

Matt Mullican: Banners

Matt Mullican's exhibition surrounds us with huge, colourful banners. We find ourselves immersed in a cornucopia of colours and signs that repeat themselves and cross-reference each other according to some law of their own in an abstract world that we are left to decipher.

This Californian artist is fascinated by pictograms. He uses the poster as a form of expression aimed at the public. Pictograms representing music, theatre, film and painting reveal themselves to us immediately, while others are pure inventions. By placing his name alongside them on the posters, Mullican combines elements of reality with his own subjective world.

Mullican recognised the banner as a particularly effective vehicle for bringing a message to the street. The visual syntax is pared down to the minimum and is instantly legible. What distinguishes his banners from the carriers of national symbols and battle insignia is that they serve to present his models of the world.

Using signs, Mullican has constructed cosmologies and world models. The first cosmology was based on ideas he had conjured as a child. Black figures on red banners represent god, souls, angels and demons. Glass models redolent of scientific instruments illustrate the cycle of human life on its journey between birth and death, heave and hell.

Mullican's second cosmology shows five interrelated worlds: the green world of the elements, the blue world of objects, the yellow world of the arts, the black world of abstract signs, and the red world of subjectivity. The banners bear signs portraying the elements, objects, the sign itself, and the head that represents the subjective mind.

The signs recur, hewn in stone, as figures on a field of play.

Amid the flurry of banners, colours and signs intermingle to generate a combination of meanings.

Dieter Schwarz