

Mariella Mosler. KNOT FOLLIES

September 19 – November 14, 2019

In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface [...].⁽¹⁾

The dialectical interplay between the two-dimensional surface and the three-dimensional space is a central pictorial method of Mariella Mosler, who is presenting her second exhibition in the Drawing Room. These dialectics are also operative in the ornament, an aesthetic core element in the works of the Hamburg-based artist who teaches as a professor in Stuttgart. It runs through her entire art production in various incarnations, materials, and dimensions. Mosler became internationally renowned with ephemeral, geometrically structured floor reliefs comprised of quartz sand, which were shown in the context of Catherine David's *documenta X* in Kassel and other venues. As a stylized, abbreviated, reality-charged symbol language, ornaments translate fundamental phenomena of existence into a rapport of recurring forms. Decorative patterns harbor deeper layers that make reference to the origins and continuity of systems and genealogies of various kinds. This also applies to the phenomenon of the knot, which functions both as a historical, interlaced ornamental figure and as a present-day model for future-oriented calculations in the realms of higher mathematics, physics, biology, and chemistry. In the exhibition *Knot Follies*, which assembles new pieces by Mariella Mosler from three work complexes, the knot is entangled in an aesthetic game, which—as the term "folly" implies—may ultimately well lead to *non*-sense. The fact that "folly" also refers to ornate architectural structures that served as multi-coded accents in English landscape gardens of the 18th century is no coincidence.

Knot Follies is also the title of a group of three-dimensional neon sculptures suspended from the ceiling that directly refer to the knot models of mathematical topology. According to the corresponding mathematical theory, "true" knots have at least three alternating under- and over-crossings and cannot be undone. Whereas "unknots," in turn, can be reduced to a simple closed loop in an unknotted state. The luminous



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light signs in the air appear to be multiply intertwined knots; yet these are resolvable, and thus in a strict sense "unknots."

Here, the symbol-like two-dimensional form turns into a spatial entity, whereas the individual shapes of the *Knot Follies* simultaneously manifest themselves through the immaterial medium of light and dissolve again, when it is absent. This interplay between presence and absence, flatness and plasticity, surface and depth is also intrinsic to Mosler's mirror works that are interspersed with shimmering vertical stripes. Presented in the exhibition under the title *Sea Change* (literally denoting a transformation of the sea and idiomatically referring to a decisive upheaval or shift, the term phonetically also implies the "seeing" of change), these remain visually in motion despite their stationary condition.

The mirror works further develop the artist's earlier reflecting, silver-striped wall coverings, which allude both to the presentation of art in the bourgeois salons of the 19th century and to the mirroring curtain wall facades of modernism that have shaped metropolitan architecture



worldwide in a programmatic departure from the ornamental form. Like a haptic, palpable grid, interrupted upon closer observation by small irregularities and smudges and glittering in more deeply inscribed oceanic blue tones, the silver stripes overlay the heterotopic space of the mirror of which the French philosopher Michel Foucault has claimed that *"it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there."*⁽²⁾ Again, here an expansion of the surface into the third dimension is activated. Even if the realities on both individual sides of the mirror have different states of being, they are inseparably interconnected in the endless loop of mutual conditionality.

The vertical stripe structure of the mirror works reappears as a background grid in the collages, which Mosler is now presenting for the first time. The motifs that are assembled into associative ornamental tableaus in the collages stem from an archive she has compiled over many years, which includes printed matter from museums and other art and cultural institutions, leaflets of charitable organizations, as well as images depicting the artist's private home and working spheres.

In a nutshell, the collages portray Mosler's personal socialization and living environment as well as the collective bourgeois educational horizon of our (western) cultural history and present situation. These "patterns" that have formed the artist's existence, as well as our own, implicitly contain a critique of our hegemonic, imperial strategies of usurpation from which the material "treasures" and value systems of the capital-governed societies of the west have emerged. Mariella Mosler counters the questionability of a linear, progress-oriented concept of thinking, as it has established itself as a global economic consensus, with the idea of an inter-temporal "interweaving," a multi-dimensional texture and intertextuality that unfolds in the dynamic, mutable network of her art, spanning across various times, spaces, and media.



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- (1) Michel Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, from: *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité*, Oct., 1984 ("Des Espaces Autres," March 1967, translated from the French by Jay Miskowiec): <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf> (Sept. 30, 2019).
(2) Ibid.

From 1985 to 1993, Mariella Mosler (*1962 in Oldenburg) studied visual art at the Hamburg University of Fine Arts with Bernhard Johannes Blume and Stanley Brouwn and philosophy at the University of Hamburg. In 1997, she participated in the documenta X in Kassel.

Mosler lives and works in Hamburg and Stuttgart, where she has been teaching as Professor of Sculpture and Ceramics at the State Academy of Fine Arts, Stuttgart, since 2004. She has received numerous stipends and awards.

Solo exhibitions of her work have been presented among other institutions by the Württembergische Kunstverein in Stuttgart, the Sprengel Museum in Hannover, the Hamburger Kunsthalle, the Overbeck Gesellschaft, Lübeck, the Kunsthalle Göppingen, the Ernst Barlach Haus, Hamburg, the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, the Städtische Galerie Ravensburg, the Kunsthalle Gießen, and the Herzliya Museum of Art in Tel Aviv.

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