

The Galerie Reinhard Hauff was founded in 1995 and opened with a solo show by Stephen Willats. Since then, the gallery has continued to show the London artist. The exhibition *CONVERSATIONS WITH BUILDINGS* is now the 6th solo show by Stephen Willats in the gallery.

Stephen Willats (*1943) is one of the pioneers of Contextual art. Contrary to mostly self-referential art practices, Willats situates right from the very beginning his artistic work in a social environment. "By 1965 I had begun to map out what was then a completely new physical and social territory for an artwork to operate within" Stephen Willats remembers. "This was very much in the spirit of opening up the demarcated boundaries between separated disciplines which typified thinking." His art originated in the confrontation between people and their lifestyles; in "territories", which have more to do with real life than with art; and in habitats, whose structure and architecture shaped the social fabric decisively. Stephen Willats has remained remarkably consistent and true to this spirit, which can best be described as a personal philosophy, throughout his entire career. For an in-depth explanation of Willats' thoughts on his art practice, we highly recommend that you visit the artist's [website](#).

In the exhibition *CONVERSATIONS WITH BUILDINGS* Stephen Willats explores once again seemingly distant peripheries of typical art environments. The artist is out to engage in a conversation – this time with buildings. But just like art cannot dispense with social context, Willats' buildings don't stand alone. They are integrated into objects, signs and pictograms. Viewers attempt to deduct possible messages, to create order in what they see and construct their own meaning. Arrows connect images and seem to support lines of thought processes or chain reactions. Stephen Willats provides objects with colour codes and attributes. He establishes analogies between the forms of *Buildings and Vases* (2015), where there isn't actually any – other than form. And he disrupts mental connections, as soon as we are tempted to fall back on known patterns of thought and typologies. Instead he prompts us to perceive opposite elements and lend them attention and weight: as in *Conscious Unconscious Continuous Discontinuous* – the title of a work in three parts from 2013.

The earliest works in the exhibition are from 1982 and 1983: Both works from the series *Tower Block Drawings* are photographic prints with ink, pencil and crayon on paper. Photographs of various objects swirl around apartment blocks, lending a touch of bitter reality to such social slogans as "new buildings for new people". As if you could design modern man as rationally and easily as a new building. For Willats it's clear: Under these premises, architecture was imposed as a canon, and urban living space was constructed to contain and frame order. In contrast, Willats designs playful arrangements (*Conceptual Tower Series*, 2011) which dissolve every linear grid and

pattern in favour of a physical and spiritual spatial freedom.

Stephen Willats sees himself as "instigator of change in social consciousness and attitudes". That such change cannot be any static fabric, but remains an on-going dynamic process, is clear in Willats' pictures. They don't have a beginning, and no end. There is no singular and definitive way of reading them. The arrows are pointing in various directions. Thereby Willats offers the viewer lots of room for interpretation and leaves meaning open, without ever losing himself in vague or weak indications. His powers of observations are much too alert and his intellectual mind-set much too critical. Now as then.

Coinciding with the Stephen Willats show at the Galerie Reinhard Hauff, a large group of works by the artist are presented until 21th August 2016 in the international group show *GOOD SPACE – political, aesthetic and urban spaces* at the Villa Merkel, Esslingen, curated by Andreas Baur.

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