

Small is Beautiful

Jan Albers, Katja Aufleger, Matti Braun, Mathias Deutsch,
Henrik Eiben, Jirí Kovanda, Melissa Kretschmer, Mariella Mosler,
Davina Semo, Jenni Tischer, Robert Waters

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Under the title "Small is Beautiful", the first DRAWING ROOM exhibition incorporates the positions of eleven contemporary artists, most of whom present small-format works along minimalist and conceptual lines.

Referring to aesthetic issues of the 1960s, the works by Jan Albers, born 1971 in Wuppertal, include coloured pencil drawings, sculptures and "constructed images". His works, which project relief-like into space, hover somewhere between orderliness and opulence. His artistic process, which frequently involves partial destruction of the work, induces a new composition to arise from the chaos.

Also spectacular are the transparent objects from the series "Bang!" by Katja Aufleger (*1983, Oldenburg). In specially made, mouth-blown glass vessels, various chambers are filled with liquid chemicals which could cause an explosion should they ever mix together. These magnificent yet dangerous sculptures are seductive, luring viewers into the unknown like Sirens. Her works on film and her experimental models also make things visible and audible which surprise and fascinate us – leaving lasting impressions.

The sensitive silk paintings, prints, objects and installations of Cologne inhabitant Matti Braun (*1968, Berlin) are often based on anecdotes or the personal and cultural histories of people, developed in abstract form and with the artist's own unique formal and conceptual touch. Braun's work focuses on aspects of the exchange between cultures and the misunderstandings which can arise thereby. His most recent works on raw silk result from his preoccupation with the arts and crafts of foreign peoples, for example the batiks of Java. The structures are abstract, yet in the eye of the beholder they may also coalesce into landscapes, mysterious worlds, or swirling clouds.

Mathias Deutsch (*1967 in Rendsburg) creates large-format works depicting opulent, detailed pictorial worlds teeming with a sumptuous proliferation of human and animal beings. In the work on view here, "The End of a Dollhouse" (2013), a collection of apparitions, comic babies, clowns, living dolls and figures with masks and claws assemble in a gruesome *Danse Macabre* on the overflowing canvas. The scattered whirlpools or propellers lend the work a sparkling drive, which veritably catapults the viewer's gaze into the third dimension.

In comparison, Henrik Eiben's (*1975, Tokyo) pictures are rather quiet. His drawings, objects and photographs reference the minimal art of the 1960s. Yet unlike the formally straightforward arrangements of Carl Andre or Donald Judd, his clear surfaces of stretched material or painted canvas are not austere, perfect compositions, but rather always include an aspect of irritation. He is able to bring their precise construction into disequilibrium just by adding a slight twist.

The Czech Jiří Kovanda, born in Prague in 1952, is surely one of the exhibition's best known artists, having become famous for his minimalistic public performances in Prague during the 1970s. His inconspicuous interventions, such as "Divadlo (Theatre)" of 1976, involve commonplace gestures, movements or actions. The complete absence of pathos and spectacle is necessary for the "invisible performance" to succeed. No interaction with passers-by takes place, and urban space shrinks to the size of a stage spotlight. The finished product is not the performance or installation itself, but rather a black and white photograph and a text. These are the reverberations of a silent transformation.

The American artist Melissa Kretschmer (*1962, Santa Monica) takes a position between painting and sculpture in her conceptual works. Colour is important, but is always applied very reductively in her interaction with the materials. In this Californian's work, various materials and their inherent textures, such as plywood, graphite, paper and beeswax, unite in a sensuous interplay between translucence, flatness, and gloss. The geometric structure, consisting of layers of heterogeneous substances, permits these substances to interact as equals, additionally revealing chance occurrences and errors in the matrix: erasures, drips, blemishes and cracks that debunk the assumed precision.

Mariella Mosler, born 1962 in Oldenburg, became well-known for her floor reliefs of geometrically arranged quartz sand, shown at documenta X in Kassel among other places. The artist often works with ephemeral materials. They last only for the duration of the presentation before disintegrating, corroding, or being carried away. Thus for example her "Love Hearts" sculptures (2005), consisting of silver-covered, heart-shaped potatoes, are simultaneously transitory and eternal. Shown in the exhibition "Small is Beautiful" are four of her statues made of sugar, which have been exposed to the wind and weather on her studio windowsill. Sweet seduction versus deterioration, decay and death – this is a classic vanitas motif that Mosler has taken up here.

Davina Semo also creates sculpture from diverse materials, but primarily chooses "stronger" substances such as concrete and metal. This artist, born in Washington in 1981 and currently living in New York, deals with her own adventures and relationships – specifically her personal experiences and wishes – and with survival in a hectic, uncertain, and occasionally dangerous world. With titles such as "They eyed her drunkenly, they looked at her boots" or "If you get any prettier you won't be safe around me", her strong artistic expressions are full of stories which grant viewers insights into Semo's day-to-day world.

The works of Jenni Tischer (*1979, Heidelberg) are also created from diverse materials. Using wood, paper, cloth, twine, thread, sewing needles and glass, the Berlin artist constructs sculptural installations reminiscent of stage sets. In a complex and subversive manner, the artist devotes herself to themes of production, authorship and feminism. Thereby she references modernist tendencies in contemporary art, yet simultaneously questions them.

The Canadian Robert Waters (*1974, London/Ontario) explores the potential for human evolution in post-industrial societies, by relating aesthetic experience to human existence. He is interested in exploring the basis of the human desire for transcending biological limitations. His work "The Ecstasy of St. Sebastian" reflects our precarious relationship with the institution of the church, and our systems of belief.

Christiane Opitz
(Translation by Sean Gallagher)