

Herald St

Trix + Robert Haussmann have staged an illusory installation within the gallery. It's sudden and sharp, straight lines that draw a boundary, and yet the space within is opened up and reflected back in a kind of warped perception. In homage to Gerrit Rietveld, designer of the iconic Red and Blue Chair in 1917, the armchair has been stripped back to its essential shapes and primary colours. Yet, in a move infused with typical irony, the Haussmanns have overturned the Bauhaus's gospel 'form follows function'. This is furniture, but its use is in its reference points, touchstones throughout art and design history, blown up and exaggerated to almost humorous, swollen proportions.

The wife-and-husband duo have worked for two years on their exhibition at Herald St, their first solo show in London. The new work continues their longstanding subversion of historical design ideals, from 16th-century ostentatious Mannerism to the extreme simplification of early 20th-century Modernism. On the one hand, anything unnecessary has been removed in a bid for total rationalisation; on the other hand, the chairs are plump and sleek, implying plush luxury. They call this oxymoron 'lush sparseness': an acknowledgement of the angular proportions of their teachers (some of whom were directly involved in the Bauhaus and De Stijl movements), reinterpreted as illusion.

As solid as the furniture appears, their three-dimensional achievement is distorted – annulled, even – by the presence of mirrors. Depth and proportion are made virtual, and the object is dematerialised, made even further untouchable. The imitation of their project is laid bare and reflected back in a game of true or false. The Haussmanns' project indeed functions like a game (and has incorporated games, like their Log-O-Rhythmic Slide Rule of 10,000 word combinations) – that doesn't just appropriate Bauhaus motifs for pleasure, but asks visitors to reflect on the past 100 years. What has changed in our architecture, in our living rooms, in our politics – and what has not?

This is what the artists term 'disturbed reality', to signify the disturbance of form by ornament – and yet our post-war, post-Bauhaus present also feels particularly disturbed these days. Their pairing of materials simultaneously disturbs and adds to the sense of artifice: the mirror's infinite flatness is magnified next to thick-piled carpet. Monochrome stripes literally disturb your eyeball's view, teasing the edge of aesthetic satisfaction. How we perceive the space around us is called into question, as well as the values we ascribe to objects. Trix + Robert Haussmann reveal these illusions we create for ourselves, simultaneously undermining the strict order of design and celebrating the artifice within our sense of reality.

Text by Phoebe Cripps

Robert Haussmann (b. 1931 Zurich, CH) and Trix Haussmann (b. 1933 Chur, CH) live and work in Zurich.

Solo exhibitions include: The Log-O-Rhythmic Slide Rule: A Retrospective, Nottingham Contemporary, Nottingham (2018), KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2018), ETH Zurich, Zurich (2018); Reflexion und Transparenz, Kunsthaus Bregenz, Bregenz (2015); Robert and Trix Haussmann, Friedrich Kuhn, in collaboration with Herald St, London, Tanya Leighton, Berlin, DE (two-person 2014); Mirror-Spiegel, Fri Art, Fribourg (2014); Hard Hat, Geneva (2013); The Log-O-Rhythmic Slide Rule, Studiolo, Zurich (2012).

Recent selected group shows include: READYMADES BELONG TO EVERYONE, curated by Fredi Fischli and Niels Olsen, Swiss Institute, New York (2018); Theater Objects. A Stage for Architecture and Art, LUMA Foundation, Zurich (2014); Postmodernism: Style and Subversion 1970-1990, Landesmuseum, Zurich (2012), Victoria & Albert Museum, London (2011).