

HEINRICH BOBST

By Carol Nold

The origin of the universe, earth and life are questions that have occupied Heinrich Bobst (1946) since his young years. His way of thinking has been influenced by natural scientists like Charles Darwin, Teilhard de Chardin and Jacques Monod. So it was logical for him to pursue studies in chemistry. His capability of thinking in three dimensions was very helpful. Were he not a chemist, he would probably have become an architect.

His creativity and the will to think independently strengthened his desire to become an entrepreneur. His affinity to art and design accompanied him throughout his professional life. So when he finished his career as an entrepreneur and chemist he enthusiastically turned his energies to art. His scientific way of thinking flowed uninteruptedly into his artistic concepts. Bobst's occupation with time, space and existence found its logical continuation.

We know through biochemistry that seemingly identical molecules which, due to internal asymmetry are not congruent, may or may not be biologically active. Two such molecules mirror each other. A topic that was of eminent importance for Bobst in his career as a chemist and that now occupies him in a completely different context.

The wondrous manifestation of light as waves or particles is unimaginable without space and time. And—life and our existence are inconceivable without light. Beauty and art exist through light. The manifold appearances of light and its interaction with other forms of energy and matter fascinate both science and the arts. Reflections, absorption, transmission, diffraction, polarisation, refraction and interferences are only a few variations of the behaviour of light.

For Bobst, dichroism is one of the various effects of light that is of particular interest. Dichroic coatings consist of extra thin films, which reflect the incoming light, partially on their surface, but also on the interface to the base material. Thus interference effects result which make these surfaces appear in different spectral colours—depending on the perspective of the viewer. In nature such effects appear for example in mother-of-pearl. If the base material is transparent as with glass or acrylic glass, dichroic coatings may occur partly reflecting or partly transparent and change their colour according to the point of view of the spectator. Dichroic glasses find application in special optical equipment and also in architecture.

Exactly these versatile properties of dichroic coated glass and acrylic glass are utilised by Heinrich Bobst to create objects of different forms and sizes. He generates them primarily in his head and fabricates them in computer controlled high precision laser cutters exclusively as unique pieces. These objects are very difficult to describe and even more so to photograph. They have to be seen in reality. He succinctly calls them space objects and leaves a possible interpretation to the spectator and his viewpoint. His choice of shapes may tend towards minimalism, but is more closely related to concrete constructive art.

These artworks may elegantly close the circle between science, engineering and the arts—interdisciplinary—but without blurring the borders.

Heinrich Bobst works in his Art Lab in Zürich and lives nearby.

