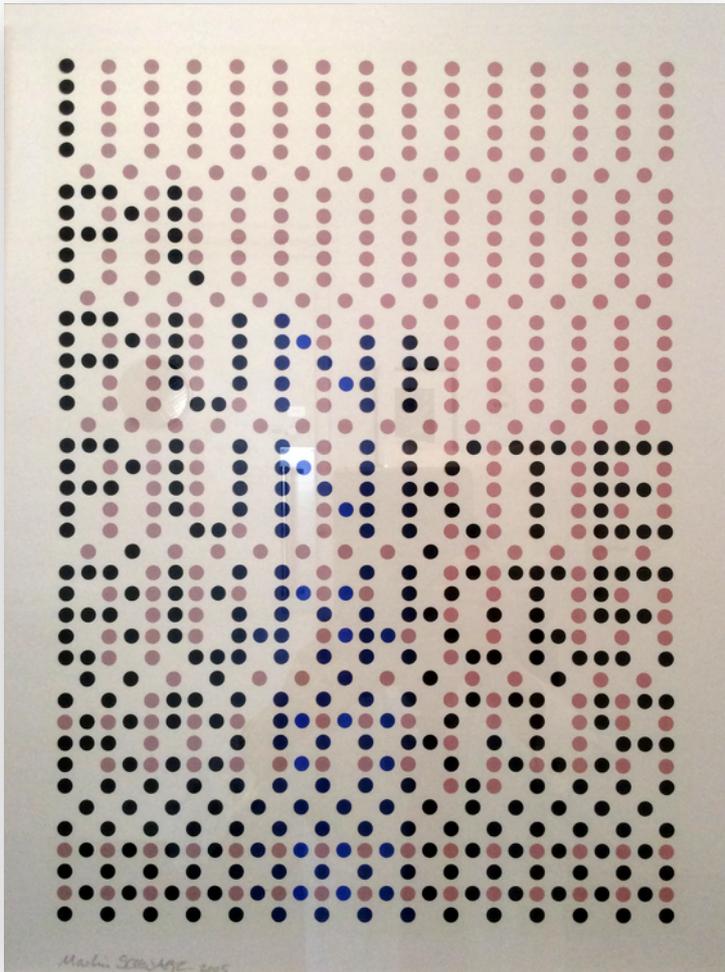


# Art and Mystery

Four graphics by Martin Schwarz

Andreas Urs Sommer



## 1. Punkte (Points)

Martin Schwarz is an artist of the elementary. What could be more elementary than a point, geometers define as an entity with a location but no extension in space. And yet – ultimate paradox – the points join and form something with two or even three dimensions. Here, it is the word 'Punkte' (English: points) that appears out of the points and disappears again in the sea of points. This novel kind of pointillism doesn't create any landscapes, any interiors or any faces. Just that one word. The word 'Punkte'.

Only once the viewer stops being a mere viewer and starts being a reader, he will become aware that the points merge to create something defined, a complete whole, hence a word. If the viewer didn't know the Latin alphabet, he would only see points, but not the word 'Punkte'. You have to read the works of Martin Schwarz – you as the viewer have to work on them, decipher them. The tiniest things are of the essence, the mere points, and not being overwhelmed by viewing in a marveling way. Graphic works as this one demand effort, call for working on them, not only on the part of the artist, but of the viewer as well. Only with collective effort it will turn into a picture that tells something: points. Is the universe more than the sum of its points? Do the points, does the spotty have to become liquid for the universe to come into being in the first place?



## 2. Unsichtbar (Invisible)

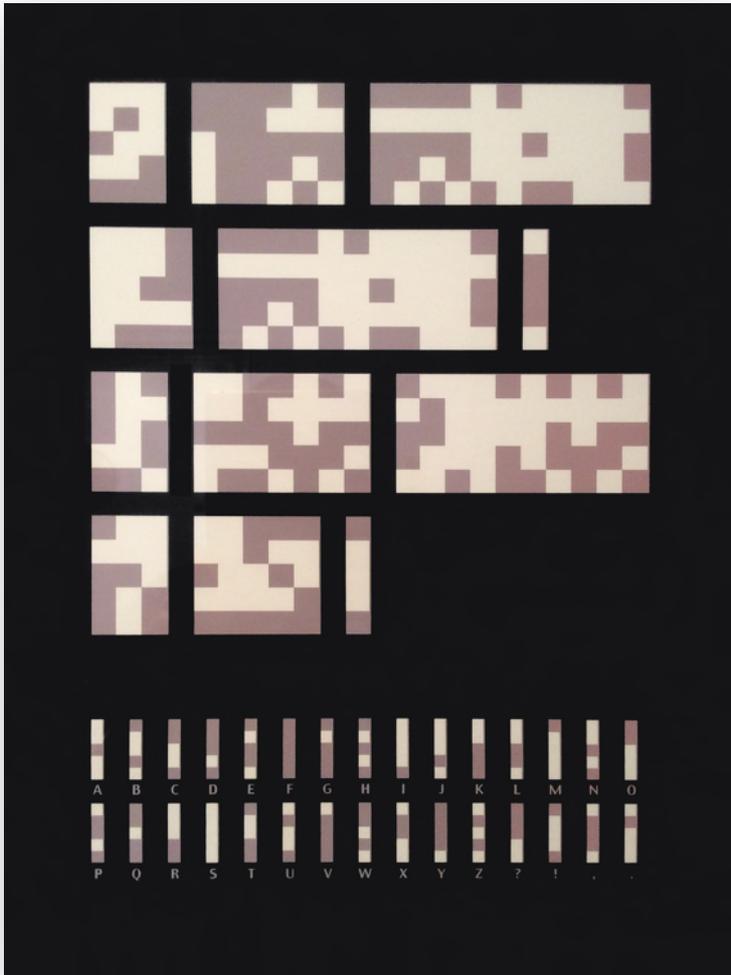
The viewer of this reading graphic created by Martin Schwarz couldn't help combining the two parts 'un' and 'sichtbar' (English: 'in' and 'visible'), which in the picture are never forming a whole word, and in his mind completing the word: 'unsichtbar' ('invisible'). There are always parts of the word invisible; it is only the predictive effort of the viewer, who becomes the artist's accomplice by likewise working on the work, that makes the invisible, hence the word 'invisible' become visible.

In hieratic black and white, Schwarz' graphics stage one of

the great paradoxes of art: how can art, whose essential medium is visibility, can make something invisible visible? By indicating? Alluding? Hinting at? Leaving blank?

The viewer gets involved in the picture; in his mind, he is doing what the artist refuses to do, hence making the word 'invisible' become visible. The work of art stays true to itself, in that it never makes the word 'invisible' become visible as a whole.

That might also be considered a confession of artistic modesty: art cannot and shall not be successful in making the invisible visible in its entirety. If it was, it would become obsolete. That neither the artist nor the viewer wants.



### 3. Geheimnisse (Secrets)

Art deciphers reality. And it enciphers it. Sometimes – as can be seen in this graphic – it provides the viewer with the key to do the deciphering himself. Deciphering is laborious, it takes effort, but it is not impossible. When you translate the sequence of grey and white squares by use of the pictorial alphabet you will eventually be able to read (translates here): “Only open secrets are secrets. Others do not exist at all.”

Does that already decipher the work of art? It actually does but only on one level, and perhaps the most trivial one: once you

have successfully deciphered the two sentences and translated the work of art into normal characters you are provided the very next key, which, however, comes with yet another riddle: do the two sentences refer to reality per se? Or just to the secrets entailed in art? If one is inclined to affirm the first, it would mean that art, by means of a code, provides a key to understanding reality as a whole. If one favors the latter, then art would remain held captive in its own cosmos and revolves around itself endlessly. A ‘yes’ to the first option has some merit in that nothing in these two sentences is restricted in any way to art: they refer to secrets in general.

If we take the two sentences literally, then we might be facing a paradox: can open secrets be considered secrets at all? Usually, an open secret is a secret that has stopped being a secret because everybody is in the know: on this view, the fling of a minister with the leader of the opposition is an open secret, or that the NSA goes to great

lengths to spy out our electronic mail. When 'open' is rather read in the way of being 'unveiled' or simply 'visible' then it is difficult to argue that only something can be considered a secret that is open in this sense. After all, a secret that is so very secret that nobody sees it is a secret to no one – it does not exist. With this in mind, isn't art always a secret? The work of art that, despite all efforts to translate it, never completely reveals itself to the viewer?

Deciphering results in enciphering.



#### 4. Lieben – Leben

(Love – Life)

In the German words, everything depends on one 'l'. How life pours into love or love solidifies in life. What direction takes the wavy line that is formed by the column of words – right or left? Is life without an 'l' more active or does it lose its grip? Is the viewer, who once more has to become a reader, required to read the image from top to bottom of from bottom to top? Does love loses its 'l' and thins out to mere life or does it actually gain the 'l', hence superior power? Does the 'l' for the life come from quite another source or does life lose itself once it loses the 'l' that drifts away in a different direction?

Something seemingly insignificant, like an 'l', can be of high importance which, by the way, is no recent invention. As early as the 4th and 5th centuries, the fate of mankind seemed to depend upon an 'l', an iota – that is when Christianity had a blazing row over the issue whether God the Father and Jesus Christ were merely *ὁμοιούσιος* (homiousios), i.e. of a similar substance, or rather *ὁμοούσιος* (homoousios), i.e. of the same substance. Academic councils decrees bound the believers to adhere to the idea of both being of the same substance, for the salvation of one's soul. Therewith, they dismissed the 'l', just like life that tries to manage without loving. Christian-orthodox black and white thinking was ill will in good intentions, while Schwarz' black and white thinking is provocation. The devil is in the detail, not only to Christians. Not least because of that we love him. Who could know better and find a more suited artistic approach than Martin Schwarz?