

ARTS ⇔ CRAFTS

Between tradition, discourse and technologies

15.11.2019 - 16.02.2020

In a digitalised world where we are constantly drawn behind flat surfaces, it is natural to ask what meaning craftsmanship has for us. How important are traditional techniques in a mechanical, standardised world of products? What can we gain by examining the skills of previous generations? What can they tell us? Eight selected positions by international artists reveal how diverse the approach to dealing with crafts can be in a world where the exchange of information and knowledge now happens faster than ever.

Olaf Holzapfel

Born 1967 in Dresden (GER)

Lives and works in Berlin (GER)

Olaf Holzapfel has used bundles of straw and wood to build an open space, adding two historic pictures from the collection of the Neue Galerie Graz to his own abstract images made of straw. Johann Kniep's *Ideal Landscape* of 1806 and *Szolnok, 1873/74*, by Tina Blau are emblematic of narrative views showing a glorified and subjective landscape, opening up different, yearned-for idylls.

Straw (dried cereal stalks) and reed (dried reed plants) have served as readily available and low-cost materials for thatching the roofs of houses ever since humankind settled down. Its only drawback is that it is highly flammable.

Nowadays, it is rare to find thatched roofs in industrialised societies—they are too labour-intensive and time-consuming.

Olaf Holzapfel finds it interesting as a material partly because it is very simple, but also because of its history in his local area to the south east of Berlin: the Sorbs who lived there also made it into decorations. For them it represented light, harvest and the geometry of the elements. He too uses it on the basis of colour and light, brightness and darkness. He cuts the stalks precisely into overlapping layers. Created following digital designs, his constructive straw pictures have for him something very painterly about them, perhaps reminiscent of landscapes also, but equally of geometric abstract pictures. The material is itself taken from the landscape and coincides with images of the landscape in the 19th century, where it is also at times the subject of the picture.

Johannes Schweiger

Born 1973 in Schladming (AUT)

Lives and works in Vienna (AUT)

Johannes Schweiger hangs his threads, textiles, fabrics and fringes on metal shelves freely from or on the wall. It is fabric, the raw material, that interests him as a starting point for his work. Here he installs the series *Sample Schlaufe* (Sample Loop) in the exhibition space as pictures designed for a fictitious men's collection, in full knowledge that fringes, loops and strips of fabric usually have feminine or gay connotations, and are rejected by 'real' men precisely because of this perception. Johannes Schweiger has many years of experience in the fashion world and has created a number of labels (e.g. 'Wiener Times' with Susanne Schneider), always working in an interdisciplinary way. He has called for fashion to become more conceptual. In *Nostalgie für Obsoleszenzfreunde* (Nostalgia for Friends of Obsolescence) he explores the theme of linen and its development from a simple fabric into a sophisticated home textile. He has linens woven on historical looms in Mönchengladbach, and thus goes back to the roots of European textile production, whose origins lie in Manchester—and which is also considered the trigger and driving force behind the Industrial Revolution.

Within the sphere of art, felt has its own history as a material, reflected by Schweiger from Robert Morris to Joseph Beuys by giving the material a presence in his own pictures in abstract-minimalistic form. In the case of felt—which has gained both fame and infamy as a crafting material—it is the structure of its surface, the pleasure of the textile itself, that captures his interest. Here we see a visualisation of his commitment to breaking down stereotyped, gender-specific categorisations. In the field of handicrafts, the production of textiles was/is considered domestic and feminine—and so in many respects an inferior occupation. Lucie Rie's buttons take on a special role. She made these as a refugee in London in order to survive and earn a living. Johannes Schweiger has made replicas of her buttons.

Antje Majewski/ Olivier Guessel -Garai

Born 1968 in Marl (GER)/Born 1976 in Paris (FRA)

Live and work in Berlin (GER)

Antje Majewski and Olivier Guessel -Garai are connected by cultural differences. Linked with their biographies, they examine the conventional methods used by the current art scene to attribute, value and classify art, as well as the delimitations and categorisations between ethnography, art history, anthropology and colonialism. Majewski paints objects in large format and in doing so examines them in depth. For her, as a German artist (with Polish heritage), this has involved travelling to and researching many countries in the world. A French citizen (with a Hungarian family), Olivier Guessel -Garai's roots go back to Cameroon, where his great-grandfather fought against the German colonial rulers. As an artist he works on the expansion of what we understand as geometric abstract art. Since a visit to the Ethnological Museum in Berlin in 2011, their joint work has been based on the intersections of their subsequent intensive research in Cameroon—stories about the throne of Ibrahim Njoya, basket weaving and cache-sexes (loin cloths).

The original Mandu Yenu throne of ruler Ibrahim Njoya is now to be found in Berlin, and exemplifies the German paternalistic attitude towards colonised Cameroon. The film opens up many perspectives on this. Who, over the decades, has been telling whose story? How? And what does it say about each of those concerned?

Cache-sexes hold a fascination for European collectors, who buy them in Cameroon in order to hang them on the wall at home like pictures, detached from their original function. Antje Majewski interviews the women who make these loin cloths to sell on the collectors' market, although they are still needed for traditional dances in Cameroon too. Their shapes, colours and patterns are reminiscent of Western geometric abstract art.

An interesting parallel in the use of pumpkins and their oil can be seen in the work *La Mur murmura*, that also combines weaving techniques from Styria and Cameroon.

Slavs and Tatars

Founded 2006

Live and work in Berlin (GER)

Slavs and Tatars is a cross-media and -genre Polish-Iranian collective whose work encompasses installations, publications and readings. Their focus always lies on reflecting and analysing social contexts. The two artists describe themselves as a 'Eurasian' collective located between the Berlin Wall and the Great Wall of China. They chart the relationships between religion, power, language and the associated identities.

The questions they ask are rooted in Polish and/or Iranian history, the end of Communism, *Solidarno c* in 1989, the Islamic Revolution in 1979 as well as the Green Revolution in 2009 in Iran.

In the cycle *Friendship of Nations: Polish Shi'ite Showbiz*, they reflect their own history/histories while formulating various messages in Polish, Farsi or English. These are combined with traditional fabrics and patterns, and condensed in the symbolism that is explained in the displayed journal. They refer to the local traditional handicraft of each place, particularly tracing the changes in it. Because as history teaches us, scripts and languages can change according to who is in power, just as memorable imagery does. The banners were produced in collaboration with Polish and Iranian craftswomen. In this way, the fabric of complex cultures is given a Eurasian structure in the world as a global village in Slavs and Tatars' work.

Plamen Dejanoff

Born 1970 in Sofia (BUL)

Lives and works in Vienna (AUT)

Following a comprehensive restitution process, the Dejanoff family had a huge collection of historical documents, books, artworks and several buildings returned to them, which the artist brought together under the umbrella of one foundation. Its aim is to promote contemporary art in Bulgaria. The *Bronze House* is a project that the artist was able to realise through this foundation. By developing this and other projects, Plamen Dejanoff manages to preserve old craft techniques, such as the already rare interlocking wood unit technique seen in works from the series *Foundation Requirement*. This series clearly reveals his great passion for research into historic buildings. By studying the restituted houses and exposing them layer by layer, he has made a major contribution to the conservation of monuments. What is also revealed, however, is that the buildings are a fertile source for his interest as a sculptor.

The *Bronze House* was initiated for public space in Sofia, and represents a very comprehensive project in many respects. The cost-intensive production of the assembled parts was taken over by a wide range of art institutions, which made them within the context of their own exhibitions. After more than ten years he was at last able to open the building—which is actually more of a sculpture, perhaps also a monument to the history of the country at a significant place in Sofia, the centrally located Alexander Battenberg Square. Over 300 elements make up an 11-metre tall, grid-like lattice structure, a smaller version of which can be seen here at the Kunsthaus Graz. A key issue that runs through all of the phases of the realisation of this megaproject is how it relates to the public. How, and by what means, can art in public space be effective?

Jorge Pardo

Born 1963 in Havana (CUB)

Lives and works in New York (USA) and Mérida (MEX)

Jorge Pardo places an oversized shelf in Space01 at Kunsthaus Graz. It is packed with a profusion of goods, articles and artefacts. Based in Mexico, Pardo works across genres, making lamps into sculptures or hanging furniture like a picture on the wall, where it can't be used. His interest lies in sculpture, its history and methods: what does it mean today to be a sculptor? He explores how people read and understand connections, how they perceive space. In Los Angeles, MOCA commissioned him to build an entire house as an exhibition, which could be visited like a museum during opening hours and yet was used freely by him the rest of the time. He designed the house as a sculpture, working also with chance by integrating unforeseen events into the process. Jorge Pardo works with his hands and likes to feel the materials. In order to remain independent, however, he founded his own company, which employs various different craftspeople. His works, which can also be used as products, have an unsettling effect on viewers, caught between functionality and aesthetics, workshop and small factory, everyday life and artificiality, and also between reality and virtuality.

Haegue Yang

Born 1971 in Seoul (KOR)

Lives and works in Berlin (GER) and Seoul (KOR)

Large black-haired figures hang like spidery serpent creatures from the vaulted roof of Space01, looming like demonic extra-terrestrials. Made from synthetic materials, they contradict conventional notions of traditional craft, which for many summons up an ideal concept of intrinsic quality and being at one with nature. The black anthropomorphic wicker figures also belong to a group of works called *The Intermediates*. Fairytale, mystical figures are composed of traditionally worked wicker, palm leaves and industrially manufactured castor bases.

So, with great irony and humour, *The Intermediates* tell eerie stories that create links to the past while creating their own worlds. In the vast digital wallpapers of *Multiple Mourning Room* (in collaboration with Manuel Raeder), the creatures lift off into fictitious, endless expanses, floating out of their strangely decoupled, urban living environment. So emerges a mysterious world waiting to be explored, between folkloric traditions and artificial spaces of the future.

Azra Akšamija

Born 1976 in Sarajevo (BIH)

Lives and works in Graz (AUT) and New York (USA)

Diaspora Scroll is a large fabric roll of remembrance that grows continuously with the knowledge of its many contributors. It collects embroidery patterns that combine local with migrated knowledge, primarily that of women. Embroidery reminds Azra Akšamija of her grandmother's generation and of Bosnia, which she left at the age of 16 with her family during the Yugoslavian war. As they work together on the diverse embroidery patterns at the workbench, conversations naturally develop about each person's traditions, ties, knowledge and identities. The designs embroidered into the textile bear information, refer to places or events, and demonstrate that they nonetheless share similarities and commonalities. *Diaspora Scroll* tells of migrations, cultural transfers and the growth of constantly evolving cultures that can never be self-contained, and which, like organisms, are constantly evolving in heterogeneous openness.

Monument in Waiting is a handwoven wool kilim that incorporates 99 prayer beads collected from destroyed Bosnian mosques. In their weaving the women tell the story of the war and its traumas, giving the joint activity a healing effect and the carpet the power of a collective monument, a memorial that articulates history and stories through many old and new symbols. Many of Azra Akšamija's works tell of rootlessness and deep-rootedness, of the possibilities of connecting and sharing, but above all of the new growth that can spring from them.

Accompanying programme

(in German language)

14.11.2019–16.02.2020

BIX project: Olivier Guesselé-Garai,
La Mur murmura

Fri, 15.11.2019, 3–4pm

Guided tour with curator
Barbara Steiner

Tues, 19.11.2019, 3.30–4.30pm

Introduction to
ARTS ↔ CRAFTS
Exclusively for teachers and
educators
With Monika Holzer-Kernbichler

Thurs, 21.11.2019, 4–7pm

KoOgle: Working with copper—
surface structure in jewellery design
Jewellery workshop with Katharina
Binder

Sat, 23.11.2019, 3–4.30pm

Art meets nature. Seen from both
sides:
Of animal artists and artificial nature
With Daniel Zechner and Christof
Elpons

Sat–Sun, 23./24.11.2019, 10am–5pm

Open House 2019 – Handicrafts!
Powered by UNIQA
Come and join in—free admission!

Sun, 24.11.2019, 11–12pm

Exercises in the contemplation of
artworks:

Haegue Yang, *The Intermediates*
With Barbara Steiner

Tues, 26.11.2019, 3.30–4.30pm

Guided tour ARTS ↔ CRAFTS
Exclusively for teachers and
educators
With Monika Holzer-Kernbichler

Fri, 06.12.2019, 3–4.30pm

Art meets nature. Seen from both
sides:
Of animal artists and artificial nature
With Daniel Zechner and Christof
Elpons

Sat, 07.12.2019, 2–4pm

SpaceKids: Working with straw

Sun, 08.12.2019, 3.30–4.30pm

Guided tour of the exhibition
With Gabi Gmeiner

Thurs, 12.12.2019, 4–7pm

KoOgle: Say, are you spinning? – Yes!
Spinning workshop with Johanna
Arbeithuber

Fr, 13.12.2019, 3pm

Artist's talk with Azra Akšamija and
Alexandra Trost

Sun, 15.12.2019, 11am–12pm

Exercises in the contemplation of
artworks:

Antje Majewski and
Olivier Guesselé-Garai
With Barbara Steiner

Sat, 04.01.2020, 2–4pm

SpaceKids: Working with straw

Thurs, 23.01.2020, 4–7pm

KoOgle: Turn the potter's wheel!
Pottery workshop with Selma Etareri

Fri, 24.01.2020, 3pm

Artist's talk with Plamen Dejanoff
and Barbara Steiner

Fri, 31.01.2020, 3–4pm

Guided tour with curator
Barbara Steiner

Sun, 02.02.2020, 11am

Exercises in the contemplation of
artworks:
On Jorge Pardo

Fri, 07.02.2020, 3pm

Artist's talk with Johannes
Schweiger and Alexandra Trost

ARTS ↔ CRAFTS continued!

Galerie für zeitgenössische Kunst
Leipzig

14.03.–28.06.2020

Opening: Fri, 13.03.2020

Kestner Gesellschaft Hannover

13.06.–13.09.2020

Opening: Fr, 12.06.2020

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Curator: Barbara Steiner

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