

10 OCT 2001

# Space invader

Sabine Hornig

Sabine Hornig's sculptures involve the refined use of unlikely walls, reflective windows and spatial scenarios. Sometimes she builds unusable rooms, dead ends or corridors in existing spaces so that it is not at all clear where the work begins and ends. At other times she erects free-standing, navigable architectural look-alikes with quirky twists of scale or improbable vistas. Both groups of work are visual puns that rely on double-takes: moments when you sense that everything is not in the place you might expect it to be.

Since the beginning of the 1990s most of her works – like those in the exhibition 'Rauhputz City' (Roughcast City, 2000) – involve the mimicking of details from low-cost, functional buildings-. More wryly than dryly she likes to mock-up or photograph dull edifices that are generally considered blights on the landscape. Great attention is paid to surface: recreating pitted rendering or getting just the right grey for a convincing concrete-look. Her reproduction entrances and window frames strike you as undistinguished: standardised products of regulation rather than invention, pragmatic rather than imaginative. Installed in self-consciously designed art spaces they can be quite droll. Hauswand mit Bewegungsmelder (Façade with Motion Detector, 1997), for example, effectively turns a wall outside in. Its motion sensor triggers a light fixture in a manner more suggestive of suburban paranoia than an automated interactive welcome.

However, Hornig's works are not simply incidents of displaced architecture. The free-standing works are first and foremost sculptures intended to be negotiated by a subject in an art space (you have the sense that architecture is her muse but not the main subject). Buildings can be frames. The built-in works declare the space they adopt and alter as sculpture while often side-stepping site specificity by being relocateable. Both are equally engaged with the use of psychological effects on the viewer. Take Twins (1996), for example, which consists of two nearly identical adjacent white rooms both divided unequally by a wall with a display window in it. The only obvious difference between the two rooms is that you enter them on opposite sides of this internal façade. On entering the second room you believe you are in the space you just saw through the window of the first room, and in doing so you achieve something rather improbable: you are now part of a space you have already understood as an image.

The complimentary yet antagonistic relationship between image and space is central to Hornig's work. She

likes role reversal: creating spaces that flatten out and images that protrude into space. To make matters more perplexing, her pieces also involve image and space in flexible analogies with other abstract pairs: exterior and interior, public and private. It seems for Hornig the later is a border that still exists, but which can be traversed or inverted at will. Appropriately then, figure-less and ware-free shop windows and their reflections crop up frequently in her more recent works. *Window with Curtain* (2001), an installation for Gallery Bonakdar, New York, is a large transparency installed in an artificial façade bisecting the room. The image in the window gives a semi-opaque view of the interior of a vacant shop, the buildings opposite and the actual gallery space. Hornig takes the melancholy and oppressive anonymity of these layers of emptiness and makes them kind of attractive; both the real and depicted spaces become available to the viewer for private projection.

*Window with Curtain* has a subtle punch line: half the gallery is designated as a part of the work. As with the earlier *Nebenzimmer* (*Adjoining Room*, 1994) a willing art collector would have to similarly demarcate or surrender a part of their private space. Other works by Hornig also show sensitivity to the economic condition of space in art – after all, the character, size and features of any art space has a lot to do with who is prepared to pay for what. Likewise, *Sleepcorner* (2000), made for a recent exhibition in PS1, New York, consists of two white shelves that are really a model of a miserably small mezzanine bed. Hornig's work makes visible how an art space can render insignificant a volume that is all-important to you.

Hornig recently erected her own ruins, *Emsakropolis* (2001), in the pastoral setting of an overgrown German landscape garden. The work is based on photographs the artist made on a trip to a Greek island. Her snaps recorded the outlines of the crude concrete shells of unfinished buildings dotting the landscape. These rough pavilion-like structures are built by landowners in order to avoid the expiry of precious building permits. Hornig has undertaken to reproduce one in a scaled-down, somewhat tidier version. You can't stand up in it, nor do you become a necessary part of it in the way you might with a Dan Graham structure. The originals are not just the by-products of the local economy, but also crazy trans-historical things whose form recalls both Classical architecture and Minimalist sculpture. Hornig's work sits like a folly estranged from its origins, like the focal point of a picture in space.

It seems fitting – although coincidental – that to reach Hornig's Berlin studio you have to walk through an abandoned building site; many seasons have passed since anyone lifted a finger there. A raw concrete cellar lies open to the elements, occasionally flooding; protruding rusted steel re-enforcements seem to have lost hope of ever being connected to a first floor; up-ended form-work and half-poured walls suggest corners of unrealised rooms. This scene epitomises an ordinary form of progress in a permanent hiatus. This is not the kind of thing that you see featured in mainstream celebrations of 'the new Berlin' – a city which, like an ageing film icon, has undergone such radical (and not always successful) cosmetic surgery that to look upon it is also to disbelieve.

First published in Issue 62  
October 2001

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