Mondrian Ambiente
Olaf Metzel

Opening: Friday, October 16th, 6 – 8 pm
Exhibition: October 16th – November 14th, 2026

In his fifth solo exhibition at Wentrup, Olaf Metzel takes on modern architecture and design. *Mondrian Ambiente* is a formal exploration, or rather the formal exposure, of objects and ideas. In it, Metzel subjects the supposed clarity of modernist form and order to the forces that have long defined his work: irregularity, fragmentation and ambiguity.

Among the figures invoked throughout *Mondrian Ambiente* are the titular Piet Mondrian, alongside Charlotte Perriand, Pierre Jeanneret and Carlo Scarpa: artists, architects and designers whose radically different practices nevertheless share an intense concern with relationships between elements, line and plane, body and object, material and space, detail and whole.

Instrumental in establishing the language of purity and restriction were groups such as the Dutch De Stijl, and its members Theo van Doesburg, Piet Mondrian and architect Gerrit Rietveld. But conflicts with modernity are very much inherent within modernity itself. It was Doesburg who proclaimed the new modern architecture to be built out of relationships of opposites, shortly before he broke off his partnership with Mondrian, to finally have the freedom to draw diagonal lines.

The broader milieu of the time freely moved between designing lounge chairs, writing manifestos, painting abstract paintings, and building utilitarian houses. In Metzel's work, these forms collide. Architecture and design, books and reviews, not only as physical structures but as social instruments, become sites of conflict. But if a house, as Le Corbusier purported, is a machine for living, what is art a machine for?

The suspended function of these objects, in a sense, inverts the way modernism reduced forms to their fundamental elements: the reduction becomes a very real one. From object to live in to object to live with, this transformation happens on more levels than just size and practicality. The architect becomes his creation; the mid-century chaise longue becomes sculpture; the architectural detail becomes fragment; the functional object becomes an image; the image becomes an obstruction.

Across disciplines, Metzel's material is made illegible, but tangible. In his sculptures, he turns his subjects against themselves, twists, warps and crushes them, distorting the clean, symmetrical structures they claim to depict, breaking their straight lines and stripping them of their familiarity and beauty to the point of irritability. But as Loos, another grandfather of modernity, pondered, architecture should please everyone, and art: no one.