

Scaffolding

Herald St presents *Scaffolding*, a group exhibition including ten artists from the gallery's programme: Markus Amm, Michael Dean, Trix and Robert Haussmann, Annette Kelm, Francis Offman, Sanou Oumar, Djordje Ozbolt, Matt Paweski, Amalia Pica and Nicole Wermers.

As a noun, 'scaffolding' evokes a delicate, temporary structure of support. As a verb, 'to scaffold' implies to bridge a connection; to forge a bond or affinity. In different ways, the works in this exhibition reference such structures – be they physical or more abstract.

In her collages, sculptures and photographs, Nicole Wermers dissects the visible and invisible ways that urban environments function. *Untitled Ashtray* (2010) is a powder-coated steel ashtray with five vertical layers of coloured sand fading from purple to white. Giving a disco-like glamour to a typically minimal, functional object, the work captures smoking's unique relationship with commodity fetishism, consumer behaviour, and friendship-building.

Incorporating an eclectic array of references, Djordje Ozbolt's colourful paintings often clash high and low culture to make – sometimes acerbic – observations about human culture. *A gentleman never tells* (2021) depicts a monkey on a suspended branch smoking a cigarette. Perhaps alluding to a patriarchal phenomenon of bad behaviour and secrecy, the subject matter also resembles a generic, mass-produced artwork like a kitsch image one might find on a t-shirt.

Michael Dean's *LL (Working Title)* (2017) was included in the fifth edition of Skulptur Project Münster, where it was shown in the atrium of the former LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur. Incorporating materials associated with urban environments, such as plastic sheeting, concrete, stickers, metal, paper, and plastic bags, the work alludes to how fragility and decay characterise the city. Deceptive in that it appears to be a warped found object, perhaps a street lamp or piece of scaffolding, Dean created each individual part of the sculpture, including the applied warning tapes and stickers reading 'sorry' and 'i love you'.

Markus Amm's luminous abstractions are constructed from his idiosyncratic approach of carefully applying pigments, oil, thinner and binding agents to layered gesso boards. Unpredictable in nature, Amm has compared his process as akin to 'alchemy'. Abstract yet radiating a gentle warmth, *Untitled #6* (2010) holds a calming presence that suggests the natural world: the sky or an expanse of water.

Troubling distinctions between functional design and decorative art, Matt Paweski works with diverse 'practical' materials such as birch plywood, aluminium, plastic, silicon and rubber. Intricately and deftly made as if they might have come from a production line, his sculptures are sometimes more functional than they appear, and sometimes less. Almost Constructivist in nature, *Two Benches II* (2015) can be playfully moved into different formations, while *Flower Cabinet (for CC)* (2024), which the artist has described as a 'purposeless machine object' has a small window revealing a mirror and miniature shelf one could place a precious object. Shown last year at an exhibition curated by Matt Connors at Goldsmiths CCA in London, the work revealed a shard of a Clarice Cliff ceramic.

Meticulously rendered in pen on paper board, Sanou Oumar's *9/11/19* (2019) stems from an interest in the dynamic forms and structures of architecture and – through an obsessive daily drawing practice – a pursuit for visual order and infinite calm. His works similarly evoke hard-edge abstraction, architectural renderings, religious mandalas and, according to Roberta Smith, 'Mondrian's black scaffolding'.

Trix & Robert Haussmann's *Hommage à Gerrit Rietveld* (2019) pays homage to Gerrit Rietveld's *Red-Blue Chair* (1919), an iconic modernist chair of the De Stijl movement. Pared back to one acid-yellow colour, the Haussmanns have supported the padded lounge chair on mirrored panels, which give the chair the surreal appearance of being unsupported, floating above the ground and defying gravity. *Spiegelobjekt Durchdringung* (2013), which translates to 'Mirror Object Penetration', is a monochromatic mirror that conveys a feeling of energy and motion.

Amalia Pica's *Study for rearranging the conference table 11* (2020) builds from the artist's 2020–21 solo exhibition at Museum Haus Konstruktiv, Zürich, which featured artist-designed conference tables that museum staff would rearrange daily into shaped formations of different sizes, according to a choreography designed by Pica. The work illustrates Pica's interest in the Concrete Art movement, in which geometric abstraction and political ideas were explicitly linked. Comprising two interconnected components, the work forms part of a larger series which – like modular furniture in corporate settings – can be physically altered to create different aesthetic moods.

Annette Kelm has described how she is interested in 'utopias and imagined universes' and her conceptual photography often reflects on the commodification of design and human value systems. *Coxcomb Red* (2023) depicts three flowers resting inside a modernist, spiral-shaped vase which simultaneously refers to a rich tradition of still-life photography and the symbolic trope of memento mori. Kelm makes clear the image's artificial staging: a white strip at the top of the work reveals the photo was taken, laboratory-like, in her studio.

'Most of the materials I use are gifts and they have good stories,' Francis Offman recently observed. Informed by personal and collective experiences of immigration, Offman – who migrated from Rwanda to Italy – creates works that emphasise a notion of 'taking care of things'. Characterised by torn and ripped patches of colour and texture that appear to float around each other, Offman has likened his abstract compositions to jazz music. Including materials like spent coffee grounds, Bolognese plaster and recycled textiles, his works ask viewers to consider the shrouded histories and connections of objects they use and encounter, and their potential new futures.

Text by Laurie Barron