

A Material Girl

"...In transcending the limitations or extending the possibilities of one material, the sculptor has sought to emulate, if not imitate, effects familiar, or at least more easily achieved, in another [...]. Perhaps the greatest sculpture has been created by artists thinking not only about the materials they were employing, but about those which they were not employing." Nicholas Penny, *The Materials of sculpture*. New Haven and London 1993 (Yale University Press), p 270

Even in the early contest between the arts, sculpture could always chalk up a number of extra points because it was possible to comprehend or grasp it, in the literal sense of the term. To a certain degree, its unique three-dimensionality enabled it to seem "natural", and people appreciated it when solid, heavy stones seemed like light and airy as fabric or even like pulsating skin half concealed by the latter.

But the so deceptively "real" sculptures were not alive. What is more, any possibly genuinely artistic idea was stifled by the mass of the material, even when that material appeared to drift along like some personification uncovered. Even abstract forms, when not borne aloft by architecture, remained very much down to the earth and rooted in the ground, as it were. Little wonder, therefore, that from the very start sculpture, more than any other genre, was denied the capacity to represent anything spiritual or transcendental.

And so today we are still waiting for material to be enlivened and the invisible materialised by the hand of the sculptor, whose one-time workshop has long since occasionally begun to resemble a laboratory.

Fortunately Christiane Haase is specialised in said matters. As a proven sculptor, she immediately experimented with the surfaces of living contemporary sculptures, i.e. with knitted pullovers (*Rollanleitung für Pulloverwesen*, 1999). Later, using left-overs from sculpture symposia – which she once again "converted" – the artist reconstructed not prehistoric tools, for example, but instead created modern celts or chisel-shaped implements (*Stein-Zeit*, 2001). To judge by their many and varied forms and their material, their bright red polyurethane handles compete with the sandstone quarry for recognition as casted objects actually related to carved sculptures.

Fascinated by such absurd, as only apparently useful and therefore all the more "incomprehensible" forms, in 2003 Christiane Haase produced a series of loose sheets, so-called *Aliens*, in "Japanese paint on Japanese paper" in which she processed, among

other things, the visual impressions she gained as a foreigner in Nagoya. It was there that she first exhibited these creatures, which are sometimes reminiscent of far-eastern signs and symbols.

With a confident feel for space, learnt from architecture, the artist is now allowing her two-dimensional *Aliens* not only to creep cautiously out of splits and crack, but also to casually occupy whole sequences of rooms in arabesque-like sweeps (*Alien invasion*, 2002, Erfurt). From a distance, this colourful and decorative tumult of "extraterrestrials" seems like a school of wondrous fish or a well-arranged formation of rare insects. On the other hand, one can also recognise quite lifeless but functional items, such as dog collars, shower heads, massage balls, baby rattles or scissors. For this reason, the solid *Alien Tools* (2003) moulded in coloured polyurethane seem quite consistent and logical, and not just because of when they were produced. These "tools for unexpected tasks" seem as if they might have been removed from the earlier room installation or taken, and transposed into 3D, from Haase's previous pencil drawings (*Untitled*, 2003), which are fascinatingly clear in their outlines. Now these green, blue or skin-coloured, but always compact and abstract objects are lying, like precious utility goods, in rear-lit niches, or waiting, shrink-wrapped and hanging on hooks, for their buyers – and curious users.

Unlike the smooth, perfectly-styled *Alien Tools*, in the process of designing her latest series Christiane Haase has allowed for *Kontrollverluste* (Losses of control, 2005). Using paper maché, the artist has produced several "non-shapes" whose coloured sandpapered surfaces seem like concrete. Despite their hardened state, these items still seem to be malleable, or to even be generating themselves, like a hot pulp. These rather lumpy masses, some of them astonishingly rich in detail, seem like the materialisation of the unuttered, of something that is now actually "in the air", conjuring up, for example, the mood of someone in a huff, or of cheerful exuberance. As these balloon shapes also resemble the text fields in comics, it remains for the viewers to fill them with their own associations and – possibly – to grasp them, in the dual sense of the term.

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