

Foreword

Max Hollein

The works of Bettina Pousttchi came to our attention as far back as 2006, as part of the group exhibition *The Youth of Today*, we showed a selection of photographs from her series *Fans* (2002). The artist, who works in the media of photography, video, sculpture, and installation, then became known to a wider audience thanks to the imposing site-specific photo installation *Echo* (2009-10) in Berlin. Right in the middle of Berlin's historical center, Pousttchi applied abstracted façade elements depicting the then recently demolished Palast der Republik (Palace of the Republic) to the façade of the Temporäre Kunsthalle. In *Echo*, she resurrected the state building of the German Democratic Republic, which had been removed after just thirty years to make room for the rebuilding of Berlin's Stadtschloss (City Castle), which had in turn been demolished in 1950. Using architecture, three of Germany's political systems installed a symbol of their respective eras on Schlossplatz. The artist shows how quickly architecture can lose the meaning attributed to it or, to put it another way, it is politically opportune to replace one building with another when a new state-supporting symbolism is needed. The brief timespan within which these changes took place is remarkable: revisions in the form of demolition, rebuilding, demolishing, and reconstruction occurred within seven decades.

A similarly complex situation served the artist as her point of departure when creating the façade of the Schirn Kunsthalle. In the area immediately adjacent to the Schirn, between the cathedral and the Römer, the destroyed old town is being partially reconstructed. A homogenous urban fabric had evolved organically over centuries but was largely destroyed during the Second World War; historical buildings that survived or were only partially destroyed were removed and replaced by the Technisches Rathaus (Technical Town Hall) in the 1970s. That massive concrete structure, with its architecture typical of that era, would only last thirty-five years. Now, individual historical buildings are to be reconstructed and harmonized with new buildings whose materials are supposed to approximate historical architectural forms. This raises fundamental questions: what history is being reconstructed here? To what end and by whom?

Pousttchi took up these questions and, with her monumental photo installation *Framework*, created a powerful perplexity. Using elements of half timbering, she produced a repeating pattern that is placed like a black-and-white ornamental frieze over the postmodern building housing the Schirn. Half timbering – originally a purely structural building element – is thus mutated into pure decor. To some it seems absurd, to others formally logical, to see it applied to a building from 1986. Yet this approach is not so far removed from the reconstruction of historical buildings; historical-looking façade cladding is also slipped over a building volume constructed using state-of-the-art technology and executed with modern materials. Thus Pousttchi's theme is the current longing for tradition and historical architectural forms that is satisfied by new-old city castles and new-old towns, which may have a historical appearance but of course no longer serve their original historical function.

Naturally I would especially like to thank Bettina Pousttchi for her artistic contribution, which not only radiates enormous aesthetic power but also transforms the rotunda and façade of the Schirn into an artistic plane for discourse. The

collaboration with her in developing and realizing this elaborate outdoor installation was superb and a great pleasure.

Moreover, I am also particularly grateful to the active circle of private supporters of the Schirn Kunsthalle, the 'Schirn Zeitgenossen', which has strongly advocated presenting very current, innovative artists at the Schirn and provided substantial support to make it possible. I wish to take this opportunity to thank the founding members of 'Schirn Zeitgenossen' –Michael Fabich, Andreas Fendel, Ralf Herfurth, Hartmuth Jung, Angela and Thomas Kremer, Sunhild Theuerkauf-Lukic and Andreas Lukic, Vasiliki Basia and Jörg Rockenhäuser, and Antonie and Heiner Thorborg – for their tremendous initiative and passion for recent art.

The commitment of the City of Frankfurt is essential to the Schirn Kunsthalle's work. Hence I am grateful to, as representatives for all the city's decision makers, Mayor Petra Roth and the head of cultural affairs, Felix Semmelroth.

Our cultural partner, hr2-kultur, is to be thanked here for the media support.

I wish to explicitly thank the curator, Katharina Dohm, who worked closely with the artist when developing the idea for the exhibition and who managed its realization. I also thank her and Adam Szymczyk for their essays on Pousttchi's work. Nikolaus Hirsch conducted a conversation with the artist that reveals the artist's approach in general and to *Framework* in particular. The designer Peter B. Willberg deserves thanks for his extraordinarily successful design for the catalog, as does the

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