

In line with its on-going reflection on the production systems that determine our living environment, La Loge invites the artist Michael Beutler, whose practice is based on experiment and the conception of independent developments. As a critical and playful response to standardisation, Haus Beutler is an exhibition project that gives the human being back its full dimension by placing it at the heart of the processes shaping its formal, functional and architectural surrounding.

Conceived and first presented by Bielefelder Kunstverein (May 10 – July 27, 2014), Haus Beutler is a solo exhibition that offers a first insight into Beutler's projects' various development processes and into their contexts since 2000. Alongside an architecture for the exhibition, developed especially for La Loge, and some new installations, the artist is presenting drawings, models, studies in materials, photo and video documentations of earlier projects. In the sense of a retrospective on a small scale, the solo exhibition is thus making it possible to look back over some essential groups of works from Beutler's artistic production.

Michael Beutler likes spaces, and most of all unusual (exhibition) spaces like, for example, the stables of old post office coach houses (2006, 4. Berlin Biennale), or an old water tower (2011, Lingen Kunsthalle). With his works he usually reacts to the social and architectural structures of an exhibition's respective situation, which is used simultaneously as a site for production and presentation.

Architectural features, like the structure of spaces, doors, windows and pillars govern his designs as much as found materials or sight lines. To produce the modules for his installations, he first builds his own tools or »proto-machines«, a term once coined by the art critic Gregory Williams. A term the artist still likes to use today. With the machines he works on industrially produced materials like paper, metal, wood or plastics. Three dimensional components first come about in combination with these »proto-machines« but also particularly through shaping them by hand. What result are oversized woven carpets and bulging 'Wursthäuser' ('Sausage Houses', Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin 2013), water-borne, rotating panorama rooms (Drunken Gate, 2013, MOCA Taipei), honeycomb structures made from waste paper (Knock Knock, 2013, Le Grand Café – centre d'art contemporain, Saint-Nazaire), or cardboard latticework wall displays (The Garden, 2011, Haus der Kunst).

How the materials are created, produced and further altered is, however, in precise terms a result of handiwork and development-as-process. To that end, the artist repeatedly includes third parties. His tools and machines structure the process and define the framework. They set out a system for the team, within which people again are allowed to improvise with combinations of material and colour

choices. As the objects of an artistic production ostensibly only interrupted, they are usually integrated into the exhibition presentation. Beutler regards the state of temporary uncertainty and an open-ended development of works as a productive component of his work.

Michael Beutler has a variety of aspects permeating his work: “[...] the material, the social structure, the space, its dimensions and volume, and the background, be that an event at a trade fair, a project for art in building construction or a regular White Cube exhibition, all of it always integrates into the work. I see that as a possibility for extending my working pattern. The works often happen automatically; in that case, I don’t have much to do at all, as a lot of it already results from the prevailing circumstances. Then I’m myself only sort of half responsible for what’s happening; I like that. As regards the location, I do find a certain authenticity important, as a situation where something’s open to experience. I think you can see in a work that it really was built in a certain place, hands-on, and so that it fits too [...]”<sup>1</sup>

His works are usually only temporary installations and are not, like bronze sculptures, made to last for ever. At least, they don’t purport to be lasting. The material is too fragile, or the form of the modules and structures created is too site-specific to be constructed again in the same way at another place. Beutler’s approach to his work takes off from the material, transforms it through his delight in experimentation and inscribes the transformation into his works as an act of

artistic operation. He shares this approach with artists of his generation, who are indeed interested in the practicalities of their own production methods, but look to architectural-constructive connections for their inspiration rather than to classical sculpture.

For ‘Portikus Castle’ (2007, Portikus), Beutler used the full height of the exhibition space in Frankfurt. The sculpture filled up the space completely, was made of coloured tracing paper across metallic lattices, allowed only a very narrow passage around, and denied viewers any distance from itself as object. ‘Portikus Castle’ came about, like most of his spatial interventions, as an autonomous architectural entity, a space for experimentation and think tank, within the already existing architecture. As is the case here, an installation usually dominates the space, extends not infrequently over several rooms or fills up the entire exhibition. In this respect, many of his installations are dismantled and put in storage when exhibitions are over. There are only a few – mostly projects outdoors – that remain on site.

What is special about the exhibition at La Loge and previously at the Bielefelder Kunstverein is that it uses artistic means to make both a retrospective and an assessment of the status quo possible at

the same time. Already completed projects and their spatial contexts are open to experience as a 'pars pro toto' by way of individual elements.

In this process, the transitions between architectural space, display, material, artwork, sketch and document become blurred. They resemble his works as they are intertwined or interwoven. Models are on display, which served to gauge the space and calculate the material in the development process. Small prototypes and connection test pieces are shown, which the artist employed on initial tests of his architecture and his constructions.

And in addition, fragments and reproductions from existing installations are being integrated into the exhibition's architecture – representatives, as it were, of his earlier works. Some of these exhibits had a role in preparing and realising his projects. Others have become components in an architecture especially designed for the exhibition, in a new presentation they allow his projects to be documented.

The result is an accessible 'all-over-installation' in the best sense, transforming and equipping an exhibition's space with his own works. Working with assistants, an inventory, a review and an assessment of works already laid up in anticipation have been made in order to select and prepare those works destined for the Bielefeld and La Loge exhibition. In this process, new walls, paper displays resembling wallpaper and functional 'exhibition furniture' have come about. This is the particular background, formed from existing works, or respectively samples, objects and materials from individual works, against which models are shown as well as construction elements, material studies, videos, photographic documentation and drawings. Beutler has developed a specific presentation and his own artistic form of it for each of these media. Individual exhibits have a functional character and can, for instance, be used as furniture. Missing models and construction elements are being re-made, or respectively represented using documentation. The frames and plinths for the exhibits are his own work, partially using fragments of other works. The video and photographic documentation has been reviewed and re-edited.(...)

As previously evoked, the development process itself is important to Beutler, which is why he makes most of his decisions during the production and mounting of the exhibition. The mounting itself remains an experiment prepared in advance, where the effect of space is related to the requirements imposed by the materials. This approach means that his interventions retain their autonomous, artistic gesture. An impression of variety and variation arises, despite the serial production. The individual character, the visible construction and the manual finishing of the material allows us to appreciate the genesis of his installations, in terms of time and form.

The rooms and installations, sometimes originally shown in large exhibition venues, are now shifting into the smaller galleries of La Loge. Some rooms have the character of workshops; others serve solely for presentation and show works in a suitably adapted form. These are not being shown chronologically but follow their own logic as works, their aesthetic, materiality, formal design and the way they function.

It is interesting that Beutler does not stop at recycling completed works either. The medium of the exhibition thus becomes the underpinning and reflection of his own artistic work, which consciously resists any temporal categorisation and musealization.

The result is sometimes reminiscent of Schwitters' Merzbau or John Bock's bricolage exhibitions, which present their work in a comprehensive complex or a comprehensive work of art respectively.

Accordingly, 'The Beutler House' does not just try to re-interrogate Michael Beutler's way of working and the emergence of the projects in their individual phases. Much rather, it is, in an overall perspective, the display of contemporary sculpture, the possibilities of artistic documentation and the communication of ephemeral projects that are investigated here. La Loge is transforming itself into 'The Beutler House' and, with that, for a time into the idiosyncratic and fascinating house of this one artist.

text by Thomas Thiel, director of Bielefelder Kunstverein

First published in the accompanying brochure of the exhibition Haus Beutler by Michael Beutler held at Bielefelder Kunstverein (10 May – 27 July 2014).

The original text has been slightly shortened and adapted in order to fit La Loge's exhibition.

1 Interview, in: Elke Buhr, Michael Beutler: Kunst / Art, Lufthansa Aviation Center, 2007, pp.12-29.

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