

## Isa Genzken at K21 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen

With two parallel exhibitions dedicated to Isa Genzken (b. 1948), the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen offers a special look at the work of one of the most important contemporary women artists worldwide. The focus is on two work phases from her career spanning five decades. On the lower floor of K21, the emphasis is on her visionary early work—a period that has never before been honored to this extent in any other exhibition. In parallel, current works from the last decade are on view on the bel étage. This exciting compilation draws attention to developments within the oeuvre, as well as to Isa Genzken's attitude towards the world. It testifies to her ability to continually reinvent herself artistically, to appropriate new materials and techniques, and to respond precisely to the circumstances of her time.

Works from 1973 to 1983 is an adapted version of the eponymous exhibition that was on view last fall at the Kunstmuseum Basel. In Düsseldorf, special reference will now be made to the city, as well as to Genzken's biography, because this is where the artist studied from 1973 to 1977 and subsequently lived until 1979. The exhibition thus begins with works from her years of study and builds a bridge to the year 1983, when Genzken increasingly turned her attention to the next theme. On display are sculptures, computer prints, multi-part drawing series, photography, and film.

One focal point of the exhibition are the *Ellipsoids* and *Hyperboloids*, elongated wooden sculptures based on elaborate computer calculations. Their aerodynamic form suggests industrial production, but in fact they are one-of-a-kind handcrafted pieces that emerged from Isa Genzken's engagement with the historical avant-garde and American Minimalism in particular. Unlike Minimalist art, however, her reduced aesthetic conceals subtle associations and references to her own biography, for example by the titles of her sculptures, which denote names of people, places, and objects.

The early works testify to Isa Genzken's self-confidence and intransigence, with which she adopted her position in the field of sculpture—an environment that, in the 1970s, was largely dominated by men.

In addition to the sculptures, another focus of the exhibition is on the computer graphics, some of which are very large, measuring up to eight meters long. They were created from 1975 onwards parallel to the *Ellipsoids* and *Hyperboloids* and are printed on continuous paper, including the guide hole margins typical of the time. They reveal how Genzken played in an innovative way with algorithmic figures and the technical possibilities of her time. Here as well, the artist mixes conceptual approaches with personal themes. Works that initially appear abstract become recognizable at second glance as traces of her own existence and tell of relationships and desires.

Parallel to the presentation on the lower floor of K21, current works by the Berlin-based artist will be on view on the *Bel Étage*. Featuring installations, sculptures, and wall works, the exhibition “Isa Genzken. Here and Now” undertakes a diagnosis of the state of the present. In her works, Genzken takes an unabashed look at the society of late capitalism. In doing so, she exposes the crises, fears, and taboos that characterize it.

Her installation *Gibt es genug Medikamente* (Is There Enough Medicine), for example, refers to how societies struggle to deal with diseases. With the installation *Poverty*, she in turn deals with the themes of impoverishment and homelessness. Also on display is a selection of works from the series of *Geldbilder* (Money Pictures), which consists of a group of canvases on which banknotes and coins of different currencies are attached, thus figuratively referring to currencies that shape the world.

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A further group of works in the exhibition are the *Schauspieler* (Actors). These sculptures comprised of mannequins, which the artist has dressed, sprayed, and equipped with everyday objects, stand individually or in groups fraught with tension. Here as well, references to the artist's own biography become clear—several of the mannequins wear Genzken's own clothes. The aspect of interaction is also important, insofar as visitors can walk around the sculpture groups or pass between the individual mannequins, thus becoming part of the scenarios. Unlike the *Ellipsoids* and *Hyperboloids*, the *Schauspieler* create strong narratives among themselves. At the same time, however, just as in the early sculptures, their material again refers to industrially manufactured production and, in particular, the rapidly perishable consumer goods of mass culture.

As with the *Ellipsoids* and *Hyperboloids*, with the *Schauspieler* cinematic thinking plays a role which has accompanied Isa Genzken from the very beginning of her artistic career. The model-like character of the groups of actors is reminiscent of film sets or scenarios from cities, and the movement of the viewer is an elementary component of the work.

The exhibition “Isa Genzken. Works from 1973 to 1983” was conceived by the Kunstmuseum Basel in cooperation with the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf.

The exhibition “Isa Genzken. Here and Now” is sponsored by the Foundation for Art, Culture, and Social Affairs of Spard

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*Curators: Susanne Gaensheimer and Agnieszka Skolimowska ("Isa Genzken. Here and Now"), Sören Grammel ("Isa Genzken. Works from 1973 to 1983")*

***Isa Genzken. Works from 1973 to 1983***

***Isa Genzken. Here and Now***

*K21, May 8 – September 5, 2021*

*Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf*

***Press conference: Thursday, May 6, 2021 at K21 (tbc.)***

#IsaGenzken

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