

# KÖNIG GALERIE

ISA GENZKEN | ISSIE ENERGIE

11. NOVEMBER 2017 - 7. JANUARY 2018

ST. AGNES | NAVE

OPENING: 10. NOVEMBER, 6 - 9 PM

"Every form is the arrested momentary image of a process. Thus, the work is a station on the road to becoming and not the set goal."

El Lissitzky

"I've always said that you should be able to express something with every sculpture, that it should be a sculpture even if it's not finished yet. That's what a sculpture should look like. It has to have some kind of relationship to reality."

Isa Genzken

100 years after 1917

Isa Genzken is one of the most influential figures in contemporary art. Her iconographic use of everyday materials elicits a shift in the perspective of the viewer and frees the industrially produced materials she works with from their original meaning. Her eccentric imagination ignores the established laws of composition, oversteps the boundaries of sculpture and again and again pushes us to the limits of what we can take in. Isa Genzken's transmuted constructions lure visitors out of their comfortable viewing habits and confront them with the immanent question of the abandonment of the self.

Schauspieler

The Schauspieler (actors) form a complex group of works. In a lecture at the Städelschule in Frankfurt, Benjamin Buchloh gives them a special place in Isa Genzken's oeuvre, stating that they confront us with "the most disturbing encounters with ourselves as subjects of advanced forms of consumerism". The figures first appear as astronauts floating through space in the artist's installation OIL, presented in the German pavilion of the Venice Biennale in 2007. Since then, an increasing number of mannequins - the ones usually found in shop windows - populate her sculptural constructions.

Figures of men, women and children stand, sit and lie in different stages of dress and undress, their faces partially or fully covered by masks, netting, glasses and spray paint, almost always sporting headwear, sometimes tied up in banderols or tape, turned away from or towards each other, alone, in pairs or in small groups, like in a painting, on a stage or in a film set in space.

ST. AGNES  
ALEXANDRINENSTR. 118-121  
D-10969 BERLIN

T +49.30.261 030 80  
F +49.30.261 030 811  
INFO@KOENIGGALERIE.COM

OPENING HOURS  
TUE-SAT 11AM - 7PM  
SUN 12PM - 7PM  
KOENIGGALERIE.COM

# KÖNIG GALERIE

Isa Genzken uses the term *Schauspieler* to describe these groups of figures that at first glance resemble sculptural scenes. Genzken's remark that she sometimes also calls them "my puppets" gives these snapshots an intimate character and adds the theme of self-portrayal to the more universal aspects. In contrast to the English word "actor", which describes the plot-driven activity of a player, the German title "*Schauspieler*" alludes to the freedom to act, where - in compliance with the direction - suspense and delight are allowed as much space as the awareness of otherness.

In a conversation with Wolfgang Tillmans about sculpture in general, Isa Genzken said: "They have to have some kind of relationship to reality. It can't be something meditative or even made up, totally bland and beside the point (...) actually, sculptures are like photographs - they can be crazy, but they still have to have some quality that links them to reality."

Apparently chosen at random and appropriated with perfect indifference, the mannequins and their clothing meet the basic criteria of the readymade. Not without a sense of humour, Isa Genzken transforms artificial bodies into artistic bodies by freeing the artificial body - designed to be easily recognised at first glance - from its rigid structure. She also counters its immediate recognisability - and the thrill of the moment - with a trance-like staging of emotionally coloured inner worlds that leads to longer periods of contemplation.

## Wall installations

In her new wall pieces Isa Genzken again combines the radical nature of the readymade aesthetic that is characteristic of her work as a whole with earlier moments of the complex history of art in the 20th century. She continues to blend modernist art with anti-modernist art in her work. And in the unbounded chaos of the present she again finds allies opposing the sentimental pessimism from the time of the First World War.

Isa Genzken's use of shopbought tape references Piet Mondrian and the "new design ideas" of the Dutch *De Stijl* movement that he founded in 1917, but also Theo van Doesburg, who in his "concrete" works was committed to geometric and abstract reduction of lines and surfaces in pursuit of a functional purism.

"I created them without intention, without any intention except to reject ideas." Marcel Duchamp

In her new works, Genzken combines constant grid-like presentation of the motif with the dynamic effect of diagonal lines, lending her collages a radical indifference through her use of industrially produced materials, as is typical for the readymade, whose key work "The Fountain" by Marcel Duchamp was conceived in the same year that the *De Stijl* movement was founded. Her new wall installations challenge the viewer with a material reality that seeks to do nothing but to represent in a tangible yet immaterial way an attitude toward life she creates through her work, which faces today's turmoils without sentiment.

# KÖNIG GALERIE

## Concrete works

Concrete - that amorphous grey substance devoid of identity - is the primary building material of contemporary construction. Isa Genzken has been using reinforced concrete in her work since the 1980s, both for indoor and outdoor sculptures. She casts forms out of it and leaves them bare after they've hardened, without making the slightest change to them. Sometimes she adds an antenna or surrounds them with barrier tape.

Their construction and realisation is always preceded by the artist's imagination. That is the decisive moment of the work, flowing into the finished sculpture through the initial design and the physical and chemical casting process.

The outdoor sculpture ABC - a double gate made of reinforced concrete presented at Skulptur Projekte Münster in 1987 - follows the architectural aesthetics of El Lissitzky and breaks up the form of a library building with a sheer and elegant shell construction.

Despite their aura of monumentality, Isa Genzken's indoor concrete sculptures also have a certain delicacy that makes them appear fragile. Her flights of stairs - which the artist calls "Leonardo" - look like the model of an unrealised building project, but in fact they are sculptures in their own right, countering unfinishedness and deterioration with the robust durable nature of their material. The work sparks our imagination because it reminds us of a large-scale architectural element freed from spatial tradition by being undersized, which in turn reveals its dynamic inner nature.

Here too Isa Genzken challenges our established habits of perception; she transforms an everyday material through an artistic and alchemical process and in its amorphous state instils the cast concrete with such transparency that it leads the viewer to their own inner world.

"If you ask me what art is, I don't know. If you don't ask me, I do know."  
El Lissitzky

Text: Ulrich Höfler, 2017

In collaboration with Galerie Buchholz