

*A World of News and Perspective*



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# The Washington Diplomat

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## Light Years Away

*In Goethe Show, Unlikely Pair of Artists Contrast, Complement Each Other*

by Gary Tischler

At first glance, based on what's presented at the Goethe-Institut in the exhibit "Lichtbogen / Arc d'Light," you couldn't find two artists more different than sculptor Wulf Kirschner and painter Nicola Stäglich. Their differences cover age, experience, style, intent, themes, materials, gender, time, space, size and color.

Kirschner is technically described as a steel sculptor, which to some extent is like saying Piet Mondrian makes grids. Kirschner's work is big, solid, muscular, churning and full of danger. It's dark and elemental, but also carefully controlled and powerfully made. The picture of him on his Web site—an artful, beautiful construction itself—suggests a man who does battle with what he makes, arming himself with dangerous tools in the process. Kirschner welds and turns objects into the kinds of things that are the aftermath of fires, bombs and explosions. He's somebody who doesn't always shave, is what you think.



photos: Goethe-Institut

Wulf Kirschner uses welding techniques to create his large steel sculptures, in which he applies lines of melting metal that shimmer with subtle light and powerful solidity.

Kirschner's sculptures—a series of three-dimensional works titled "Quadrat"—are full of secretive colors masked by dark solidity. The sculptor has said that he's fascinated by the elemental, by what water and fire can do to material things and the earth itself. So in some ways, he's like a man who works with his hands, using welding tools, shovels, sharp hammers and axes, but who thinks too much about what he's doing and thus delivers art.

On the flip side, Stäglich's paintings on Plexiglas have an open warmth, a musical quality that seems a direct, if abstract, response to what the eye sees, as well as what the heart feels and the finger makes. Her brushwork seems almost an ebullient way of translating the sun itself. Stäglich is interested in what nature has to offer as opposed to how dangerous it might be, or how overbearing and powerful its natural effects might be.

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There are many other contrasts between the two featured artists: Kirschner was born in 1947 and his list of exhibitions and pieces make for a book all by themselves, while Stäglich, born in 1973, has a catalogue that amounts to a small pamphlet. Nevertheless, it is full of bold photos of her work, with colors that practically escape from between the pages.

It's easy to see how individual exhibitions of each artist's work might appear, and even what kind of effect they would have on the viewer. But at the Goethe-Institut's dual show, a nifty idea has produced transformative results. By putting the works of Kirschner and Stäglich together, often side by side—ostensibly to explore the effects of light—something interesting happens. Although the two artists work in different media, with obviously different results, a conversation starts and connections are made. It isn't just about light anymore—it's about color and the essential differences and how they relate to each other.

Stäglich, for instance, uses brightly colored brushstrokes—blues, yellows, oranges—put onto translucent Plexiglas, with the result of creating shadows on the wall and a space of light between the glass and wall. This is high-energy, musical work—transparencies that sing with both light and color.



Nicola Stäglich's paintings on Plexiglas have an airy, open warmth accentuated by bold bursts of color that radiate with translucent light.

For his "Quadrats," Kirschner uses welding to make big and small sculptures, to which he applies lines of melting metal from electrodes. There's electricity going on between Kirschner's works and Stäglich's transparencies. It's almost as if they're getting to know each other.

In short, sparks fly: Stäglich's colors seem to activate the small blotches of color in Kirschner's quadrants, sizzling here and there as if they are indeed showered with light. Conversely, the solidity, darkness and sheer impenetrable heft of Kirschner's sculptures steady Stäglich's transparencies, grounding what are essentially airy works that appear fragile, willowy and watery.

These two artists show off the effects of light in a major way, transforming each other's works so that they become both complimentary and complementary, inspiring and protective, like two separate poems in praise of the same goddess, jointly given.

*Gary Tischler is a contributing writer for The Washington Diplomat.*

### Lichtbogen / Arc d'Light

through Jan. 31

**Goethe-Institut**

812 7th St., NW.

For more information, please call (202) 289-1200 or visit

[www.goethe.de/ins/us/was](http://www.goethe.de/ins/us/was).

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