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Eternal Fields

Katharina Keller, Shila Khatami, Daniel Kiss, Ani Schulze,
Christian Theiss

17th January - 28th February 2025

*"The place that an epoch occupies in the historical process can be determined more strikingly from the analysis of its inconspicuous surface expressions than from the epoch's judgments about itself."*¹

The lines and contours of a city weave themselves into endless patterns. Traces of times past, whose significance often seems long forgotten, combine with those of the present to form an assemblage of history. "Windows, doors and decorations [...] have accumulated in unpredictable ways over centuries,"² writes sociologist Richard Sennett, "[...] and this accumulation continues." A patchwork carpet in public space, simultaneously woven and unraveled. Over time, his ornaments have become increasingly abstract and purist, his outlines ever more reduced, tracing Western modernism's striving for rationality and truth.

But neutrality does not exist, and neither does a single truth. Even the abstinence of signs, even the blank page, can become ideological. Even the straight line is more than it seems. It becomes a demarcation to the culturally or gendered - supposedly irrational - other.

Today, a contemporary, disenchanting iconography is gradually overwriting the once mystical symbols of the city. Expressions of a secular world that are able to provide clearer guidance: traffic signs, road markings, neon signs and billboards - new guidance systems for new beliefs.

Urban surfaces and façades are always also dividing lines, both symbolically and truly. They mark the transition from outside to inside, the boundary between public and private space, between representation and intimacy. They differentiate between divergent social spheres and realities of life, are the membrane of a protective space as well as a cultural mark of distinction, an entrance as well as a barrier. They select and control, create affiliation and exclusion, hold together and repel. Both social orders and political struggles are manifested in the design and destruction of façades. As rigid and static as they may appear, they can become a projection surface, a canvas that wants to be replayed.

The exhibition *Eternal Fields* follows this idea. It quotes and expands the aesthetic laws of the architecture that surrounds us and explores playfully subverts the hegemonies inscribed in it.

Shila Khatami's installation paintings, for example, initially seem to reproduce the rules of public space in their choice of industrial materials and their form, borrowed from the marking of a runway, but then dissolve any disciplinary or normative claim in their spontaneous, fleeting gesture. In the installation of their works on the ceilings, floors and

¹ Siegfried Kracauer: *Das Ornament der Masse*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977. S. 50

² Richard Sennett: *Die offene Stadt*, Carl Hanser Verlag: München, 2018. S. 24

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walls of the interior space, they subtly change its perspective perception and at the same time reduce the principles of the exterior space to absurdity.

Katharina Keller's installations also deliberately intervene in the given spatial contexts: a window covered with a thin layer of aluminum makes it impossible to see through and recurs to strategies of thermal insulation and the temporary protection of facades in Siberia, where Keller was born. Architectural forms cast in concrete cite the ornamentation of the region's traditional wooden architecture, which is used to mark the transition from inside to outside and is ascribed a protective function. The fragility of the objects, which form a personal archive of the artist, also makes the patriarchal character of the material she has chosen, borrowed from socialist brutalism, appear fragile.

In their works, Christian Theiss and Daniel Kiss imagine an alternative ornamentation that overcomes the aesthetic dogma of reduction introduced by Adolf Loos at the beginning of the 20th century and thus also quietly resists the Eurocentrism inherent in it. Inspirations from the most diverse cultural areas and religions merge into surrealist forms that seem to grow organically out of the walls and resolutely oppose the disenchantment of the world. For *Eternal Fields*, they merge their individual practices into collaborative installations: In the combination of Christian Theiss' ceramics with Daniel Kiss' digitally modeled reliefs, historical and contemporary materialities of structural design and construction unite.

Ani Schulze's artistic practice also subverts the power structures of art history with the means of fiction. Her works examine how imposed norms determine the performance of bodies in space and create alternating utopian worlds and narratives that invert or distort them. In addition to elements that take up actual spatial surfaces and sometimes seem to continue the real space in the image, mystical motifs and everyday objects, such as a camouflage cap, a safari hat and a mask, transfer the aspect of the façade to a psychological level.

Emerging from the collaboration between Christian Theiss and Daniel Kiss, which began in a joint residency, the exhibition *Eternal Fields* aims to highlight existing moments of connection and collectivity between the practices of the five exhibiting artists and create new links - consciously dissolving boundaries.

Anna Marckwald