

GALERIE NÄCHST ST. STEPHAN ROSEMARIE SCHWARZWÄLDER

POLLY APFELBAUM ISA MELSHEIMER Via Appia

2 May – 15 June 2019

In our double exhibition Polly Apfelbaum and Isa Melsheimer are showing new ceramics as well as paper- and textile-based works that highlight the artistic focal points of both artists. After two solo exhibitions at Galerie nächst St. Stephan Rosemarie Schwarzwälder for Polly Apfelbaum and three for Isa Melsheimer, it is their first collaboration.

The exhibition owes its title to an encounter on the Appian Way in Rome in 2013 when Polly Apfelbaum was on a scholarship from the American Academy and Isa Melsheimer on a scholarship from the German Academy Villa Massimo. Both had been equally enthralled and captivated by the block paving of the famous road lined with cypress trees and the relics of tombs and graves dating from Ancient Rome. Such was their shared interest in architecture and in ancient and modern ruins that they would subsequently meet up again many times in Rome.

Polly Apfelbaum's works resonate with echoes of Minimal Art, Pop Art, but also Post-Minimalism and Appropriation Art, without underscoring the established art canon. Apfelbaum's approach is fundamentally anti-authoritarian, and her specific ability is one of reverse psychology, applied with a sense of humour and a degree of scepticism. Her work combines both high and popular culture, and she sees it as radically provisional, highlighting procedural aspects rather than end results.

Her ceramics and her textile- and paper-based works featured at our exhibition are micro-environments, small-scale landscapes that vividly evoke the Appian Way, the sky, the vegetation, and the paving stones. Apfelbaum is intrigued by the ancient tradition of ceramics and its craftsmanship, for the time factor that is involved but also the changes wrought during the firing process. The spiral motif is one that has fascinated Apfelbaum since the late 1990s. Unlike Louise Bourgeois, for whom spiral shapes represented control and freedom at the same time, Apfelbaum in her snail works references nature, its emergence and evolution. Snails slowly make their way along a path that is open-ended; inwardly, they symbolise the awareness of nature from its beginnings; outwardly, its helical evolution.

Isa Melsheimer explores in her work urban habitats and the circumstances under which they are shaped and altered. Arrayed alongside sculptures made of concrete, glass and ceramic are textile-based works and ensembles comprised of living plants. The sculptural works are accompanied by gouache paintings, their imagery overlaid with quotes from genres such as art, architecture, design and pop culture.

Melsheimer's new ceramics are hybrid structures made up of the constructed and the organic, as if the plant kingdom had chosen to reclaim buildings and cities. The Appian Way symbolises the transition between the urban and the rural. Melsheimer has studied theories of architecture and urban planning at length, most recently with Metabolism, a Japanese architectural movement of the 1960s that focused on a flexible form of urban planning, both in the air and above water. Like an organic metabolism it was designed to respond and adapt to changes in living circumstances as required. Melsheimer is also interested in the ruins of modern and contemporary architecture that have been left to decay as a result of badly planned urban development. One of her ceramic sculptures references the decaying Macaranã swimming stadium built for the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, which could stand as a sculptural entity, but also as a Roman amphitheatre. The craftsmanship aspect of working with ceramics is as crucial to Isa Melsheimer as it is to Polly Apfelbaum, coupled with the fact that the outcome of the firing process can never be predetermined down to the last detail; in other words, the works continue to undergo change even during the actual production process itself.

POLLY APFELBAUM was born in Abington, Pennsylvania, in 1955, and lives and works in New York.

In 1997 she took part in the 4th Lyon Biennial; in 1998 in the 11th Sydney Biennial; and in 2019 in the Québec Biennial. In 2003 the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia organised Polly Apfelbaum's comprehensive mid-career solo exhibition, which went on show the following year at the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati and the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City. Besides numerous scholarships Polly Apfelbaum received the Anonymous Was a Woman Award in 1998 and, in 2012 the Rome Prize.

Selected solo exhibitions: Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City (2019), Ikon Gallery, Birmingham (2018), Belvedere 21, Wien (2018), National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington D.C (2017), Ben Maltz Gallery, OTIS College of Arts and Design, Los Angeles (2016).

Selected collections: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; BelvedereVienna; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Carnegie Museum of Art,

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Academy Museum, New York; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, und Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

ISA MELSHEIMER was born in Neuss, Germany, in 1968, and lives and works in Berlin.

In 2008 Melsheimer was awarded the Art Prize of the City of Nordhorn and, in 2015, the Marianne Werefkin Prize. She is the recipient of a scholarship from the German Academy Villa Massimo in Rome, the Goethe-Institut Lisbon, the Villa Aurora in Los Angeles, and the Chinati Foundation in Marfa.

Selected exhibitions: Kunstverein Heppenheim, Germany (solo, 2018), Städtische Galerie Delmenhorst, Germany (solo, 2018), Fogo Island Art Gallery, Newfoundland (solo, 2018), The National Museum of Women in Arts, Washington, D.C. (group, 2018), Mies van der Rohe Haus, Berlin (2017), MUMOK Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna (G, 2017), Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck, Remagen, Germany (group, 2016), Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (group, 2016), Ernst Barlach Haus, Hamburg (solo, 2015), MARTa Herford, Germany (group, 2015), Ikob Museum für zeitgenössische Kunst Eupen, Belgium (solo, 2014), Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen, Germany (group, 2014), Santa Monica Museum of Art, Santa Monica, California (solo, 2012), Kunsthaus Langenthal, Switzerland (solo, 2010), Carré d'art - Musée d'art contemporain, Nîmes, France (solo, 2010).

Selected collections: Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, The Netherlands; Centre national des arts plastiques (CNAP), Paris, France; Carré d'art Musée d'art contemporain de Nîmes, France; Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck, Remagen, Germany; Künstlerhaus Schloss Balmoral, Bad Ems, Germany; Mudam Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg; Museum Kunstpalast, Dusseldorf, Germany; Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany; Sammlung Falckenberg, Hamburg, Germany; Sammlung zeitgenössischer Kunst der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn, Germany, S.M.A.K. Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent, Belgium.