

Bettina Pousttchi

Progressions

Feb 8 –
May 5, 2024

MEDIA ORIENTATION
February 6, 2024, 11 am

OPENING
February 7, 2024, 6 to 9 pm

Curated by Sabine Schaschl

Museum Haus Konstruktiv is opening the new exhibition year with a solo show on Bettina Pousttchi (b. 1971 in Mainz, Germany). Sculptures, photographic works and wall-mounted objects are on display. The exhibition provides deep insight into the multi-layered oeuvre of this artist, who is well-known for her monumental site-specific facade installations in public spaces. The majority of the presented works were specially created for the exhibition. In various formal arrangements, they emphasize the processual and the fluid, while reflecting on social change.

With her sculptures, which she develops for indoor and outdoor spaces, Bettina Pousttchi makes reference to the architectural, social and cultural implications of their respective settings. For several years now, she has been using objects that structure the public space and characterize the physical experience of the urban space, including crash barriers, crowd barriers, bicycle racks and tree protection barriers. By applying techniques such as bending or pressing, and reconceiving their coloring, Pousttchi relieves these everyday objects of their regulatory function and detaches them from their context of meaning, turning them into signs of change, fluid structures and dissolving boundaries. With her serial use of the source material, the artist conceptually draws on minimal art, and some of her objects can also remind the observer of Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades.

The main focus of the Haus Konstruktiv exhibition is on Pousttchi's sculptures: artworks made using steel, ceramics and light. These are complemented by new photographic works, which also play a key role in this internationally renowned artist's multifaceted oeuvre. In the large hall on the first floor of the museum, the show begins with large-scale sculptures from the *Vertical Highways* series: upright crash barriers in bold colors, which have been mechanically bent, compressed and wedged into one another, such that the abstract forms come across like oversized dancing figures in the space. Some of the objects have additional titles, like *A28* or *A33*. These are the names of German motorways, hinting at the original purpose of the material. This series is taken further by the *Progressions*: new sculptures, presented in a museum for the first time, which lend their name to the exhibition. Crash

barriers of different lengths are lined up in ascending order, thus reinforcing the impression of movement, an aspect typical of this artist's sculptural approach. The color spectrum ranges from bold red and yellow, reminiscent of traffic signs' coloring, to more neutral tones like anthracite and ivory.

The *Directions* series in the cabinets on the fourth floor shows another facet of the artist's engagement with structures that bring order to public spaces. For this, Pousttchi developed visual templates that were cut out of steel and color-coated. Inspired by road signs, these sharp-edged cut-outs do indeed seem to guide the public into the spaces like signposts. The objects oscillate between art and signage, although in the real world, there are hardly ever this many signposts in such a small space. So many viable directions, so many possibilities.

On the second floor, sculptures are brought together from various groups of works dating back as far as the early 2010s. The three white-coated *Double Monuments for Flavin and Tatlin* comprise neon tubes combined with white powder-coated crowd barriers, stacked to form towers several meters high. As the title suggests, the imposing, yet astonishingly delicate structures refer to two iconic 20th-century artworks: the 1920 utopian architectural model *Monument to the Third International* by the constructivist Vladimir Tatlin on one hand and Dan Flavin's famous 1960s light works on the other. The latter, with his series of works entitled "monument" for V. Tatlin, created his own homage to Tatlin, a key representative of the Russian avant-garde. Pousttchi incorporates this artistic setting and takes it further by giving her artwork an additional level of reference: While Flavin usually arranged his fluorescent tubes symmetrically, Pousttchi's monuments are interpretations with more artistic freedom. The forces that have acted on the barriers are clearly evident. The altered forms and the individually positioned light sources come across as defamiliarizing effects, like a questioning contribution to the increasingly loud discourse on deciding which monuments still have a right to exist in public spaces today. In this sense, Pousttchi's sculptures are not only reminders, but also encourage us to reflect on the role of monuments within our culture of remembrance.

The *Double Monuments* are complemented by other sculptures made from street-related objects. Three of these constitute deformed tree protection barriers that wrap around each other in dynamic motion. The forms are gentle and flowing, much like their coloring in subtly nuanced shades of green. Reinforced by the appealing titles *John, Marie* and *David* (2018–2019), which come from the names of Berlin streets, they seem impressively anthropomorphic – similar to the dancing crash barriers on the first floor. *Felix* (2018), made of interlocking bicycle racks, has a somewhat more ambivalent effect. With its highly polished stainless-steel surface, this object attracts attention, but at the same time, the reflections cause it to visually blend into the surrounding space. With this, and the other objects presented here, the artist, as an astute observer of her environment, is commenting on the rapid changes in the urban space.

The presentation in this room is rounded off by a series of ceramic pieces (*Earthworks*, 2023), which demonstrate how the artist refers to architecture in her practice. The individual handmade modules made of fired clay bring to mind the ceramics used in construction. After all, as a natural material, clay is one of the oldest building materials in history. Pousttchi combines each pair of elongated convex shapes in such a way that the sharp-edged long sides face each other, while the rounded sides close off the new form on the outside. With silver and blue glazing, the wall reliefs now oscillate between two- and three-dimensionality, and represent a continuation of a modular principle that characterizes many of this artist's works.

In the columned hall on the fourth floor, the artist's latest series of works, a combination of photography and painting under the title *Horizons* (2024), is presented for the first time. With clearly evident brushwork, the canvases have been primed by

hand in light shades of blue, yellow and violet, and subsequently printed on by means of a silk-screen technique. The abstract motifs can be traced back to the highly acclaimed photo installation *Echo*, for which the artist covered the facade of Temporäre Kunsthalle Berlin in 2009/2010 with a digitally generated photomontage on paper posters, depicting the Palace of the Republic, which had recently been demolished. By impressively combining photography and architecture, she raised questions about the handling of the urban space, history and memory. In the subsequent years, she realized a number of large-format installations that expanded on the traditional understanding of photography and deepened her interest in questions regarding its materiality in the digital age. For *Horizons*, Pousttchi photographed sections of the paper posters that had been hanging in Berlin's urban space for six months. The traces of weathering caused by the forces of nature during the winter months are superimposed on the original motif. Thus, on several levels, the photographs are traces of the real, as well as containers of temporality and memory – a central theme in the medium of photography and in the oeuvre of this artist.

The work *Shanghai Window* (2023) is based on photographs that Pousttchi has taken of architectural elements from the international art deco movement. Digitally reworked to create a distinct pattern, this ornamental structure of net-like lines was recently applied to a window in Shanghai's urban space for an exhibition project by the artist. The hybrid forms (Pousttchi herself calls them 'transnational patterns', as they combine the architectural vocabulary of forms from different cultural domains) reveal links to the architectural history of this Chinese metropolis, which was influenced by European art deco during the opening-up of the empire in the mid-19th century. At the same time, the print's color gradient, from yellow to orange to brown, imitates the natural progression of the sun over the course of a day. On multiple levels, Pousttchi explores the fluid boundaries between cultures with this work.

Bettina Pousttchi studied at Kunstakademie Düsseldorf and completed the Whitney Independent Study Program in New York. She lives in Berlin. Pousttchi realized numerous institutional solo exhibitions around the world, including: *Constellations*, Museum of Contemporary Art Shanghai (2023); *World Time Clock*, Aurora Museum, Shanghai (2023); *Fluidity*, Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck, Remagen (2021); *In Recent Years*, Berlinische Galerie – Museum of Modern Art, Berlin (2019); *Panorama*, KINDL – Centre for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2019); *Protection*, Kunstmuseum St. Gallen (2018); *Suspended Mies*, The Arts Club of Chicago (2017); *World Time Clock*, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C. (2016/2017); *Double Monuments*, The Phillips Collection, Washington D.C. (2016); *Drive Thru Museum*, Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas (2014); *Framework*, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt (2012); *World Time Clock*, Kunsthalle Basel (2011); *Echo*, Temporäre Kunsthalle Berlin (2009/2010).

In the summers of 2022 and 2023, the Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn presented *The Curve*, a large-scale interactive installation by Bettina Pousttchi, on the roof of the museum. A sculpture over six meters high from the *Vertical Highways* series has been permanently installed at Berlin Central Station since April 2023.

MEDIATION PROGRAM

OPENING

February 7, 6 to 9 pm

Speaking from 6.30 pm: Andreas Durisch, President of the Foundation for Constructivist, Concrete and Conceptual Art, and Sabine Schaschl, Director of Museum Haus Konstruktiv.

PUBLIC GUIDED TOUR IN ENGLISH

February 28, 6.15 pm

Further guided tours in German: Wednesdays at 6.15 pm and Sundays at 11.45 am

For more information and events, visit: hauskonstruktiv.ch

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