

Kunsthalle Basel is delighted to present the first solo show by the German artist Mandla Reuter in Switzerland.

Fiction and reality – two concepts that are each the opposite of the other and yet each depend on the other. It becomes all the harder to apply one of these two categories to a situation or a story when we are presented with differing opinions as to what is fiction and what is fact. At the centre of this exhibition by Mandla Reuter is a plot of land situated in Los Angeles and owned by the artist. There are no images of this plot in the show. Instead, Reuter triangulates its location from various sides and in different ways, but without addressing it or representing it directly. This multifaceted approach generates several interpretations and places a question mark over the reality and existence of the land. This questioned reality is referenced even more forcefully by the existing objects and industrially produced materials that play a dominant role in the show.

In past exhibitions, Reuter obstructed doorways and blocked the usual entrances into the gallery space, which required the viewers to make constant detours and at the same time obliged them to confront his art, which possesses meaning and function in equal measure. Through these detours and the pauses they inserted into the tour of the show, the artist generated tensions and invoked different levels of reality that contradicted the usual format of exhibition visits and created something new. The organisation of the exhibition underlines its artificiality. Like the City of Las Vegas that was conjured out of the arid Nevada desert and which is in a class of its own when it comes to dramatic composition. Fiction and reality here come so close that there is almost nothing to distinguish between them. The casinos, spectacular fountains and replicas of historical sites represent a concept that is based on copying other places, showing them in concentrated fashion in one spot and creating a completely warped reality.

At Kunsthalle Basel, Reuter takes the institution's ground plan and strips it of its usual function. By splitting the lower galleries into two parts and separating one from the other, he allows for two different presentations to be experienced in Basel, too. Room 1 is an artificial extension of the entrance area. Functioning in the same manner as a lobby, it presents the arriving visitor with a number of options of where to go next. *Allée* (2013) is a hole – provisionally re-sealed – in the left-hand wall of the gallery, with a framed engraving mounted over it. The colour print shows a historical view of a formal park whose garden architecture echoes Reuter's own concept, insofar as its layout offers various avenues and thus various options. Here, you could take down the picture, remove the temporarily re-blocked section of wall and climb through the gap. By making your way through the utility rooms and the men's toilets that lie beyond them, you would reach the stairs, the lobby, and ultimately find yourself back in the open air. If you decide to remain in the first room,

however, the two automatic vending machines offer a choice of refreshing drinks – assuming they are in operation at that moment. Through the simple act of manipulating the power supply, Reuter robs the machines of their functionality: 24-hour availability. The dimensions of these two block-like pieces of machinery, whose scale is that of a very powerfully-built person, make them into exhibited employees, service personnel whose condition of being human means they are not always at our disposal.

Occupying the centre of the gallery is *The Gate* (2012), which is the first of several pieces in the show that reference the plot of land owned by Reuter in Los Angeles. Protected or hidden beneath the stone is a plastic bag with something inside it.

The entire show is dominated by a work that is invisible in its materiality: the lighting system *N Broadway* (2013). The lighting in all five rooms is organised into different circuits and is switched on and off at irregular intervals. Reuter first created this work in 2004, when it was inspired by the presentation system designed by Friedrich Kiesler for Peggy Guggenheim's Surrealist Gallery in New York. Kiesler used spotlights that illuminated the works individually and guided the visitor from picture to picture. Reuter subsequently designed other versions, some influencing solely the gallery lighting, others correlating with additional objects. For his solo show at Kunsthalle Basel, Reuter has created one additional lighting installation in Room 5 that complements what is already in situ. The modified lighting of *N Broadway* impacts dramatically upon the gallery architecture, collapsing and restructuring it in continuously new ways. Unlike the system designed by Kiesler, the lighting switches on and off independently of the presence of visitors, making it perfectly possible for the latter to find themselves plunged into darkness.

Rooms 2 and 3 have been fitted with a white carpet, which was grubby even before the start of the show. Reuter's installation in Room 3 also featured in the preceding *Regionale 13* group exhibition, *When I look at things, I always see the space they occupy*, and was left in place for his solo show.

Carpets are found first and foremost in interiors, whether in homes or hotel rooms, and often connote private spaces. The carpet here, however, carries traces of dirt and footprints, of material from the outside world and specifically from Reuter's plot of land in Los Angeles. This is mingled in Basel with dirt from the street trodden onto the carpet by visitors. Through the carpet, which was really supposed to be laid in L.A., Reuter switches the two locations and turns the rooms of the Kunsthalle into a piece of ground in the American city.

Within the circle of works concerned with Reuter's plot of land in Los Angeles, the diazotype

Survey (2012) in Room 3 is the only one that appears to deliver proof of its existence. The work shows a cadastral map – a piece of fiction produced by the City of Los Angeles – on which the said parcel of land and the planned street can be recognised. Diazotypes, commonly known as blueprints, were used by architects and city planners to duplicate construction drawings and land registry maps. Superseded in our own day by modern printing technologies, the diazotype method exudes a sense of the past and makes the work itself an artefact, a remnant from a bygone era of design. But however much proof the blueprint provides, it is contradicted by the pronouncement of No Such St. (2012). A letter addressed by Reuter to himself at his L.A. address was returned to its sender, stamped by the local post office with the observation “No such street”. These two works neutralise each other with the message they carry.

The Mandla Reuter exhibition continues in Rooms 4 and 5, but their entrance from Room 3 is locked. You have to exit the galleries, turn left out of the Kunsthalle’s main entrance, turn left again at the end of the building, and continue past the Kunsthalle restaurant and the inner courtyard to the rear entrance, which is the same as the entrance to the Stadtkino cinema. There you have to ring the bell and wait for a member of staff to open the door. Passing through the museum’s administrative offices, you then finally gain access – after a not inconsiderable lapse of time – to the last two rooms of the show.

In formal terms alone, Rooms 5 and 4 – arriving from the back, we visit them in reverse – are entirely different from what we have seen so far. We are greeted by a much more personal, even private Reuter. The artist has filled this second part of his show with works, objects and materials that he has conceived specifically for this space, and juxtaposes them with works created for other exhibitions. This ‘private’ section of the show is separated from the ‘public’ part in a very particular way, and yet still remains public. Only in Reuter’s handling of the space do we see radical differences in comparison to the first three rooms. The Daybed, for example, is a piece of furniture that Reuter had long wanted to build for his studio. Had it appeared in the front part of the show, its status would have been upgraded to that of an artwork, which was not Reuter’s intention. Some of the works seen here reference those encountered in the first three rooms, while others are independent pieces with no connection to the rest. The works do not correspond with each other, but group themselves together as if in a lounge or in storage. They include Souvenir (2009), a commissioned sculpture in bronze that was first shown in Reuter’s exhibition at the Schinkel Pavillon in the grounds of the Kronprinzenpalais in Berlin, and which is a miniature of an existing bronze from the GDR era by the German sculptress Senta Baldamus (1920–2001) on permanent display in the park of the Kronprinzenpalais. Reuter’s copy of Baldamus’s Dream of Flying can be seen as a conceptual work that takes up the history of the palace gardens and of past political epochs and in so doing

exemplifies the complex background to Reuter's work.

Mounted on the wall are 14 framed photographs of sunsets, all taken from the same spot on Reuter's piece of land. The work, entitled Prospect 330 E Waldon Pl and dating from 2011, shows different views of the city of Los Angeles. The pictures are hung upside down, since Reuter wishes to draw the viewer's attention to their different colour sequences and at the same time questions the importance of the pictorial motif per se.

Visually the most powerful installation in Room 5 is Cervino (2013), a construction of steel I-beams running vertically, horizontally and diagonally across the entire room. In 1959 Walt Disney opened a new rollercoaster attraction at his Disneyland resort that centred upon a 1:100 scale model of the Matterhorn. The artificial Swiss mountain consists of an outer envelope supported by a steel structure similar to that seen here. Standing right beside Cervino is the cabin of an elevator, raised off the ground on a section of scaffold. The cabin is made by Otis, an American elevator company whose founder, Elisha Graves Otis, effectively paved the way for high-rise construction with his invention of the very first hoist to feature an automatic safety device. In 1854 Otis gave a personal demonstration of this early elevator: standing on a platform that had been raised high above the ground, he instructed an assistant to cut the rope. The lift braked immediately and Otis' system was proven. From this moment on, it became possible to build skyscrapers and to access their upper floors comfortably. The cabin on display here metonymically substitutes the high-rise. Reuter has brought the cabin inside – just as he has done with The Gate(2012), two column-like concrete pillars that were originally created to stand outdoors – and presents it as a token of his interest in the marking of building plots and their boundaries.

Room 5 also contains the part of Reuter's N Broadway that gives the work its name, Chinese lanterns from North Broadway in the Chinatown district of Los Angeles, which light the gallery and complement the light installation as a whole.

In Room 4, the last in the show, a 35mm projector casts the image of a scallop shell on the wall. The shell belongs to the replica of the Trevi fountain in Las Vegas, filmed by Reuter as it changed colour under the lights permanently illuminating the fountain. Mandla Reuter has taken up the theme of the Fontana di Trevi in Rome on several occasions. In an installation of 2010, he presented five 1000-litre containers filled with water from the real Trevi fountain. The same preoccupation with water is found here in these last two rooms, in the water pipes of Jet d'eau (2012/13). This work, developed for the Sprengelmuseum in Hanover, uses industrially manufactured high-pressure water pipes of the kind used for fountains like those in Las Vegas and everywhere, and for irrigation systems. In

the Kunsthalle, Jet d'eau appears as a leftover in the form of loose individual sections of pipe.

A photograph taken in the Hotel Trois Rois in Basel, which shows Mandla Reuter asleep, was inspired by the drawing used for the exhibition poster and refers indirectly to the loss of all sense of time and space experienced in hotel rooms.

Mandla Reuter's one-man show at Kunsthalle Basel is hallmarked by his separation of the exhibition rooms into two parts. The exploration of Reuter's plot of land in Los Angeles and the artificiality of the entire scene thereby provide the two major themes through which Reuter pursues his stringent approach to the artistic representation of the real and the fictive, trying to bridge the gap between the two and at the same time demonstrating how such an attempt can fail.

The exhibition is generously supported by Regent Lighting and George Foundation. The artist would like to thank Les Trois Rois and Sielaff Schweiz, Fred Lorenz.

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