

Kunsthalle Wien

#FemaleFool Booklet

I'm **Isa**
Genzken.
The Only
Female
Fool

Museumsquartier

I'M ISA GENZKEN,
THE ONLY FEMALE FOOL
28/5 – 7/9 2014
www.kunsthallewien.at

“Genzken’s urban aesthetic operates at levels at once indexical, connotative, denotative, material, symbolic and allegorical”, Joshua Decter writes in the publication that accompanies the exhibition. “She seems to have an intuitive grasp of cities as territories of wonder, complexity, fear and hope.”

The large-scale exhibition at Kunsthalle Wien focuses on Genzken’s fascination with the urban. Her sculptural exploration of architecture is accompanied by reflections on the social and the lived space in the global metropolises. Genzken’s *Social Facades* (2002) with their reflective surfaces are reminiscent of the reflective surfaces of corporate buildings, however they also distort our own image, which is thereby reflected in the shimmering and reflective sheets from the DIY store that are pasted with image objects. Her *New Buildings for Berlin* (2014) are euphoric, utopian designs that teach the actually built conformity tristesse, how great contemporary building could look. The *Beach Huts* (2000) celebrate the improvised temporary dwelling, as another place of longing. *Science Fiction/Hier und jetzt zufrieden sein* (2001), which was jointly produced with Wolfgang Tillmans, forms with its large reflective cubes a resonator that duplicates the environment and suggestively draws the viewer into the abstract space of pictorial illusion.

Although Genzken’s multifaceted work in essence entails a surprising wealth of ideas, it nevertheless provides for a clear anchorage in

the sculptural field. It casts a critical look at the present in her work, and takes this as the starting point for a radical reinvention of reality. Formal rigor is confronted with a playful combination of materials, and the homogeneous with the disparate. However, the diversity of expression is never arbitrary, but corresponds to the dynamics of the big city, which on account of its ambivalence still serves as the main source of inspiration for Genzken. The classical rigor of modern architecture, the post-modern fascination with the trivial and the motley combination of vastly different styles in the real urban space, constitute the raw material of her sculptures and assemblages, collages and films.

Genzken shares this exploration of contradictions of urban life and its inherent potential for social change with artists such as Gordon Matta-Clark and Dan Graham whose work she admires. In the exhibition selected works of these artists are showcased with works by Genzken in a dialogue, which is intended to focus on the parallels in their explorations of the urban space. Works by Carl Andre, Jasper Johns, Gerhard Richter, Wolfgang Tillmans and Lawrence Weiner are also exhibited. For Genzken they are a source of inspiration, of artistic dialogue, and communal works.

Curator: Nicolaus Schafhausen

A publication with texts by Joshua Decter and Tom McDonough is published by Sternberg Press to accompany the exhibition.

Ellipsoids and Hyperboles



Isa Genzken, *Blau-grün-gelbes Ellipsoid 'Joma'*, 1981, Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne

Ellipsoids and *Hyperboles* are among Genzken's earliest works. She produced these lacquered wooden sculptures in the seventies aided by a carpenter and a physics student. The shape of the elongated, streamlined sculptures was calculated by a computer, in those days a very elaborated process. The perfectly converging parallels of the coloured wooden sculptures only touch the floor in one respectively two places. They give structure to the space that surrounds them. With their polished and shiny lacquered surface they enjoy an uncanny presence, where reified associations are overshadowed by geometrical constructedness. Centre of gravity and point of contact create a tension that is absorbed by the sculpture's curvatures. In these works the surface appears to possess a certain depth, while depth presents itself as a curved folding of the surface.

New York

"To me, New York had a direct link with sculpture ... New York is a city of incredible stability and solidity. And then the height of the buildings ..." (Isa Genzken in conversation with Wolfgang Tillmans). The photographic series *New York* shot between 1998 and 2000 comprises approximately 600 b/w and colour photographs. They are pictures of skyscrapers, facades, reflecting window fronts, urban canyons and buildings that are mirrored in other buildings. Urbanity presents itself in these images as an agglomeration of impressive and elegant skyscrapers, a symbol of modernity. These images, that were shot with no great effort yet seem to pursue a strong composition, are reminiscent of the photography of the Neues Sehen (New Vision movement), which itself



Isa Genzken, *New York, N.Y.*, 1998/2000, Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne

was characterised by Bauhaus. Their detailed view is abstract and often diagonally shifted to emphasise the dynamics of architecture. The speed of a metropolis is visualised in the geometrically structured buildings and the grid-shaped roads that aim to accelerate. *I Love New York, Crazy City* is the title of collaged books Genzken made in 1996 in which she pays homage to her beloved city.

New Buildings for Berlin

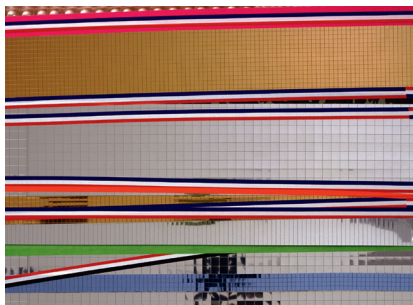


Isa Genzken, *New Buildings for Berlin (Alpha)*, 2014, Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne

Architecture, probably Genzken's most important subject, is succinctly expressed in her models for *New Buildings for Berlin*. These abstract models for high-rises follow the utopian spatial concepts of classical modernity like Mies van der Rohe's design for a glass skyscraper in Berlin's Bahnhof Friedrichstraße from 1922. "Only skyscrapers under construction reveal their bold constructive thoughts, and then the impression made by their soaring skeletal frames is overwhelming", van der Rohe noted then. Genzken elaborates on this constructive thought and arranges coloured glass into sculptural formations. The work refers to the principles of modernism with its visionary, even societal

requirements but at the same time takes credit for the sculptural sphere that lies beyond reification.

Social Facades



Isa Genzken, *Soziale Fassade*, 2002, Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne

Social Facades are pictorial objects covered by Genzken with reflecting foil and other reflective materials. They lead to think one can see oneself in them, but all they do is provide a distorted image. Akin to the facades of corporate buildings with their reflective exterior that allows the inside to look out, but prohibits the outside from glancing in, they are attractive and repulsive at the same time. Ultimately nothing but faceless facades, they are reminiscent of the external shell of modern architecture, but whose reflective surfaces resist presenting any definitive “outward appearance” which continually shifts depending upon their surroundings. Where we hope to find our face, we discover instead the physical recalcitrance of metal, plastic and reflecting foil. *Social Facades* are thus an expression of the contemporary social constitution,

mirror of a reifying subjectivity or a product of a society that tries to find its fulfilment in consumerism.

Stelen

The columns titled *Stelen* are often associated with Genzken’s longstanding interest in modern architecture, in particular the skyscrapers of New York. The columns are laminated with foils, sometimes even pictures and postcards. The slim, rectangular steles also explicitly refer to the minimalism of Post-War American art, that Genzken had engaged from the beginning of her career. Naming them after her friends and people that are important to her,



Isa Genzken, *A, B, C, D*, 2002/2003, Courtesy private collection Jarla Partilager and Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne, Photo: Mathias Johansson

furthermore lends the work an air of abstract portraits, that allow for an individual design despite the array of uniformly structured sculptures made from DIY store supplies: post-Fordist do-it-yourself-constructions of subjectivity.

Science Fiction/ Hier und jetzt zufrieden sein sein

The work is a collaboration between Isa Genzken and Wolfgang Tillmans and was created for an exhibition in Museum Ludwig, Cologne, in 2001. Genzken's mirrored wall-units that capture the spectator in a convoluted reflection confront *Wake*, Tillmans' monumental photograph. Tillmans shows us the remnants of a party in his studio. The institutional space of art merges into the informal dance floor. The mirrors' presence and the spatial dynamics they create, form a typical dissonance with the deserted party scene: "here" and "now" react to a "there" and "then". Space and time overlap and even the reflective surface – a central theme in Genzken's work since 2000 – suddenly oscillates between euphoria and an illusion that only superimposes reality.

Ohren (Ears)



Isa Genzken, *Ohr*, 1980, Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne

In New York Genzken made a series of photographs that featured the ears of women she talked to on the street. The ear is exhibited as the body's endogenous "receiver". As Genzken's work contains a whole range of "world receivers", abstract sculptures with antennas, the ear is also interpreted as a recording device for outside impulses and receives auditory messages. Magnified, the photographs dissolve the sensory organ into a plastic form, which by all means is equal to any loudspeaker or world receiver. The body is objectified and made into a machine that processes external information. In their factual, cool documentation the photographs mask all individuality and uncover the sculptural in two-dimensional reproductions. "I think that photography has a lot to do

with sculpture – because it is three-dimensional and because it depicts reality.” (Genzken)

Atelier (Studio)

In the 1980s Isa Genzken lived in Cologne, when the city was a centre of contemporary art. Together with Wolfgang Tillmans she created the photographic series *Atelier* that was shot in the Cologne Cathedral and features Genzken at the centre of this imposing piece of sacral architecture. The title *Atelier* suggests that the Cologne Cathedral was an inspirational place for Genzken and her artistic creativity. De facto, the vertical alignment that extends upward reflects Genzken's interest for modern high-rises from a historical point of view. Genzken's presentation of the cathedral pushes the surroundings comprising cloisters, buttresses and prayer chairs into the background and thus sovereignly contradicts the claim that man has to be subordinate to sacral architecture.



Isa Genzken/Wolfgang Tillmans, *Atelier*, 1993, Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne

Hemden (Shirts)



Isa Genzken, *Hemden*, 1998, Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne, © Kunsthalle Wien, 2014, Photo: Andrea Fichtel

These different paint-splattered shirts have hardly ever been exhibited before. The objects are by all means meant to be worn and are based on the idea of sculptures that are instantly transferrable into the sphere of social encounters. The textiles, covered with traces of neon and silver colourings, were worn by Genzken and she also posed in them for photos. They are designed objects, yet function as pieces of clothing and emphasise once more Genzken's claim that through artistic appropriation and disassociation ordinary goods can become contemporary mirrors of the self.

Beach Huts

Beach Huts are improvised houses that Genzken assembled out of different materials: a cube laminated with confetti is juxtaposed with a house completely coated in mirrors, comprising four mirror pieces supported by an espresso-box. The basic principle of the reconstructed space becomes evident in the works that are constrained to the premises they are based on. More concerned with tectonics than architecture and determined by the principle of bricolage – the improvised combining of what is available – the *Beach Huts* give off a playful vibe. Ultimately they are modelled constructions of a space that is designated to take off one's clothing and change into bathing gear. The latent voyeurism that such places attract is implied by the transparent, partially open constructions as these designs oscillate between architectural models and sculptures.



Isa Genzken, *Strandhäuser zum Umziehen*, 2000 (detail), Courtesy Collection FRAC Nord-Pas de Calais, Dunkerque and Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne

Sculptures in public spaces



Isa Genzken/Gerhard Richter, U-Bahnstation König-Heinrich-Platz, Duisburg, 1992, Courtesy Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne

Numerous projects for public spaces as well as drafts for unrealised projects show how important it is to Genzken that her works reference their surrounding spaces. The enamel wall-image created in cooperation with Gerhard Richter for a metro station in Duisburg represents art in urban transit areas; the oversized *Rose* that was erected in the MoMA's courtyard displays a subtle shift in the scale of contemplation. Abstract frameworks that capture the environment like window views create their own form of spatial presence. Genzken explains that her sculptures are not about appropriating space nor do they contain or define a certain perspective. With their restrained design Genzken's works for public spaces insist on being proposals how the world can be viewed from a different perspective.

Haare wachsen wie sie wollen

Haare wachsen wie sie wollen was created in 2002 for Galerie Meerrettich in Berlin, Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, in those days ran by the artist Josef Strau. The work comprises a collection of bamboo shoots that proliferate like hair from the roof of that small, detached building. Later the exterior sculpture was exhibited on the roof of the Italian pavilion during the Venice Biennale in 2003. During the exhibition it can be seen on the rooftop of Kunsthalle Wien Karlsplatz. Genzken sees sculptures as objects that are charged with content and through their placement in outdoor and indoor spaces establish a constant relationship with these spaces, thus providing a dialogue with the respective architecture and its social as well as ideological charge. The unruly hair becomes a plea for the proliferations of the urbane, which have become a defiant reaction to the universally increasing endeavours of conformity.

Favourite artists, artist friends, and collaborations

“After all, art is often on the edge in the sense that in one moment it seems very close, and the next moment you find it doesn’t. You can see this quality in the artists I love ... I always ask myself, ‘Who did you love when you were young?’ Michael Asher, Lawrence Weiner, Dan Graham, Carl Andre – almost only Americans. And then I ask, ‘As you got a little older, who did you love then?’ Wolfgang Tillmans and Kai Althoff ...” (Isa Genzken in conversation with Wolfgang Tillmans) Looking at her life and work a few characters that are personally or artistically close to Genzken can be added to this small group of contemporary favourite artists. In the exhibition selected works from Genzken’s artistic environment with its defined quantitative limits will be contrasted with her own work.

Between 1982 and 1993 Genzken was married to the painter Gerhard Richter, she was a student at his master class in Düsseldorf. In 1992 they collaborated on a commission to decorate a subway station in Duisburg (first draft: 1980), where Genzken’s sculptural interest in materials and Richter’s love of planes and colours came together. Dynamic, conically shaped circular segments trace the orbit of Mercury and Venus. Richter’s *Kugel II* from 1992, on the other hand functions

as a real movable small sculpture, as its polished surface mirrors its scaled down environment.

“Mobile” in a different way are works of art that, solely based on artist’s instructions, can be performed at different locations. In his *Declaration of Intent* from 1968 Lawrence Weiner expressed that an idea by itself can be a work of art and the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership. Along this line of thought his instructions for *TWO MINUTES OF SPRAY PAINT DIRECTLY UPON THE FLOOR FROM A STANDARD AEROSOL SPRAY CAN* could be implemented in the exhibition space without further interference of the artist. Weiner’s inherent intention to “dematerialise” an artwork and to integrate the spectator in the production and reception of art is very similar to Genzken’s concept of sculpture.

This also includes blurring the boundaries of public and private and cross pollinating the languages of sculpture and architecture, typical also for the work of yet another conceptual artist from Genzken’s circle of friends: Since the 1960s Dan Graham has addressed the organisation of spaces of labour, production, corporate organisation, or the emergent sameness of middle-class housing developments within the expanded post-war territories of American suburbia. In 1981 Genzken roamed the clubs of New York with Dan Graham

and photographed the concerts. The aim was not to document the personalities of the music industry, but to explore their poses. Graham’s artistic and theoretical work equally focuses on the subject and its relations to its environment. For Graham the self is not an atomistic entity, but is imminent in the network of relationships or environmental structure. His photographs taken from the photo- and text montages he created together with Robin Hurst in 1987 called *Private ‘Public’ Space: The Corporate Atrium Garden* feature glass houses in corporate buildings that reflect the city dweller’s dream of earth as a Garden of Eden, but might just as well be interpreted as a parallel world to the suburban shopping malls.

“I was twenty-one when I first went to New York, and I was so fascinated by the architecture and glad that something like that existed and that I was able to have this visual experience that I thought to myself, this is where I want to live. To me, New York had a direct link with sculpture – that must have been it.” This is how Genzken in 2003 remembers her first impression of this city, a city she would frequently visit, roam and explore in the years to come. This manner of re- and de-construction of certain locations illustrates a spiritual kinship between Gordon Matta-Clark and Genzken. With his *nonuments* and *anarchitecture*, Matta-Clark sought to intervene in cities when and where it had an impact: at strategic architectural

sites that were emblematic of transitions from urban neglect or decay towards redevelopment and gentrification. In his project *Reality Properties – Fake Estates* (1973) the artist offers a “deadpan burlesque of the capricious character of private property and real estate investment: he purchased the deeds of miniscule plots of unclaimed urban territory at auctions for twenty-five dollars apiece and documented these nearly invisible, innocuous sections of the urban to reveal ownership as an absurd condition.” (Joshua Decter).

Isa Genzken cultivated long-standing ties of friendship with Michael Asher, one of the first conceptual artists in the US. In the late 1960s and early 1970s his “subtle yet deliberate interventions – additions, alterations or subtractions – in particularly environments” aimed to be a conceptual intervention to reconsider the way exhibition spaces worked: to have empty exhibition walls and merely exhibit the movable partition walls, the removal of the partition wall between the exhibition space and the office area of a gallery or removing the doors of the exhibition space so it can be open all day and night, are some of his most famous interventions that he simply called *dislocations*. The artist wants to enhance our awareness of the automatic production of ideas concerning order and layout through shifts in space and modifications. Asher did not bequeath any physical work.

Because of its radical site-specific character, his comprehensive work can only take its place in the annals of the art system as reprints of his texts and writings.

Hommage à Jasper Johns is the title of an image that Isa Genzken produced in 1992. One half consists of a transparent plastic foil covered in ochre-orange paint, the other half comprises chequered gold and silver cubes of mirror foil pasted vertically on top of each other. “It is dedicated to Jasper Johns. As he basically did these flags, I mean he is so famous because of his flags, and I was thinking of a flag too, and so I did this ...”

Johns started producing his numerous variations of the American flag from 1954 onward with his unique technique: a medium is covered in a collage made from shreds of newspaper, a popular image is chosen and transferred to the medium in encaustic and oil paints.

His flags will never flutter when there is victory or defeat, as they are flat and still. They refute the artistic zeitgeist: when Johns painted his first flag in New York, the dramatic expressive gestures of Abstract Expressionism were triumphing over here.

Like flag, the other central theme in Johns' work also borrows from a pool of familiar signs: *Targets*, which also are a familiar pattern, a reality and metaphor combined. Johns brought both back to mind;

the simple target that is magnified,
broken down by colour and surface;
the metaphorical quality of the
mounted boxes with hinged lids
on top in which plaster casts taken
from a face or parts of the body
are arranged. Associations are
provoked, destroyed, linger in space
and are revived.

Program

Opening

Tue May 27, 7 pm

Lectures

Tue May 27, 6 pm

Jennifer Kabat

*The Bauhaus Disco: 18 Thoughts on
the Grace Building, Ghost Estates
and Isa Genzken*

The New York-based writer and critic
Jennifer Kabat introduces the work of
Isa Genzken, particularly with regard to
its relation to architecture. (In English,
free admission)

Tue Sep 2, 6 pm

Vanessa Joan Müller

We Are The Only Female Artists

Vanessa Joan Müller talks about female
artists' careers in the male dominated
post-war art world. (In German)

Talk

Wed Jun 25, 6 pm

Daniel Buchholz & Nicolaus Schafhausen

Who is Isa Genzken?

Daniel Buchholz, long-time gallerist
of Isa Genzken, and Nicolaus
Schafhausen talk about their
personal approach to the artist's
work and its development over the
past decades. (In German)

Filmscreenings

Thu Jul 10, 7 pm

Isa Genzken, *Zwei Frauen im Gefecht (Two women in combat)*

1974, 16mm transferred to DVD, b/w, silent, 8 min.

Performers:

Isa Genzken, Susan Grayson

Camera: Benjamin H. D. Buchloh

Two artists – Isa Genzken and Susan Grayson – exchange clothing. One is tall and slim, the other one shorter and bigger, but somehow the shirts, skirts, bras and shoes seem to fit both women in different ways, as is documented by the repeated exchange.

Isa Genzken, *Chicago Drive*

1992, 16mm transferred to DVD, colour, sound, 26 min.

Camera: Ray Wang

Chicago Drive is a cinematic dialogue with Chicago's famous architecture, captured by camera trips along the high-rises' facades, reflective windows and motorways and translated into an abstract matrix of modernity.

Isa Genzken, *Meine Großeltern im Bayrischen Wald (My Grandparents in the Bavarian Forest)*

1992, video, colour, sound, 63 min.

In 1992, shortly before they passed away Isa Genzken made a film about her grandparents. It is a personal document capturing the everyday routine of a married couple that lives secluded lives. It makes the private public without disclosing it.

The grandparent's house and their everyday life seems the antitheses to the world reflected in Genzken's other works, yet insists on the concept of lived space as a social sphere.

Thu Jul 24, 7 pm

Isa Genzken, *Warum ich keine Interviews gebe (Why I Don't Do Interviews)*

2003, DVD, colour, sound, 10 min.

Camera: Armin Krämer

In *Warum ich keine Interviews gebe*, a 10 minute film based on improvisation, Kai Althoff plays an investigative art journalist who wants to question Isa Genzken about her work. Genzken concludes that to conduct interviews would be quite the opposite of creating art and answers the question about her approach to contemporary art by replying that the necessity to answer such a question is the reason why she does not do interviews.

Isa Genzken, *Empire/Vampire, Who Kills Death*

2003, DVD, colour, silent, 40 min.

Camera: Christoph Manz

Empire/Vampire comprises a sculptural group made out of everyday objects that evoke catastrophic scenarios as if seen in a diorama. Genzken develops a dystopian view on the present in these assemblages that are presented on pedestals at eye level.

The video *Empire/Vampire, Who Kills Death* shows how Genzken captured the eponymous group of works on film, aided by her cameraman

Christoph Manz and how she interprets it as a sculpture that is incessantly moving and changing.

Thu Sep 4, 7 pm

**Isa Genzken/Wilhelm Schnell,
*Ground Zero***

2007/2008, DVD, colour, silent,
6 min.

The video by Wilhelm Schnell and Isa Genzken shows *Ground Zero* in New York seen from the 36th floor of the Millenium Hotel.

**Isa Genzken/Kai Althoff, *Die Kleine Bushaltestelle (Gerüstbau)*
(*The Little Bus Stop [Scaffolding]*)**

2012, digital film, colour, sound,
71 min.

Between 2007 and 2010 Isa Genzken shot a movie in collaboration with Kai Althoff that moves between slapstick and improvisational theatre. They act out different couple constellations and take on different roles. At home and on the road, in Berlin, Cologne or New York they shot the film with a simple camera. The loosely connected sketches and scenes feature love, sex, the weather, disease, money and art time and again. Many episodes, laid out antagonistically or as a dialogue, can be interpreted as allegories of contemporary creative existence and its aporia.

Education Program

Sunday Tours

Sunday, 3 pm

Guided tour in German through the exhibition with free illycaffè. The tours are free of charge with admission.

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#Vermittlung

Colophon

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I'm Isa Genzken, The Only Female Fool

28/5 – 7/9 2014

Exhibition

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