

# FEMALE ARTISTS BUILD BARRICADES<sup>1</sup>

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A first encounter with the work of the artist Andrea Winkler took place in the course of preliminary researches for a group exhibition at the Künstlerhaus KM–, Halle für Kunst & Medien, in Graz. The show back then centered work that, proceeding from the ready-made – considered as an artistic approach to everyday (consumer) objects or industrial processes and materials –, expanded the autonomous concept of sculpture and included painting, film and video. Works using various digital source material as equivalent components of sculpture were as present as works reflecting the exhibition space. In particular regarding this last point, Andrea Winkler's art work, her in-situ developed anti-display *Short Lets Considered – III (Hermits)* (2014), outperformed and exceeded this curatorial concept. The apparently so arbitrarily spread elements of crowd control systems, the chains and karabiners, traces of Styrofoam, rolling suitcases etc., credibly conveyed that we see something unintentional, not yet finished, not released for display or not removed remains of an accident during the set up, and well, we are dealing with the random traces of institutional negligence. This left a feeling of having reached *game over*, a targeted suspension of immediacy as if one has arrived at a place where reckoning and reasoning have come to an end for now. The sculptural arrangement, oscillating between site-specific installation, object trouvé and staged (side) scene, deceived and disillusioned at once – as if the artist virtually refused to disband the tension between mimetic representation and distancing abstraction to one or the other direction. She rather seemed to pursue the mutual necessity of both moments and gave the situative arrangements a vivid idea of the power, effect and cogitation of aesthetic illusion. One recognized the orienting residual functions of the guidance or crowd control systems still triggering trust in the possibility of an ordered gaze, but at the same time, one sensed the *Kaputtheit* of an irreproducible state of emergency and happened to be the testimony oneself who endeavours to charge the situation with interpretations. The exact extent of the terrain wasn't immediately apparent where the elements of Andrea Winkler's work were operating – possibly due to the continuing spray marks on the walls. The signalling effect of the guiding and controlling systems, instructing to not pass this scene or site of crime of a not further determined event, bore all the more irritation.

At the same time, these systems possessed a quality going beyond the scope of this situative arrangement. By elaborating the fictionality of the situative arrangement and the surrogate-characteristics of the performed, Winkler demonstrated that the sculptural formation should not be regarded to stand just for itself, but rather as a reference to something else, that is permanently mediated, and not representable, as if the reminder of the limited

1 Cf. Ludwig Rubiner, *Künstler bauen Barrikaden* (Artists Build Barricades). *Texte und Manifeste, 1908–1919*, Darmstadt 1988.





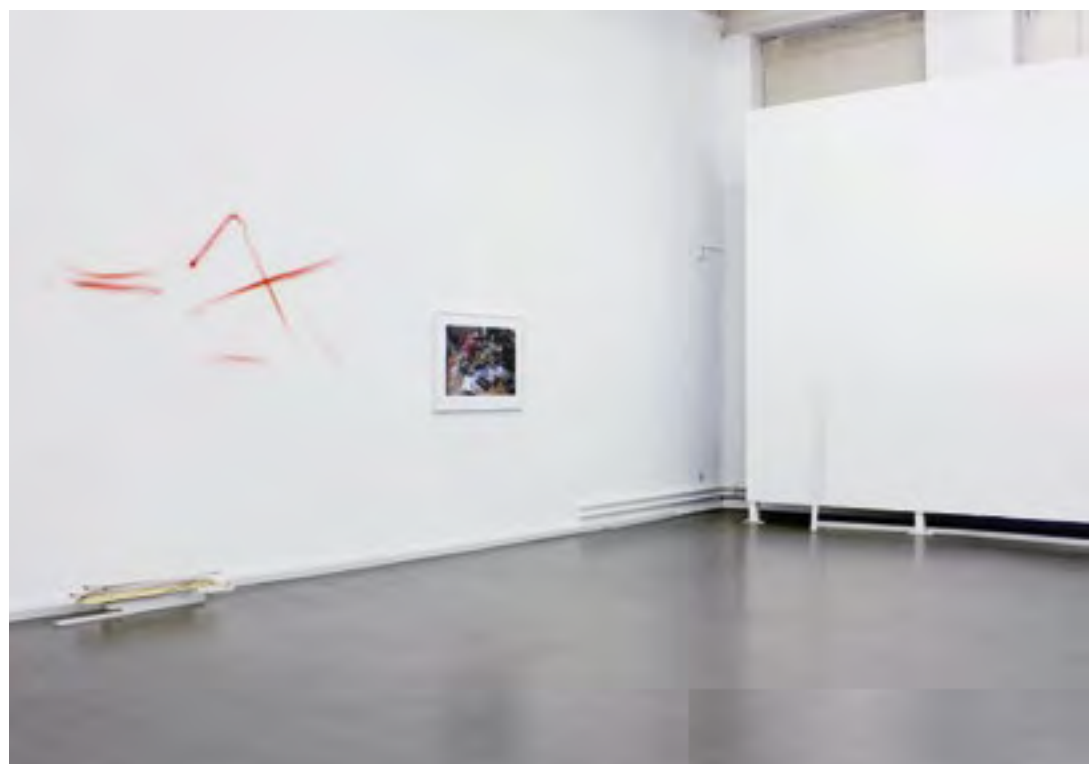


possibilities of representation boosts the rank of what is alluded to here. To some extent comparable with Matias Faldbakken's *dOCUMENTA (13)* contribution in 2012, when he simulated a disorder in the extent of a comet's impact in the section of introductory economy textbooks in a public youth library, being fully aware, that the unsettledness in public space by an art work called *Untitled (Book Sculpture)*, despite the enormous irritation on site, turns out significantly less harmful as the real, hardly in book format squeezable, speculative economy hustle *out there*. Both, Faldbakken's and Winkler's work, bring out the topic of the spatial staging, because such installations look, despite their distant, analytical atmosphere, as if they only just *happened*.

"If the art work can be regarded as the marginal case or exceptional case of coming and going, as the scene of an appearance, which requires a production without being retraceable, one might argue in turn, that the relation to art can be regarded as a clarifying exaggeration of the relation to the scene, or that the relation to a place as a scene and to the scene as the place of an appearance is preformed in relation to art. Art is, according to Kant and Adorno's definition of the art work actually ties in, the consciousness of being-produced simultaneously bracketed by an as if. The art work has 'to seem so free' from the produced, from any 'force of arbitrary rules', 'as if it is a product of mere nature'.<sup>2</sup>

In these very simple, but in their casualness concise interventions by Winkler, it comes to alienated reenactments of fragments out of object-like – found and modified –, order and safety suggesting components of a frantic instable everyday world like police road blocks, museum crowd control stanchions, makeshift hedges in the event of an accident – things, that should usually keep us from approaching things, places or valuable goods. Through the precise positing of the diversified crowd control gear, Winkler transforms exhibition spaces into complex three-dimensional walkable collages that always render the particular relation of the surrounding architecture and the other exhibition situation into a precarious, questionable scenario. Rather than a flash up of the own artistic signature, Winkler is interested how her staged zones and the layed out objects interact with the existing space and its impacts, what sort of repertoire of emotions they create and what kind of deviations from the common everyday reality they induce. The fact that her motives themselves already exist of everyday deviations and accidents, enhances the extraordinariness of Andrea Winkler's artistic practise. The artist constructs a *double-bind* – on the one hand, the situations appear to be a mere representation or mimetic model of reality, art without any actual function, on the other hand, the works act as reference to a real aesthetic system that develops a place with real social regulations. This also involves the physical and psychological qualities of the space, material and objects, as well as, their impact on the public. The public takes in a key role in the settings, it is not

2 Alexander Garcia Düttmann, *Was weiß Kunst? Für eine Ästhetik des Widerstands*, Paderborn 2015, p. 165.



only sensitised for the conditions and characteristics of the presentation within the exhibition space, it is also carrier medium:

“However, the interventions unfold their critical potential in the exhibition spaces of the gallery or the museum – different from a sociological text on the ideology of pure aesthetics – only in the interaction with the viewer, who finds himself/herself in a distanced relation to the conditions that are determined by art reception. Regarding the situations when the context of common art reception is alienated, he/she will envision both the intrinsic conventions of the context, and the conventionality of the own behaviour. Which means, that the viewer is involved in the expanded reflection on the carrier medium of art. The confrontation with the conventions of art presentation necessarily includes a confrontation with the conventions of art reception, so the viewer has to become topical to himself/herself as a carrier medium.”<sup>3</sup>

We might even here deal with a double strategy of the artist’s aesthetic practise, one of critic *and* appropriation, unfolding the inner discrepancy and plurality of the connection between art and perception, especially in view of an artistic reflection on the fragile relation between aesthetics and economy. Which one of the objects is more crucial than another in regard to the orchestration, or if one of them can also work as single piece without the overall situation, or if they only together as a well balanced ensemble disturb, remains to a large extent open. To disguise the complication of the operation through the simplicity of the results, the artist doesn’t achieve by overly aestheticising the object, but in pointing out our relationship to the aesthetic object, an effect we encounter in simple, formal precision in her work group *BAGS (1–50 ... etc.)*.

It also comes to astonishing turnarounds, twists, and chains of associations in these extraordinary tricky bag-sculptures. The series respectively presents mostly two in colour contrasting handbag models in a strange, *competitive* sculptural alliance: because only slits in one bag enable the emergence in/of the other one.<sup>4</sup> The (hand)bags aren’t stitched together with glue or invisible seams either, they support themselves, in so far the meshing of the single elements isn’t done by clearly visible, tightly lashed belts.

Their fetish-character, the charisma of appeal and desire, handbags usually only trigger as single pieces. Set in competitive relation to the same equivalent object, they show themselves manoeuvred into an elusive disfunctionality and an exuberant existence beyond their initial function. It comes to the following, self-referential paradoxon: “One is now, at one and the same time, the whole and the part, and so into infinity: it is both limited and unlimited, it moves and stands still, both identical and different, like and unlike itself and others, both equal and unequal to itself and others, etc.”<sup>5</sup>

The bag is commonly known as transport equipment, a mobile space for the useful everyday things and hoard for the mysterious, most important

3 Juliane Rebentisch, *Theorien der Gegenwartskunst zur Einführung*, Hamburg 2013, p. 173.

4 Comparable to the merging of the hand and face of the British musician FKA twigs on the cover of her EP *M3LL155X* (Young Turks, 2015).

5 Mladen Dolar, “In Parmenidem Parvi Comentarii”, in: *Helios* 31 (2004), The Association, University of Michigan, here: p. 77.

gadgets and tools to be protected from the gazes of strangers. The dark inner life nurtures speculations on their content, and their outlook delivers messages on the owner's character, style and social state. But through the sculptural doubling of the bags, that appear as if a parasite grows out of a host, the formal ambiguities and discrepancies between material and form, making and colour emerge. Winkler shows, how the formal separation of functionality and aesthetics corresponds with the user value and exchange value and what kind of orchestrating qualities of the material evolve only by the negation of its common function.

“Every artist has, next to the duty to make art, the duty to assert it. To establish the own production conditions is just as well part of the artist's profession.”<sup>6</sup> – I only presented a few examples in excerpts, yet they give an insight into processes of a special practise. They enable works and exhibition situations highly based on intuition and incident, at the same time, they continue working on themselves and claim their own method that they might be quite something else than what they seem. The artist emphasizes characteristics of a contemporary practise, that nowadays not only produces and presents objects, images and installations, but always produces along the production per se and presentation per se. These described works and settings not only exclusively represent themselves, but show that the relation between the artist and her approach undergoes changes and can be interrupted. The intense productivity lurks where relations are worked out between the one practise and the other.

The careful choice of titles *Short Lets Considered*, *Till The Smoke Goes Out*, *Du bist zu klein*, *Famous Quotes by Famous People* also points to the analytical moments in her installations. She also turns her attention towards the way how the objects finally affect each other, their impact, their union, their arrangement, to the way they satisfy and frustrate, promote and constrain, stimulate and hinder. If they are rather incidents, moments or situations – they always inhabit the possibility to escape themselves. A gathering of ready-mades can remain unfinished. Duchamp's redefinition of the artist as someone who creates art without producing the objects of her choice, once implicated a momentous alteration of long-held assumptions about what art should be, and still bears lasting fascinating potential and serves complex plays of thoughts with beckoning revelation at the end.

6 Peter Hacks, *Die Maßgaben der Kunst. Gesammelte Aufsätze*, Düsseldorf 1977, p. 266.