

## Bettina Pousttchi

Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich, Switzerland

'Progressions', Bettina Pousttchi's survey illustration of the idea that urban space is not only the physical environment of a city – from pedestrian and surveillance structures to actual buildings – but also a projection, subject to both time-bound ideologies driving urban policy and to city dwellers' subjective memories. Spread across three floors, the exhibition highlights the fluidity with which Pousttchi moves between industrial-scale readymades, urban architecture and photography. Yet, while the artist's methods and materials may vary, seriality and indexical relationship to the real are recurrent motifs.

The show opens with seven of Pousttchi's large-scale metal sculptures from the series 'Vertical Highways' (2023). Made from the metal used in highway crash barriers and powder-coated in yellow, red, black or white, the works reiterate the same essential shape, but have varying curvatures and dents, as if to transmit individual violent instances of real-life car accidents. Further rooms are dedicated to the artist's more intimate pieces, such as *David* (2015), *John and Marie* (both 2018). Moulded from the stainless steel used in tree-protection barriers, these works – along with the wall-based series 'Directions' (2023) – playfully reconfigure utilitarian structures. Others riff on postmodernist minimalism. *Double*

*Monument for Flavin and Tatlin VII* (2010), for example – one of the three multiples shown at Haus Konstruktiv – combines metal crowd-control barriers and white neon, evoking the work's titular figures. Pousttchi's interest in photography, particularly the complex way in which a photographic image's indexicality can be probed and challenged, is demonstrated in her new silkscreen series, 'Horizons' (2024), with a dozen works displayed in a large gallery on the fourth floor. Made especially for the exhibition, the series picks up thematically an earlier photo-based installation, *Echo* (2009–10), which saw Pousttchi cover the facade of Berlin's Temporäre Kunsthalle with hundreds of posters featuring archival images of the Palast der Republik (1973–2008). At the time, the former home of the East German government had been recently – and controversially – torn down to make way for the Humboldt Forum, a copy of a 17th century baroque palace destroyed during World War II. Titled in a serialist fashion (e.g. *Day 1* or *Day 12*), the 'Horizons' silkscreens are inspired by the slow disintegration of the *Echo* posters, some of which were collected after they'd been hanging outside for six months. Pousttchi photographed the poster fragments and then silkscreened them onto canvases painted with acrylic.

What nations choose to destroy or rebuild is indicative of what their citizens want to remember or forget. By making

a ghostly copy of the Palast, Pousttchi ingeniously drew attention to the tensions and contradictions implicit in revivalist projects. Today, Germany not only remains haunted by its imperialist Prussian past and its responsibility for the Holocaust but, with far-right nationalist sentiment on the rise again, the country has also recently witnessed protests over its response to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Given that Berlin – a city with a large immigrant population – is again a theatre of clashing ideologies, Pousttchi's critical re-engagement feels timely.

In 'Horizons', Pousttchi asks what remains of an image after it's repeatedly stress-tested. The horizontal stripes and controlled rhythms of the silkscreens call to mind Walter Benjamin's framing of photography as the quintessential form of mass-reproduced art in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1935). The closer one looks at Pousttchi's work, however, the more opaque and irregular the compositions reveal themselves to be. Contrast and figure blur; instead, the paintings present a quasi-diary of erosion – or, as a metaphor for historical revisionism, one might say, of erasure. By further removing any direct relationship to the original archival images, Pousttchi expresses a healthy scepticism towards photography's ability to reliably author the past.

— Ela Bittencourt



Left  
Bettina Pousttchi,  
'Progressions', 2024,  
exhibition view

Opposite page  
Vivian Greven, *PSY*  
*AMO (1-2)*, 2023, oil on  
canvas, 2.1 × 2.9 m