

**Post / Postminimal**

**The Rolf Ricke Collection in Dialogue with Contemporary Artists**

February 1 to May 18, 2014

The exhibition title *Post / Postminimal*, a play on words based on the art-historical term of Post-Minimalism, refers to artistic positions of the late 1960s and early 1970s in the United States. The art critic Robert Pincus-Witten used this term in 1971 to describe a kind of art that overcame the formally rigid stance of Minimal Art and broke up the traditional understanding of the artwork as an artifact in favor of process-oriented approaches. Furthermore, the canon of materials was expanded to include items that had not yet been used in art, such as neon, latex, polyester and others.

*Op Losse Schroeven: Situaties en Cryptostructuren* and *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form* were the names of two epochal exhibitions that took place in 1969 at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and the Kunsthalle Bern. Organized by Wim van Beeren and Harald Szeemann, respectively, along with the exhibition *Eccentric Abstraction* conceived by Lucy Lippard in the Fischbach Gallery in New York, they made important contributions toward helping this new, expanded understanding of sculpture break through. The Cologne gallerist Rolf Ricke acted as one of the crucial figures behind the scenes by inviting artists to Europe to create works on site for his exhibitions starting in the mid-1960s. As one of the pioneers of young American art, he brought artists such as Richard Artschwager, Bill Bollinger, Gary Kuehn, Richard Serra and Keith Sonnier to Kassel and later Cologne, where they worked on site and developed new works especially for the gallery. All these artists were later represented with works in the aforementioned exhibitions, but had previously been shown by Rolf Ricke in solo and group shows. The collection that Rolf Ricke assembled over several decades with great knowledge and dedication was jointly acquired in a unique initiative by the Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, the Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein and the Museum für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt.

In the spirit of the former gallerist Rolf Ricke, the exhibition *Post / Postminimal* takes a broader perspective and focuses decidedly on the present and the future. The Kunstmuseum St. Gallen invited a number of contemporary artists to take part in the exhibition, all of whom were born after the epochal exhibitions in 1969, but who take up the sculptural possibilities of the late 1960s and '70s in their work and redefine them for the present. Their treatment of historical positions ranges from a deepening of the process-oriented approach to artworks (Raphael Hefti, Christoph Weber, Kilian Rüthemann) to the use of contemporary materials and techniques and the addition of content or poetry to the often material-oriented formal inventions of the past (Katinka Bock, Mariana Castillo Deball, Thea Djordjaze, Magali Reus) to the ironically broken quotation, which cunningly portray the heroic gestures of the previous movement in an absurd light (FAMED). *Post / Postminimal* thus opens a multigenerational, wide-ranging discourse on the rediscovery of sculpture in contemporary art: nine fascinating artists from the younger and youngest generation encounter seven defining figures for sculptural work today.

**Stairwell and foyer**

Language is a preferred medium of the artist collective **FAMED** (founded in 2003 in Leipzig). The group's playful approach is even evident in its name: a grammatically incorrect coinage that states the idea of fame passively and offers little indication of its meaning. The neon work *Untitled (Unsaid)* (2010), which consists of the word "UNSAID" prominently situated by the staircase, offers a glaring sight at the beginning of the exhibition. The neon lights inevitably call to mind advertising slogans and the promises of consumer society. However, the word ironically exaggerates the message to the point of absurdity: what is it that remains unsaid here, in the exhibition? As an artistic intervention, language and advertising media leave room for interpretation beyond the visible.

The work *Untitled* (2010) also functions based on the absurdity of its placement. As a source of light, the light bulb serves no function here, since it illuminates nothing besides itself. Its lack of function is further exaggerated by the fact that the cable makes a detour to the ceiling, only to return to the floor on its way to an outlet that in fact is located close to the light bulb.

The artist **Kilian Rüthemann** (\*1979), who comes from Toggenburg in Eastern Switzerland and currently lives in Basel, always deals with the given situation of the exhibition space in his work, in which he experiments with the properties of various materials: using precise interventions, he breaks up the existing architectural structure and investigates its spatial qualities. *Linger!* (2012) consists of four sheet-metal objects laid on top of one another,

which resemble mattresses in shape and hang almost like mattresses over the railing of the stairwell, a location that is far from ideal for presenting art. Angular and rigid, they rest in a precarious balance. In the museum's imposing, Neoclassicist foyer, the work suggests a powerful and menacing gesture, as manifested in the act of bending and stacking the material.

Upon first viewing *Untitled (Clothes Rails)* (2013) by the St. Gallen artist **Valentina Stieger** (\*1980), one begins to feel a strange sense of familiarity. Articles of clothing appear to be almost casually laid over bent white aluminum rods like those used in clothing racks. The works are reminiscent of design objects and explore the tension between everyday objects, design and art. In her work Valentina Stieger deals with familiar objects that are never neutral, always linked with personal memories and collective associations, and questions the visual qualities of the materials she uses. At the same time, the artist creates an unstable situation with her playfully light installation in the grandiose, Neoclassicist interior, which calls to mind a theater in which the visitor is a spectator of an imaginary play.

#### Room 1

**Raphael Hefti** (\*1978), who lives and works in Zurich and London, often arrives at artistic ideas through mistakes in production processes. This is also the case with the series *Replaying the mistakes of a broken hammer*. As suggested by the title of the rod placed almost as an afterthought in the corner of the room, this seemingly minimalistic work is based on an observation the artist made from a failed attempt to produce a hammer. During this process he noticed how the properties and appearance of the steel changed in production. This insight inspired Hefti to create a visually arresting series of works: he subjected a common steel rod to a hardening process by alternately heating it and allowing it to cool. The production process changed the surface of the steel, resulting in a patina of a remarkably painterly quality.

The works of the Georgian artist **Thea Djordjadze** (\*1971), who lives in Berlin, are of an extraordinarily fragile character. They are essentially subtle sculptural gestures, fragmentary and "unfinished" in appearance, whose often unconventional combinations of materials and contrasts of organic and clearly structured elements reveal a mysterious, even surreal effect. In her works, delicate, soft foam rubber is combined with hard plaster, coarse wire mesh with finely woven fabric, chamfered steel and cool glass with what appears to be barely treated ceramic. Modernism in art, design and architecture is the conceptual and formal point of departure for her work. Yet it is less the purity of form that interests her than the precarious situations in which the use, change and combination of often opposing cultural practices play a crucial role. In this way, the artist translates objects from the context of their original functionality and appearance and carries them into the open environment of her own artistic work.

#### Room 2 / Oberlichtsaal

The Oberlichtsaal brings together works from the defining years of the leading innovators of the new conception of sculpture from the Rolf Ricke Collection to form a true powerhouse of sculptural possibilities. The exhibition follows the historical practice of presenting sculptural works very densely and closely integrating various positions with one another, in contrast to common practice today. Rolf Ricke's unique collection as a whole constitutes a unique historical and cultural document of American Post-Minimal art of the highest quality, from the decidedly personal viewpoint of a companion and supporter: Richard Artschwager, Bill Bollinger, Gary Kuehn, Barry Le Va, Richard Serra and Keith Sonnier were not only shown in the above-mentioned historic exhibitions; they were also regular guests at Rolf Ricke's gallery in Cologne. The St. Gallen artist Roman Signer also saw the groundbreaking exhibition at the Kunsthalle Bern, and it offered him crucial insights for his own work. The trio of artists who make up FAMED intervene in this historical context with the spray-painted work *Empty Until Full* (2005). The work's title is written between two neon quotation marks, thus ironically commenting on its own process of creation, just as it appears to mischievously challenge the historical practice of exhibiting works in close proximity to one another.

**Keith Sonnier's** (\*1941) early explorations of various materials such as textiles, latex and wire mesh and their inherent material properties consequently led him to create sculptures using incandescent and neon lights, which brought his work international acclaim. These works captivate the viewer above all through the almost seductive appeal of the colored light, which in Sonnier's work always possesses an "erotic" quality. With *Neon Wrapping Lightbulbs* (1967), in which a red neon light is delicately wound around two light bulbs and appears to join the lights together, and the impressive *BA-O-BA* (1972–88), two of the artist's central works are presented in the Oberlichtsaal. These are joined by the early floor piece *Untitled* (1967) and *Wall-Cloth-Piece* (1968), the latter of which appears strikingly weightless. Together they offer important insights into Sonnier's early work: "From the beginning I was fascinated by the work of Keith Sonnier and its tremendous versatility. In this sense, I believe he

outshines many others. In the 1960s he was not yet defined as an artist who often works with light, which is ultimately too narrow a definition of his work.” (Rolf Ricke)

Concentration on materials and the creative process are also at the forefront of the works of **Gary Kuehn** (\*1939). Among the central features of his oeuvre are craftsmanship and material presence. Kuehn is interested in the tension of opposing pairs, which he investigates using various materials in combination, such as wood and straw, or wood and polyester. Indeed, his sculptures can be understood metaphorically. For example, when a bale of straw is fastened between two wooden boards and placed next to a second, open construction made of painted wood, as in *Straw Piece* (1963), restriction is combined with openness. Kuehn also makes use of the creative process, as in *Untitled* (1969), whose form is changed through the simple act of tying.

Rolf Ricke described the artist **Richard Artschwager** (1923–2013) as a singular position. Ricke was introduced to Artschwager by Gary Kuehn in New York in 1966, and he has said that Artschwager’s work contains an entire world. The objects made by Artschwager, who also worked as a carpenter, are reminiscent of furniture, though they have been radically stripped of any practical function. At the same time, they appear to viciously contradict the rigid aesthetic of Minimal Art with its simple cubes. Using commercially available, extremely “unartistic” materials such as Resopal laminate and Celotex insulating boards, Artschwager blurred the boundaries between picture, sculpture and everyday object. “To this day, Artschwager is the hardest nut to crack. It’s difficult to say whether it’s a sculpture, a picture or an object. Is it illusionistic? Is it minimalistic? What exactly is it? Is it Pop? I still don’t know.” (Rolf Ricke)

**Richard Serra** (\*1939) experimented early on with materials such as lead and rubber, whose physical qualities and material properties he investigated by subjecting them to simple interventions and then placing them in relation to the surrounding space. For example, in the early lead piece *Coils* (1968) the coiled material, hanging from the wall by three nails, unravels under its own weight. “Richard arrived in Cologne in September 1968 and insisted on going to a lead processing plant. I was quite surprised, because I didn’t know that he also worked with this material—up until then his materials had been of a different nature: rubber or fiberglass, for example. After searching for a while [...] we found a company. We bought some lead there, which he used to create his first Prop Piece in the gallery. [...] It was the birth of a new form of sculpture. His work increasingly moved from the object, which was still strongly tied to the wall, to large-scale sculpture and beyond the realm of Duchamp, in whose tradition Serra had previously stood.” (Rolf Ricke) Later Serra began to work with steel, in whole blocks or rolled plates, whose weight he made physically palpable, particularly in the large-scale indoor and outdoor sculptures that visitors can walk through, in which the perception of art becomes a bodily experience.

**Barry Le Va’s** (\*1941) works could almost be considered conceptual pieces. They are usually created on site and are dismantled after the exhibition. Ricke described his works as “gestures.” The focus is on the process, and its traces are visible in the works. Shattered panes of glass, for example, “tell” of the violent act of destruction with a sledgehammer, which, on the other hand, is also the very means of the work’s creation. Rolf Ricke said that the artist was interested in looking into the face of violence and destruction. Visitors enter the Oberlichtsaal through the *Slow Death Zone* (concept drawing in Room 1). The artist has drawn a deep shaft on a diagram, which covers a section of floor measuring one square meter and narrows toward the bottom: a trap from which one cannot escape—at least in one’s imagination—and into which visitors inevitably step as they walk through the exhibition. “He was the most radical of all. Even Serra said that,” Ricke concluded some years ago.

The artist **Bill Bollinger** (1939–88) had nearly slipped into obscurity before being rediscovered in recent years, and today he is considered a major “adversary” to Richard Serra in the field of Post-Minimal art, particularly in light of his fundamentally different understanding of materials. Bill Bollinger is represented with several works in the Oberlichtsaal. He tended to work with more lightweight materials, and their playful appearance is also typical of his work. He had a keen sense for industrially manufactured materials, including aluminum tubes, ropes and wire mesh, which he also used in radical and direct ways. Bollinger held a degree in aeronautical engineering and was fascinated by the idea of curved space, which he took as the subject of numerous horizontally and vertically oriented works. The two wheelbarrows filled with water in *Untitled* (1970)—a simple yet radical and energetic work—also demonstrate this fascination through an utterly ordinary object.

The work of the Eastern Swiss artist **Roman Signer** (\*1938) is influenced to a large degree by the process-oriented art of the late 1960s. He became well-known through performances and what he called “sculptural events.” His *Self-portrait in Weight and Height of Fall* (1972) is a central early work that represents the true starting point for his entire oeuvre. In this piece the St. Gallen artist jumped from a height of 45 centimeters onto a block of moist clay. The result of this act can be seen in the two impressions left by his bare feet in the clay, which hardened

into a sculpture as it dried. In contrast to traditional sculpture, Signer subjects his materials, including sand, water and others, to various energies and transformational processes, as in *Sand Pillar* (1973).

#### Room 3 / Seitensaal Nord

The palette of materials used by the German artist **Katinka Bock** (\*1976), who lives in Paris, is precisely chosen: loam, clay, ceramic, metal and stone are among her preferred media, which she uses to form sculptures of an almost poetic quality. In her work she pays particular attention to the materials' various properties. Once-soft materials such as clay are combined with hard stone or metal. For example, the ceramic roll in *Large Circles* (2011) was deformed by the artist with a bicycle while in its soft state and still appears soft, even though the material was later hardened in a kiln. The limestone sheet was subjected to a decidedly slower process of transformation in nature: originally soft in consistency, it was hardened through geological processes over millennia. Time, which can influence and transform the properties of a material, is also part of the subject matter of her work. For example, *Little Hand* (2012), and the work *Break* (2011) both allude to this theme.

#### Room 4 / Seitensaal Nord

In her works, the Mexican artist **Marianna Castillo Deball** (\*1975) questions mathematical systems and philosophical models as well as historical and archaeological methods of archiving, among other subjects. In her artworks she makes cultural-historical relationships visible. Based on a book about "exotic masks" published some sixty years ago in Germany, in *False Faces* (2008) she forms ambiguous objects out of paper, which even the title designates as fakes. She imitates the mask structures from the book with folds so that the image of the mask disappears behind the abstract folded structures on the glossy paper. The texts printed below are the original ethnographic descriptions of the masks from the book. Deball thus overlays the historical reading and reveals the cultural contingency of ethnographic models.

For documenta 13 she created a curved work in scagliola entitled *Uncomfortable Objects*, which draws on a formula by the mathematician Felix Klein. She points to the material's origins in the Baroque, when imitations of marble were used in decorating churches. Along with the large-scale sculpture from documenta, she created a series of small-format works in various colors which test the formal possibilities of the material.

#### Room 5 / Ecksaal Süd

Like a powerful symbol, a large concrete X occupies the entire wall. Even the door is not spared from this apparent act of vandalism. **Kilian Rütthemann** works—as in the foyer—specifically in relation to the room, which he transforms with an essentially simple yet radical gesture. At the same time, he experiments with the possibilities of the material—in this case adhesive properties of shotcrete—which allow him to create the symbol.

**Christoph Weber** (\*1974) also uses concrete as a medium for his artworks. For him this material's properties and its symbolic power are immanently important. This allows him to use the process of drying to make visible the act of manipulation as a performative aspect. As if conducting a series of experiments, Weber explores the material's possibilities by searching for the ideal moment of hardening. Whether lifted or rolled, he wrests various conditions from this archetypical building material of the 20th century which fundamentally contradict the customary industrial use of concrete. Weber, who calls himself a "Post-Pop Neo-Conceptual artist," essentially plays with the properties of materials as well as with conventions of use.

#### Room 6 / Seitensaal Süd

In the series *Parking* (2013) by the artist **Magali Reus** (\*1981), who lives in Amsterdam and London, rows of seats in various numbers are mounted on the walls of the Seitensaal. They thus create an atmosphere like that of a waiting room, while the cheap material and pastel tones call to mind an ice cream parlor. Some of the seats are unoccupied, while others are overlaid with metal objects, a transparent sheet or plastic covers. The inspiration for the work no doubt comes from daily life, but the materials, which are positioned with delicate gestures, lend it an unfamiliar quality. Magali Reus alludes to life with her art; in the anthropological sense, she evokes the potential body that could sit on the seats. In *Absolute Zero (Night Blue, Vertical)* and *Absolute Zero (Clear, Vertical)* (2012), by contrast, the room is infused with tension by steel chains hanging taut from the ceiling.

#### Room 7

The final room of the exhibition features works from the museum's permanent collection, including *Untitled* (1969) by Gary Kuehn, *Droplight* (1969) by Bill Bollinger and *Untitled (#94, 1967)* (1988) by Donald Judd. Katinka Bock reacts to these pieces with the second part of her installation *Sky and Sea* (2011) in one corner of the room, in which she captures the process of convergence in the firing of ceramics. Old masters such as Keith Sonnier also

bring the process to the fore: in *In Between* (1968/69) light bulbs blink alternately at one-second intervals on both sides of the wall piece. The colorful *Wall Drawing // 1116, Triangle within a Circle, each with Broken Bands of Color* by Sol LeWitt (1928–2007) is a late work by this pioneer of Conceptual Art, who also made theoretical statements about the basic principles of art. His manifesto-like “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art” from 1967 is considered a fundamental text, in which the artist radically separates the concept from the artifact. The rolled steel sculpture *Thelma is that you? (For Lena Horne)* (1983) by Richard Serra also consumes the surrounding space. Serra’s sculptures emphasize weight and lightness at the same time. His monumental steel sculptures, many of which can be walked through, structure exhibition spaces and open experiential realms to the visitor, as in *Corner Pentagon* (1988), which “occupies” one of the upper corners of the museum foyer: “With the clearly defined shape, with the cut square I am attempting to activate the wall and the room.” (Serra) With works from the former collection of Rolf Ricke and the large outdoor sculpture *Trunk* (1987), which has been displayed between the theater and the museum since 1989, the Kunstmuseum St. Gallen offers a first-rate selection of Richard Serra’s work, in addition to that of other Post-Minimal artists—thanks in large part to the Rolf Ricke Collection.

Texts: Céline Gaillard, Claudia Hürlimann, Daniela Mittelholzer, Konrad Bitterli

The quotations by Rolf Ricke are from: Christiane Meyer-Stoll, “Close to Art: Conversations with Rolf Ricke conducted by Christiane Meyer-Stoll,” in: *Sammlung Rolf Ricke: Ein Zeitdokument (Rolf Ricke Collection: A Document of the Times)*, edited by Kunstmuseum Lichtenstein, Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main (Ostfildern, 2008), p. 52 (Sonnier), p. 53 (Serra), p. 55 (Artschwager), p. 68 (Le Va).