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KLEIN / OLSON

Space is physical. It's the buildings in our cities and the rooms we live in. It's the barriers our bodies bump into, the streets where we walk, and the parks where children play. It's public plazas, hospitals and prisons, offices and private homes. It's even the alleys in-between or the empty spot in a corner.

At the same time, space is inscribed with psychological, social and cultural signifiers: these may conjure memories or feelings; they reflect norms and social divisions; they offer implicit permissions or explicit prohibitions. In doing so, they form another type of space within each of us, an inner space of sorts. As architect and theorist Leslie Kanes Weisman writes, "Physical space and social space reflect and rebound upon each other. Both the world 'out there' and the worlds inside ourselves depend upon and conform to our socially learned perceptions and values. Neither is understandable without the other." Space affects where our bodies take us, what we can do, and how we see ourselves.

For this exhibition, we have invited B. Ingrid Olson, an artist based in Chicago, and

Astrid Klein, an artist based in Cologne, to present their work together. The artists had never met, nor have they ever exhibited in the same context before. The impetus for this show was an interest in these two practices individually and a simple wish to see the work of these artists side by side, to take a closer look at the affinities and differences in their respective approaches to sculpture, collage, and photographic imagery.

On another level, though, the artists share a tendency to manipulate or call attention to space, as if testing out ways of being in the world. Their works act as a bridge between interior and exterior spaces: Klein and Olson both pay particular attention to the body as it is variously depicted, viewed, or addressed—but also the body as it is experienced, lived in, or made active.

"Much of my work responds to the frame, or structure, confinements of space, or borders," says Olson. Her photographs are performative, recording investigations of an individual body as it shifts in relations to its surroundings, selected objects, and the camera. Within the images themselves,

the artist casts herself as an anonymous participant in a physical environment and the active creator of an ambiguous and sometimes disorienting pictorial field. Olson often uses props as extensions of herself, creating layers in a sort of in-camera collage. Mirrors, for example, collapse space anonymously in some, whereas fingerprints and smudges belie their presence in others.

Many of Olson's photographs position the viewer in the vantage point of the image's subject, creating a tension between invitation and confrontation. The photographs themselves are flanked by a Plexiglas "frame," and this multi-dimensional presentation generates a similar push-and-pull sensation. The acrylic sides jut out by six inches or more and give the work substantial boundaries, while also creating a deeper empty space, almost a void, in front of the photograph. The protruding edges at once draw viewers in and keep them at bay.

Klein's large collages feature imagery of women from European movies, to which the artist adds evocative text fragments. Some of these short phrases create dissonance with the imagery, while others provide an ironic affirmation of the stereotypical femininity depicted. In extracting these familiar scenes, Klein's collages take aim at what is considered to be "a woman's place," including the way gendered spaces influence or control behavior. Klein cannily echoed these concerns in the making of the works, which are part of a larger series: She made one collage each Sunday for a year and calls

them "Sunday work," subverting the sexist notion of the female artist as casual hobbyist. The imposed text, too, creates its own kind of space, within the structure of the type itself and in the linear arrangement of the phrases in the composition.

Both artists exploit scale as a means of affecting the space between their works and the viewer. Klein's huge photoworks fill one's field of vision. Her sculpture *Fly catcher III* is an equally commanding presence: featuring a bright lights and bug zappers, it asserts itself in relation to the viewer's body as he or she moves around it. Klein made these works in the 1980s, spurred to produce them by her experience as a woman in an assertively masculine art scene in Germany at the time. In part she responded by making large works that deliberately take up a lot of room in the gallery. Unlike her male counterparts, however, the artist did not present them to be contemplated from a distance, but to create a space of feeling and thought into which viewers can enter: "In doing so," she says, "they become part of the art, the surrounding work and its fragments."

Olson's sculptures, on the other hand, are scaled more closely to the human body. These molded, machine milled, and hand-finished forms have an intimacy to them, not only in their size, but also because of their appearance and placement. Positioned on the wall at waist or crotch height, they anticipate the presence of the viewer's own body. Other iterations of these small sculptures are wedged in v-shaped columns,

and the motif is repeated in the v-shaped temporary walls that divide the room and alter the flow of the space.

The two artists use photography in different ways—Klein appropriates found images while Olson takes her own photographs—but both treat photographic images as malleable materials. Rather than presenting an ultimate coherence, there is a provisional aspect to their photography-based works that resists the sense of a permanent image. Both artists often feature overlapping imagery or “frames within frames,” using montage or unconventional camerawork as a destabilizing technique and a way to reorder existing visual logics, with the viewer pulled into the game. This sometimes heightens the collision or collapse of different registers of space: pictorial, physical, social, personal, and gendered.

Olson takes all of her own photographs, but they distance themselves from photographic reality. In some space becomes an abstraction: a play of light, shadow, and color rather than a legible pictorial realm. The images feature bursts of flash or blown-out areas, blurs, and selective focus. Fast, active, and never pristine, they favor energy and ongoing experimentation over the traditional markers of quality in photography.

Klein is interested in using photography like one might make a painting, building up a composition with different elements. Rather than adopting photography as a window on the world, she is more concerned with the

psychological or sexual space that might be found within an image. Her works echo and disrupt the commercial presentation of woman with a measure of irony, as if to say, “Don’t trust what you see.”

Klein and Olson each have their own areas within the overall space, but the exhibition also creates moments of adjacency, overlaps, and lines of sight. *Klein / Olson* offers an open-ended, multi-directional encounter with the two artists. Rather than making a claim about how their practices intersect, instead it might lead one to ask: What does each set of works suggest for the other? What kind of spaces do they create?

Curated by Solveig Øvstebø.

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