

PEDER LUND

ISA GENZKEN

23 November 2019 – 15 February 2020

Opening Reception, 22 November 2019, 6-8 pm

Peder Lund is pleased to announce the first solo exhibition in Norway by one of the most influential artists of our time, Isa Genzken (German, b. 1948). On view will be a selection of the most important recent works by the artist: five major sculptural works, as well as two outstanding wall works.



Genzken's strength is to operate fearlessly in various mediums, and her style has evolved significantly over the years. Many say that she has revived the medium of assemblage and sculpture in general. Her intelligent ensembles composed of cheap materials are loaded with art historical, symbolical, and political references, and her work is celebrated by critics and artists alike. In 2017, Genzken received the renowned Goslarer Kaiserring (eng. "Imperial Ring") award from the city of Goslar, and this year, Genzken won the important Nasher Prize to honor her as one of the most significant artists of our time.

In many of Genzken's works, her choice of materials references the excessive and mindless consumerism which a capitalistic society thrives on. Her use of bricolage in most of her later works is a quality of her oeuvre that must not only be interpreted on a formal level but also contextually. We know from her earlier and more minimalistic sculptures how precise and aesthetically pleasing her works can be, and it is clear that the specific artistic style she created later on masterfully embodies many social and art historical issues important to the artist, such as her fantastic series of the *New Buildings* maquettes, her *Actors* mannequins, and her famous *Nefertiti* readymades. Prime examples of each of these series are on display at Peder Lund.

One main theme in Genzken's oeuvre is her sculptural exploration of architecture which reflects the social space of global cities. Her work complex of the *New Buildings for Berlin* (2001/2014) can be described as a creative design which offers a utopian alternative to the uninspired conformity of the buildings we find in city centres today. Genzken's abstract skyscraper mock-ups follow the utopian spatial concepts of the classic modern architects of the early to mid-twentieth century. Through Genzken's material choice, her work also references the visions of Expressionist architects who were drawn to glass as a symbol of purity and renewal and to the idea that architecture could embody social change.

Interestingly, Genzken began to develop the series of the *New Buildings for Berlin* just a few years after the Berlin wall fell, a time when the significance to manifest a new era through architecture was as similarly critical as at the beginning of the 20th century. The intention of the first new buildings which were built in Berlin in the 1990s was to signify German unity through quickly filling the gaps in the areas that were deserted from the years of the wall. Hence, the present work, *New Buildings for Berlin (Beta)* (2014) can be interpreted as a commentary on how the idea of modernist glass architecture, which embodies

not only technical but also social progress, in the end became a tedious standard architecture that only serves the capitalistic corporations it houses.



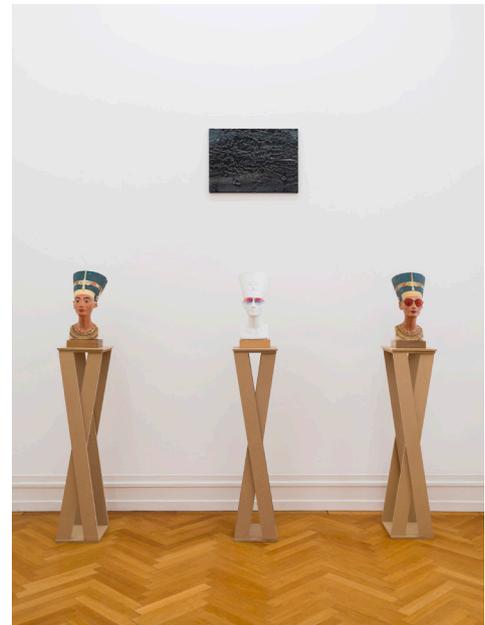
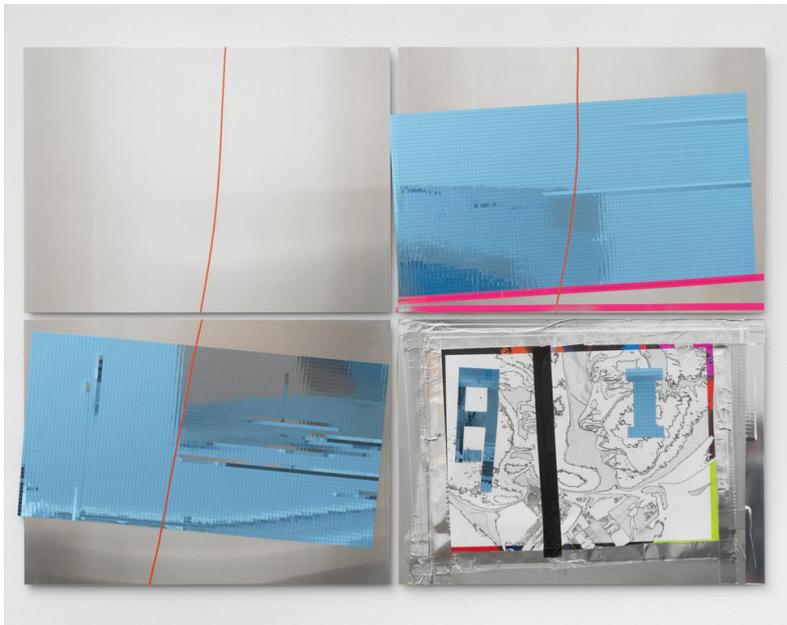
Similar references are comprised in her dynamic collage *Untitled* (2017), which consists of two aluminium panels with adhesive tape and holograph foil. The present work can be seen as a continuation of her earlier series of collages, the *Soziale Fassaden* (Social Façades), which the artists created in the early 2000s, around the same time as the first *New Buildings for Berlin* and her acclaimed work series *Fuck the Bauhaus*. The shiny surfaces of these collages reference the modern anonymous architecture that surrounds us. Most inhabitants in the urban space will see themselves reflected every day off of the shiny façades of the big corporate buildings on their way to work, while the rapid and economically focused development in large cities causes problematic issues of gentrification. Hence, despite their aesthetically pleasing appearance, the energetic lines crossing the aluminium panels in the present work over and over again can also be seen as a symbolic reference to lines of caution tape, referencing these social borders and wealth restricted areas.

Mirroring the capitalistic society we live in is also the main theme of the artist's *Schauspieler* (*Actor*) works. In this series of life-size mannequins, we meet, essentially, our *Doppelgänger*. The figures themselves could have been taken directly from a department store, however, their precise appearance differs from the models which we see there, as their positioning, garish colouring with spray paint, absurd accessories and often extravagant outfits, give them an eerie appearance. The renowned art critic Benjamin H. D. Buchloh analysed the essence of these works once as "the tragic, comical distress within which the subjects of advanced forms of consumption find themselves."

Continuing the tradition of Dada and Surrealist artists who used figurative sculptures in their works, such as the famous mannequins created by Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, and other important artists for the historic *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* in 1938, Genzken's actors can be described as sculptural bricolages which consider how people try to create new cultural identities through acquiring objects that relate to various social backgrounds. Of course, the present work *Schauspieler II, 4* (2014) also comprises obvious art historical references such as the typical geometric pattern of the jackets in the primary colours red, blue and yellow which were often used by the Bauhaus or the sparkly skull necklace, the traditional vanitas symbol which was also famously exploited by Damien Hirst.

Genzken's *Untitled* wall work from 2015 references another well-known vanitas theme - the mirror - which is a central motif in Genzken's oeuvre. The artist's use of mirrors as well as mirroring foils is present in many of her works. Historically, mirrors are regarded as symbols of knowledge and truth. In historic paintings, the depiction of a mirror refers often to the cardinal virtues "prudentia" (prudence) and "veritas" (truth) and is as such a sign of self-knowledge. Conversely, it also can refer to a symbol of vanity and the transience of the earthly, since reflected images are only present for the moment in which the mirror holds the subject in front of it. However, the most striking feature of a mirror in Genzken's work is probably the fact that mirrors are

also considered as a metaphor for falsehood and deceit in modern times. Even though a mirror seems to faithfully depict an object, it shows it reversed and the image we see is of course just a superficial representation compared to the qualities of objects in the three-dimensional world.



The present work *Untitled* (2015) picks up on Genzken's exploration of this central theme in art history in a particularly incisive and complex manner. The work is an abstract collage, composed of four equally sized, rectangular steel panels placed into a minimalistic two-by-two grid. On these silver panels, Genzken applied different types of tape, rectangular forms of blue glittering mirror foil, and a black and white print. On the right side of the image in the last panel one can clearly identify a face and considering the colouring of the edges as well as the pattern of the lines, the picture resembles a thermographic scan and is probably a digitally modified photograph of the artist and her friend, the New York-based artist Bill Schnell, whom she referenced in other works, like her column *Bill* (2000).

The present work can be considered as a unique masterpiece, which elaborates on the theme of her earlier work series of the *Soziale Fassaden* (*Social Façades*) on an even more complex level. One of the most significant aspects of the social façades is, of course, the fascination of how the image of the viewer is reflected and shattered at the same time in the glittering collages that the artist created. By integrating the depiction of a human in form of a self-portrait into this work, Genzken opens up the dual relation that was presented before, into an intellectual triangle, as the viewer is confronted with the relation to himself, the artwork and its producer.

The role of the artist as a producer and the active and passive roles of women in art are an important theme of Genzken's *Nefertiti* series. Even though these sculptures are from one of Genzken's most recognized series, the number of Nefertiti works is very limited. Peder Lund is proud to present three exquisite examples from this series, which will most likely be the last works that Genzken produces of this kind. They are especially rare as Genzken's intervention is very subtle. The artist plays intelligently with the mysterious state in which the original sculpture was found, with the queen's left eye missing. In the tradition of Duchamp, Warhol, and Sturtevant, her sculptures pose the question of authenticity and originality.

While the eyes of two of the sculptures are covered with sunglasses, we can see how the left eye in one of the sculptures has been restored, underlining the perfect symmetry of the face of this icon of feminine power and beauty. In previous sculptures from this series, Genzken also added reproductions of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, portraits of herself, and spanned a corset around a pedestal, referencing clearly how women have been mostly seen as objectified models in art history, reduced

to their appearance instead of their creations. This ever-present frustration for women artists was famously highlighted by the statistics taken by the Guerrilla Girls in 1989, who gathered data from the Met's public collections showing the incredible imbalance of focus and attention: while 85% of the depicted nudes in the modern art collection were of women, only 5% of the works were actually created by women.

Certainly, Genzken is a trailblazer for an upcoming generation of artists on many levels and the art historian Lisa Lee, who studied Genzken's work extensively, concluded that the "suggestive power of Genzken's sculptural practice is precisely a richness of reference irreducible to a single position. Furthermore, hers is an exploration of those positions and possibilities active in the present—as legacies to be reckoned with, tested against one another, deployed, or transformed."

Isa Genzken was born in 1948 in Bad Oldesloe, a small town outside Hamburg, Germany. While studying at the renowned Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf in the 1970s, she created large-scale stereometric wooden floor sculptures, which gained her international acclaim early on. In the 1980s, she began making sculptures in plaster and concrete, which have a wide range of sizes - some are small maquettes, while others are monumental in scale. Later, her practice included also painting, and from the 1990s on, she started to experiment with architectural forms in several mediums such as collages, assemblages, and artist books. Genzken began exhibiting her work in 1976 when she was the youngest woman to have a solo presentation at the influential Konrad Fischer Galerie in Düsseldorf.

The most recent solo exhibition of her works opened this year at the Kunsthalle Bern in Switzerland. In 2015, the exhibition *Isa Genzken. Mach dich hübsch!* was first on view at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam and travelled in 2016 to the Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin. In 2014, the exhibition *I'm Isa Genzken, The Only Female Fool* was displayed at the Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna. In the same year, *Isa Genzken: New Works* was presented at the Museum der Moderne Salzburg in Austria and subsequently travelled earlier that year to the Museum für Moderne Kunst (MMK), Frankfurt. In 2013, The Museum of Modern Art, New York organized Genzken's first American museum survey, making it the most comprehensive presentation of her work to date, encompassing all media from the past forty years. The show travelled to the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago and the Dallas Museum of Art in 2014.

Her work has been the subject of major traveling museum surveys, including those organized by the Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2009 (travelled to Museum Ludwig, Cologne); Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, Germany, 2002 (travelled to Kunsthalle Zürich, Switzerland 2003); The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, 1992 (travelled to Portikus, Frankfurt; Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels; Städtisches Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich, both 1993). Other venues which have hosted important solo exhibitions include the Inverleith House, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (2014); Museion, Bolzano, Italy (2010); Camden Arts Center, London; Galerie im Taxispalais, Innsbruck; Secession, Vienna (all 2006); Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2002, organized by the Gesellschaft für Moderne Kunst on the occasion of the artist receiving the Wolfgang Hahn Prize); and Kunstverein Braunschweig, Germany (2000). Additionally, her works have also been chosen repeatedly to be presented at the Venice Biennale (2015, 2007, 2003, 1993, and 1982) and she also took part three times at documenta (2002, 1992, and 1982) and the Skulptur Projekte Münster (2007, 1997, and 1987).

Works by Genzken are held by major museums and public collections worldwide, including the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich, and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, among others. The artist lives and works in Berlin.

Illustrations 1-3: Isa Genzken, *Schauspieler II, 4*, 2014. Illustration 4: Isa Genzken, *New Buildings for Berlin (Beta)*, 2014. Illustration 5: Installation view, *I'm Isa Genzken, The Only Female Fool*, Kunsthalle Wien, 2014. Illustration 6: Isa Genzken, *Untitled*, 2015. Illustration 7: Installation view, *Isa Genzken*, Kunsthalle Bern, 2019. All illustrations © Isa Genzken / BONO 2019, courtesy private collection and Peder Lund.