

The Museum of Modern Art presents Isa Genzken: Retrospective, the first major U.S. exhibition to encompass the artist's oeuvre, on view from November 23, 2013, to March 10, 2014. Spanning almost 40 years of Genzken's inventive, audacious, and deeply influential artwork, the exhibition brings together more than 150 objects in an astonishing variety of techniques, including assemblage, sculpture, painting, photography, collage, drawing, artist's books, film, and large-scale installations. A majority of the works in the exhibition are on view in the U.S. for the first time, including *Schauspieler (Actors)* (2013), a large-scale installation, while others have rarely been publicly exhibited anywhere. *Isa Genzken: Retrospective* is co-organized by The Museum of Modern Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, and the Dallas Museum of Art. The exhibition is organized by Sabine Breitwieser, Chief Curator, Department of Media and Performance Art (until January 31, 2013), and Laura Hoptman, Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, MoMA; Michael Darling, the James W. Alsdorf Chief Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; and Jeffrey Grove, Senior Curator of Special Projects & Research, Dallas Museum of Art; with Stephanie Weber, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Media and Performance Art, MoMA.

Working across a diverse array of mediums, Genzken has been inspired by two grand themes: modernity and urban architecture. Her career has also unfolded in chapters, beginning in the late 1970s, and continuing without cease until today, when a new generation has been inspired by the artist's radical inventiveness. Ranging from large-scale sculptures that limn Constructivist and Minimalist aesthetics; to rougher, more overtly architectural concrete works that conjure ruins; to paintings, photographs, and found-object installations that have redefined assemblage for a new era, Genzken's body of work represents both a rare artistic freedom and a disciplined, almost obsessive sensitivity toward the relationship of individuals to their sculptural surroundings.

The exhibition is organized chronologically, beginning with Genzken's more Minimalist-influenced sculptures from the 1970s and early 1980s. In 1972 Genzken enrolled at Düsseldorf's Fine Arts Academy, where she studied under German painter Gerhard Richter. During this period Genzken created drawings, photographs, and, most significantly, a group of monumentally sized wooden floor sculptures called *Hyperbolos* and *Ellipsoids*. Genzken's works from this early period reflect her growing fascination with the precision of both natural and manmade engineering, and with forms in space. Notable works on view include Genzken's first Ellipsoid work, *Gelbes Ellipsoid (Yellow Ellipsoid)* (1976), and the 17-foot-long *Rot-schwarz-gelbes Ellipsoid 'S.L. Popova' (Red-Black-Yellow Ellipsoid 'S.L. Popova')* (1981). In 1980, during one of her frequent trips to New York City, Genzken photographed the ears of female passersby in the streets of Manhattan, and one such work, *Ohr (Ear)* (1980), is on view. Around this time, Genzken also made a group of works by photographing and enlarging advertisements for stereo systems from American, French, German,

and Japanese magazines. Genzken has often installed her photographs of hi-fi stereo equipment, in juxtaposition with her ear photographs and her Hyperbolo and Ellipsoid sculptures, likening the engineering of a state-of-the-art stereo system both to the intricate shape of the human ear and to the precision modeling of her sculptures.

The second section focuses on Genzken's experimentation with rougher, more architectural materials like plaster, concrete, and steel. Between 1986 and 1991 she produced multiple series of free-standing concrete sculptures on high steel pedestals. Ranging in size from humble to monumental, these works resemble architectural maquettes and are titled in some cases after the kinds of buildings they represent. Although their cubic forms and industrial materials connect them to a Minimalist aesthetic, their handmade quality and their resemblance to bombed-out ruins boldly fly in the face of Minimalism's formalist rigors. Beautiful in their extreme austerity, they are also grim embodiments of the disillusion with modernist utopian visions that characterized post-modernity of the late 1980s. Pieces on view include the plaster works Müllberg (Pile of Rubbish) (1984) and Bank (1985) and the concrete-and-steel works Rosa Zimmer (Pink Room) (1987), Bild (Painting) (1989), and Fenster (Window) (1990).

In the late 1980s, Genzken began to experiment with painting. On view are works from the Basic Research series, which were painted over a four-year period using the technique of frottage. Placing a canvas covered in oil paint face-down on her studio floor, Genzken applied pressure with a large squeegee to create an impression in the painted surface. The results are part painting, part monoprint. In 1992 Genzken produced a series of paintings called MLR, an abbreviation for the phrase More Light Research. Using spray paint and lacquer and stencils made from a variety of perforated materials, Genzken created an effect reminiscent of photograms—photographic images produced without a camera by placing objects on photosensitive paper and exposing the paper to light.

The exhibition culminates with a series of room-sized installations that Genzken began in the late 1990s. In 1995, Genzken moved from Cologne to Berlin, and around the same time she shifted her artistic vocabulary toward collage and sculptural assemblage. As an artist who had experimented with film, Genzken understood the possibilities inherent in the juxtaposition of images and objects. Her keen appreciation of architectural materials and forms also allowed her to

take advantage of unconventional materials purchased from hardware and houseware stores and also found in the street. The urban architecture of Berlin and New York inspired some of her most significant sculptural series and installations beginning in the new millennium. By 2000, Genzken

began to create complex, multi-object installations that tackle subjects like the disposable global culture built around the consumption of cheap goods, and the economic underpinnings of contemporary warfare. More like environments than series of objects, Genzken's most recent works are the culmination of a 40-year examination of the intricate relationship between architecture and site, form and space, and sculpture and the gritty, material world that inspired it. Works on view include *Schwules Baby (Gay Baby)* (1997), *Spielautomat (Slot Machine)* (1999– 2000), *Fuck the Bauhaus*, *New Buildings for New York* (2000), *New Buildings for Berlin* (2004), *Der Amerikanische Raum (The American Room)* (2004), and *Ground Zero* (2008).

Arranged in an area outside MoMA's sixth floor galleries is *Schauspieler (Actors)* (2013), a new, large-scale work that is on view for the first time. This multipart installation, completed over the past year, features elaborately altered mannequins dressed in an assortment of clothes, collaged elements, and repurposed sculptural materials. Some of the clothes are Genzken's own, while others were found or purchased. By calling this ensemble *Schauspieler (Actors)*, Genzken suggests that by moving among them we, too, are actors in a theater or on a film set. The exhibition concludes in *The Agnes Gund Garden Lobby with Oil XI* (2007), the centerpiece of a 16- part installation first exhibited in the German pavilion at the 2007 Venice Biennale, which evokes the zeitgeist of a world in a state of terror. The installation, with its accumulation of rolling suitcases, calls to mind a transit station that has suddenly been abandoned, perhaps due to an unseen threat. Three astronauts, identified as NASA employees by the insignia on their uniforms, float overhead, as if exploring the ruins of a devastated culture.

#### ABOUT ISA GENZKEN:

Isa Genzken was born in 1948 in Bad Oldesloe, a town outside Hamburg, Germany. In the mid-1970s, as a student at Düsseldorf's renowned Kunstakademie, she created large-scale stereometric wooden floor sculptures, which gained her early international acclaim. Beginning in the 1980s, she made sculptures in plaster and concrete, ranging in size from maquettes to monumental. In the late 1980s, she expanded her practice to include painting, and by the mid- 1990s she was experimenting with architectural forms like windows made of epoxy resin, collage, and, eventually, assemblage. From the late 1990s on, Genzken created increasingly complex assemblage installations that engage with the geopolitical issues of our time.

Genzken began exhibiting her work in 1976, when she was the youngest woman to have a solo presentation at the influential Konrad Fischer Galerie in Düsseldorf. She has exhibited internationally since 1980, and has participated in Documenta (1982, 1992, 2002), the Venice

Biennale (1982, 1993, 2003, 2007), Skulptur Projekte Münster (1987, 1997, 2007), the Istanbul Biennial (2001), and the Carnegie International (2004). In 2007 she represented Germany at the 52nd Venice Biennale. Recent surveys of her work have taken place at Museion, Bolzano, Italy (2010), Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2009), and Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (2009).

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