

Herald St

Herald St is pleased to announce *Mirrors*, an exhibition of sculptures by Swiss artists Trix and Robert Haussmann. Initially presented at Fri Art Kunsthalle Fribourg in 2014, the installation consists of seven human-scaled works placed in the corners, on the floor, and on the walls of the gallery's Museum St premises. Each piece is faceted with mirrors, a medium which has become synonymous with the architect-designer-artist duo's academically rigorous yet playfully joyous practice.

Geometrically anthropomorphic, formalistically chaotic, dynamically illusionistic, lyrically minimal, poetically visionary... These comprise some of the ten thousand possible, and often paradoxical, combinations of the *log-O-rithmic slide rule* (1980) which, alongside the artists' manifesto *Manierismo Critico* (Critical Mannerism) (1981) serves as a foundational text-based work in their celebrated postmodern practice. The husband-and-wife pair formed a professional relationship in 1967 with the establishment of their *Allgemeine Entwurfsanstalt* (General Design Institute) which upended the prevalent Bauhaus mantra of 'form follows function' and embraced a 'critically-ironic' approach. During a pivotal voyage to Italy, the couple were exposed to designers such as Ettore Sottsass and members of the Memphis Group, and became inspired by the radical experimentation they encountered. The Haussmanns saw this spirit as part of a lineage tracing back to sixteenth century Mannerism, a moment when existing formal principles were called into question. With the development of their own Critical Mannerism, they vowed to scrutinise Modernist ideals and embrace conceptions of wonder, mystery, and ornament, always with a sense of self-irony.

One of the Haussmanns' earliest, seminal pieces which incorporates mirrors is *Lehrstück IV* (Seven codes) (1978), a reimagining of the United Nations building painted with a trompe-l'oeil striped fabric draped over the top. Since then, the material has become a sort of signature for the duo, filling hundreds of their projects, from lounge furniture to *Enigma* (2020), the last work created before Robert's death in 2021. The medium was favoured by the artists for its optical 'dissolution' of space – its capacity to expand a room into the infinite and disturb its hierarchy, value, and order. As the curator of the Haussmanns' survey at Fri Art, Balthazar Lovay, stated, 'the space is shattered, the view is hampered by the concertinaing of new architectural elements. The transparency and the authority of the "pure" comprehensible space is perverted.'

Mirrors was conceived specifically for Fri Art, in response to an invitation by Lovay to redesign a gallery within the museum. Its first iteration disrupted a white-cube, wooden-floored room, and in its second outing the pieces dynamise Museum St's townhouse interior, reflecting its marble tiles, carved cornices, and decorative bannisters. The installation blurs the lines between architecture, design, and art, and simultaneously subverts each discipline, forming a *Gesamtkunstwerk* which breaks the functionality of the space. Only one of the seven pieces is installed on the wall – others lay outstretched on the floor, lean lugubriously against the wall, and recess into corners, an area previously claimed by gilded religious icon paintings and Malevich's Black Square (1915). A two-meter column has a slight disarming tilt, and a sharp pyramid protrudes into the viewer's space. The sculptures in *Mirrors* are at once hard and industrial, and anthropomorphic, ambiguous, and alive. Their rigid geometry and the intrinsic awareness of their viewer's presence nod to tenets of Minimalism, while the tradition of Mannerism continues to be ever-present, not least with the dedication of the largest piece to the Florentine engraver Giovanni Batista Bracelli. The installation beguiles its visitors, illuminating the iconic duo's historical erudition, sense of humour, and mastery of illusion.

Text by Émilie Streiff