

The carpet, Holger Schmidhuber's  
grounded allover canvas  
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The carpet is a work of art, one that we are all used to trampling underfoot, literally. Nobody has any objections to walking all over an old Persian rug; it is only occasionally in museums that visitors carefully circumvent such items, looking for an indication of whether such actions would be welcomed or frowned upon. To tell the truth, there can be no doubt that carpets have become a rarity in museums and they are almost nonexistent in contemporary art. Carpets at museums are confusing because they are an exotic genre with a variety of connotations, such as connotations with both luxury and necessity. And whereas Persian carpets have the indelible stamp of a luxurious lifestyle attached to them, their dubious cousin goes by the illuminating name of "floor covering". And the ambiguity does not end there.

Carpets unquestionably fall into the category of "utilitarian art" but, at the same time, are not furniture, nor are they, as a rule, "design" but a object you can walk on with a character that pretty well corresponds to that of the oil painting on the wall. Hand-knotted carpets are a manifestation of advanced civilization, they are one-offs and thus works of art. However, since coming down from the walls in Modern art, they have undergone a metamorphosis. Today there is no Raphael to design major cycles of pictures on large-format carpets, indeed contemporary art in general has almost completely forgotten about the carpet.

The problem for the carpet is its location – the floor – and although sculptures and objects may be standing or lying on the floor, this is no place for a picture.

Or is it? Yes and no. Of course the floor in general and museum floors in particular are impractical places for art, yet this very characteristic, or non-characteristic, makes them very attractive for contemporary art. Very recently, Museum Wiesbaden sponsored several site-specific works in which the floor has played the central role in the room. These range from Jan Schmidt's 2013 "Markierung#2" (ill. 1), a large-scale floor pattern made of aluminum shavings produced with a saw over a period of three months, to "Zickzack" a work by Bastian Muhr dating from 2016 which was laid out in situ as a chalk "network" on the floor of the museum's project room. Two of Museum Wiesbaden's less recent works are also deliberately located on the floor, these are two pieces by Micha Ullman, "Nachttag" (ill. 2) and "Morgenabend", both dating from 2006. These two works feature fine stones under glass panels which are simultaneously windows to the ground and have the floor framing the material they present. Ulrich Rückriem's floor-based piece entitled "Ergänzungsstück" and produced back in 1972 is a precursor to Schmidhuber's piece – and the earliest of its kind at Museum Wiesbaden – its materials (metal, concrete) making it the diametrical opposite in aesthetic terms, however. Nonetheless, it does share one basic characteristic with Schmidhuber's carpets – the viewer literally "stumbles" upon the work, which tries not to attract attention in its conspicuous inconspicuousness on the floor and thus cannot help but do so. After all, who is expecting a manhole cover or a carpet that we are allowed to walk on at a museum?

Schmidhuber's work can thus be considered part of a group of characteristic items of contemporary art that are located on the ground and as a result encourage a new perception of the surrounding area. What is more, the show with his carpets follows an established exhibition principle at Museum Wiesbaden whereby recent positions are presented along with our collection of Old Masters in order to remind our visitors that all art was once "contemporary". Every one of the works in our collection of what is affectionately described as "Old" Masters was once ultra-modern, sometimes incomprehensible, sometimes lauded from the day it was first presented. Schmidhuber also works on "old" carpets, in other words his works contain, in one and the same piece, that juxtaposition which we seek to achieve by displaying one work by a contemporary artist in the same room as our Old Masters. In this context, decorating an old carpet is not only an act of appropriation but also foster a dialogue with the existing artistic material. In Schmidhuber's case, painting over can also mean "overwriting" a technique in which, strictly speaking, three layers overlap – that of the original object, the carpet, then the line of text (which is normally central and, strictly parallel to the edges of the carpet and has been inscribed onto it), and finally the act of pouring paint which, following Jackson Pollock's methodology, takes possession of the

entirety of the carpet. It is also interesting to note in this context that although Pollock painted his pictures on the ground he intended them to be hung on the walls of art galleries whereas Schmidhuber's pieces are produced on the floor and, as a matter of principle, for the floor. Even though one of his works has already been hung experimentally on the wall in the context of an exhibition, it is obvious that the carpets used by Schmidhuber are "out of place" on the wall, simply because they have the "wrong" object in the right place, i.e. they simply represent a break. Presented on the floor they appear both as straightforward and as doubly confusing, because they form an unusual framework for a picture in an unexpected location. At the same time they lie, brash and as a matter of course, in exactly the place where a carpet that is not a wall hanging should lie – on the floor.

