

At this year's Art Cologne, we will be presenting Alexandra Bircken (\*1967), an extraordinary Cologne artist currently enjoying the international spotlight. As a former participant in the studio grant program (2004–2008) the Kölischer Kunstverein has been following her career since the very beginning.

Over the past few years, Bircken has developed an individual sculptural language that reveals a deep understanding of the materials she employs and a sensitive approach to both natural and artificial materials. For her solo exhibition *Blondie*, Bircken developed freestanding sculptures, hanging objects and wall art from ropes, vintage clothing pieces, wood, concrete, articles used in daily life, hair and wool. The quintessential element within these works is the point at which a functional item is transformed into an aesthetic object or narrative microcosm.

When Bircken, who first began her career as a fashion designer, started working as an artist in 2004, her jewelry and clothing pieces began evolving into devious shapes and spatial designs and soon lost all semblance of gender specificity or even functionality. Being aware of the artificiality and role play within fashion, Bircken's use of wool, branches and stones – materials with an inherent air of authenticity – at first seems to be a faux pas. But she bucks this value judgment, focusing instead on the psychology at work behind the interplay of interaction and confrontation between wildly different materials that relate to a confusing set of pop cultural references.

Her working methods place Bircken in the generation of younger artists that have very consciously chosen a formal artistic approach. Bircken's consistency to work through and continuously develop formal problems can be traced throughout her past solo exhibitions at the Stedelijk Museum CS in Amsterdam and at the Ursula Blickle Stiftung in Kraichtal (both in 2008). Furthermore Bircken exhibited at BQ in Berlin (2009, 2006 and 2004), at Gladstone Gallery in New York (2007) and Herald Street in London (2009, 2005). She participated in group exhibitions among others at Kunstverein Freiburg, at Barbican Art Gallery, London (2008), at New Museum, New York (2007) and at White Columns, New York (2005).

On the occasion of the exhibition a special edition by Alexandra Bircken will be presented. The studio grant program and Alexandra Bircken are supported by the Imhoff Stiftung since 2004. The RheinEnergie Stiftung Kultur sponsors the series *Antenne Köln* since 2007. The Kölischer Kunstverein is pleased to announce that these two Cologne-based foundations have renewed their funding by supporting the solo exhibition as well as the production of new artworks.

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