

Bettina Pousttchi
Protection

17 February to 17 June 2018

Under the title *Protection*, the internationally renowned artist Bettina Pousttchi (*1971) has created a setting of new works specifically for the art area of the Lokremise. A characteristic feature of the works presented in the exhibition is Pousttchi's examination of the physical conditions of the given space and the social, cultural, and sociopolitical factors that determine and structure it. At the formal and material intersection of photography and sculpture, the Berlin-based artist explores the connection between systems of time and space in a global perspective. In a close cooperation with the Swiss author and radio dramatist Andreas Sauter, she references his play *Lugano Paradiso*, which was created for the Theater St. Gallen and will be premiered in a production by Jonas Knecht on 22 March 2018 in the Lokremise. Pousttchi's continual examination of the media conventions of political and economic representation shows close ties to the subject matter of the play, whose starting point is a scandal involving secret government files which profoundly shook many Swiss citizens' trust in the state in the late 1980s.

Framework, 2018

The entrance area features wall reliefs made of fired clay from the *Frameworks* series, whose materials and form point to the period when the Lokremise was built, since glazed ceramics played a major role in Jugendstil buildings in the early twentieth century. This gives the room a very unified appearance and connects to the grid shapes of the industrial windows. The form of the glazed reliefs recalls Moorish ceramics with their filigree openwork structures. However, Pousttchi developed the geometric shape from the structures of half-timbered buildings in Frankfurt. In this way, distance and proximity come together as a cross-cultural identity. The radical minimalist order of the individual panels is broken by their sensual materiality and the deviations from basic geometric shapes. The material used is not recognizable at first, and reveals itself only on closer examination.

Sculptures, 2017–18

Bettina Pousttchi works with commonly found, functional structures that are used in cities around the world. Roadside posts, bicycle racks, and, in her latest series, tree guards are the starting point for her sculptures, which are shaped by bending and squeezing. This process leaves their original function behind and makes them a witness of an event that we inevitably associate with our own experience in the urban space. This makes the works very dynamic and gives them a cinematic and sequential impression. In their altered form, they can also be read as symbols.

Already through the context of their use, Pousttchi's sculptures have a strong anthropological connection. The objects are also recognizable in their altered form, and the forces that might have affected the object can be reconstructed. In the sequence of forms, the powder-coated tree guards painted in three different green tones look light and lively, their lines reminiscent of dynamic movements of dancers. The volume of the sculpture results entirely from the line and then differentiates itself "almost unnoticeably" with the industrial colors, which are used primarily for machine paints—"shifting between olive tones, the Cold War, and the color of a forest in a nature reserve," as the *Almanach der Farben* (Almanac of Colors) states.

Selected sculptures attain a shiny surface solely through a long polishing process. This causes their sculptural form to disappear in the light and also creates unusual and fascinating reflections. The result is a unique viewing experience: real and yet from another world. However, the titles with German first names point back to the original context of our everyday environment: they are taken from Berlin street names, and so they come from the same everyday context in which tree guards, street posts, and bike racks are also found.

World Trade, 2018

The focus of the exhibition is a photo installation showing the former Twin Towers at the World Trade Center in New York. This double icon of contemporary architecture by Detroit architect Minoru Yamasaki (1912–1986) is of course first and foremost linked to 9/11, the devastating terrorist attack on this symbol of global trade. Pousttchi thus explicitly addresses social and political issues, which play a central role in her work. According to the artist, 9/11 profoundly and irrevocably changed the way we travel as well as our need for protection more than any other event. The exhibition title *Protection* draws a connection to the sculptural objects that are primarily used for protection on streets in public spaces as part of an increasingly sophisticated transit network.

Pousttchi always incorporates historical and sociological aspects into her work and explores the connection between systems of time and space in a global perspective. The artist became known for her large-scale photographs on buildings in public spaces, which cover the entire outer surface of the building. The facade of the Palace of the Republic, the East German parliament, was resurrected in 2009 and 2010 on the outside of the temporary Kunsthalle Berlin, prominently located in the center of the city. With the twenty-one-meter-long prints in *World Trade*, she brings the facades of two world-famous buildings into an interior setting. The intersection between the photographic image and architecture is revealed and gives the visitors a new awareness of the underlying mechanisms.

Text: Roland Wäspe, Lorenz Wiederkehr