

# GALERIE NÄCHST ST. STEPHAN ROSEMARIE SCHWARZWÄLDER

SONIA LEIMER Owing Awning

26 JUN – 21 AUG 2021

Opening: Saturday, June 26, 2021

Soft Opening: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

How can we establish networks within society in an urban environment by interacting with other people every day? How are social spaces created, and who decides in what way and for how long they can be used? Sonia Leimer's current works visualize the "social capital" in cities, to use a term coined by the urbanist and activist Jane Jacobs in the 1960s. Leimer's fourth solo exhibition in the gallery revolves around urban development and direct democracy – relevant issues in society that are more pressing today than ever before. These new works offer us the chance to explore the key questions of who occupies the urban realm, and what scope of action these spaces allow.

In this light, the rooms of the gallery act as places where urban life is condensed. Five large free-standing objects, which oscillate between sculpture and architecture, form a kind of obstacle course that guides visitors through the first two rooms. Canopy-like structures at eye level are each mounted on top of three concrete pillars and poles. The artist assembled these canopies, which resemble the awnings in front of businesses and other buildings, out of geometric construction elements made of robust acrylic fabric and PVC. These public places invite us to stop and stay for a moment or two. They offer protection from the sun, shelter from the rain, or they provide a place to take a short break. Free from any spatial or functional context, Leimer's capricious pseudo-canopy objects seem to stake a territorial claim in the gallery, while creating a social and architectural space at the same time. By interacting with the objects, visitors assume the role of promenaders who take up and occupy the space for a while. These *Awnings*, which is also the title of this group of installation-like works, thus delineate a gray area in which there is a push and pull between inside and outside, and between public and personal appropriation.

The temporary appropriation of urban spaces is also a theme in Leimer's work *Sharpen*, which consists of a video and several drawings made by the artist. These images that she observed during an artist residency in New York capture ephemeral situations in urban spaces. The video presents a collage-like portrait of a citizen of New York City named Chung Man Keung, who worked as a knife sharpener and cobbler, but also made drawings. In the short film made with a mobile phone, we are shown the only proof of his existence: remnants of his works on paper that he attached to the gray outer walls of a building. We also meet Eugenia Lai, a friend of the artist's who lives in New York, who talks about visiting the old man, who appears to have disappeared. The video also shows drawings that Chung made by copying images from newspapers. In this personal portrait of a man's precarious job and life on the margins, Leimer creates a memorable narrative of structural transformations and the vibrant social fabric of Chung's neighborhood. The installation heightens our awareness of how fragile and difficult existential and economic conditions in urban environments can be – and how personal spaces, which are the foundations of a city's "social capital," are often erased overnight and disappear entirely, without a trace.

SONIA LEIMER was born 1977 in Meran, Italy. She lives and works in Vienna. She studied architecture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. She was invited to participate in the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale and the Vienna Biennale for Change at the MAK Museum für angewandte Kunst (Museum for Applied Arts) in Vienna. She took part in the Vladivostok Biennale for Visual Arts in 2017, the Moscow Biennale in 2013 and 2015, and the Manifesta 7 in Rovereto in 2008. Selected solo exhibitions: MAN\_Museo d'Arte Provincia di Nuoro, Sardinia (2021); KOW, Berlin (2021); Museion, Bolzano (2020); Soravia – The Brick, Vienna (2020); Arbeiterkammer Wien, Vienna (2019); ISCP, International Studio & Curatorial Program, New York City (2019); Galerie im Taxispalais, Innsbruck (2017); Commonwealth & Council, Los Angeles (2017); Austrian Cultural Forum, Istanbul (2017); LAMOA Museum of Art, Los Angeles (2014); Artothek, Cologne (2012); MAK Center for Art and Architecture, Los Angeles (2012); Kunstverein Basis, Frankfurt/Main (2011); Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg (2011).