

Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle

Sheila Hicks & Katinka Bock

Various Others 2024

in collaboration with Meyer Riegger

Sep 07 – Nov 16, 2024

Opening: Friday, Sep 06, 2024 / 6–9 pm



Katinka Bock, Mount Palomar, 2023, ceramic, fabric on wood, 91 x 60 x 22 cm, courtesy of Katinka Bock & Meyer Riegger

This duo exhibition, which opens in collaboration with Meyer Riegger at Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle in “Various Others 2024,” shows the works of textile artist Sheila Hicks and sculptor Katinka Bock in dialogue for the first time.

At first glance, the two don’t appear to have much in common. Hicks, 90 years old, born in Nebraska, and Bock, aged 48, born in Frankfurt am Main. Both of them have been living in Paris for many years. The former works with wool, linen, silk; with soft materials. Bock uses clay, ceramics, glass, wood, stone, copper, bronze – but sometimes also textiles.

Bock’s works are always site-specific; they thus reference the location. Depending on the space and the time of the exhibition, her works are unique. Sometimes she presents a hanging sculpture, sometimes it is lying down, then perhaps outdoors or casually leaning against a wall. Before the artist starts working on a show, she looks at the room and asks herself questions such as, What’s missing here? And also mostly, How can I break the seclusion of this space? In 2008 she installed a water system in an exhibition space in Delme, France, because when she asked the team at the institution what was lacking there, their unanimous answer was: “water”.

Bock’s mural “Various horizons” (2024), which is being shown in this exhibition for the first time, suggests a chain of mountains in a place in which one would otherwise only see the bare façade of a house. On it, shines the lemon-yellow glazed ceramic “S-ol” (2024). The aluminum parts of “Various horizons,” each one meter long, are connected to each other like a folding ruler and can be folded and unfolded. But because the individual segments are positioned varying distances apart, the aluminium construction can’t fulfill the purpose of a folding ruler – the exact measurement of a distance. Bock describes this slight modification as a “variability of a norm”. A room is defined by its measurements and demarcated from other areas. The topic of limits is a central one for Bock. She says: “Emphasizing the limits is sublime and brutal at the same time. It’s more than simply questioning.”

Since time immemorial, maps and constellations have served to record what we humans measure, demarcate and map, and to disseminate knowledge about it. For the work “Mount Palomar” (2023), Bock used jeans fabric that she subjected to the weather, the sun and the moon for several days and nights so that traces of the light and shadow of a Parisian winter are visible on it. The ceramics, reminiscent of a celestial constellation, that she applied to the fabric, are leftovers of larger works that Bock had collected in her studio. They are thus part of a history and another form, set pieces that have been given new life in this composition. The title refers to the book “Mr. Palomar” (1983) by the Italian writer Italo Calvino, who named his protagonist after a famous observatory in California – Mount Palomar. Like the artist herself, Mr Palomar is an attentive observer who sees “the minute facts of everyday life from a cosmic perspective.” The larger ceramic piece at the bottom left of the work looks as if it’s looking up into the starry sky using a

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telescope. Mr Palomar is also fascinated by Saturn, which he looks at through a telescope. After microscopically observing of a field of grass, Calvino's character of Palomar is thrown into turmoil. How is it possible to correctly capture the "material consistence" of the world at all? The photograph "For Your Eyes Only (A)" (2017) shows part of a bare leg on which the imprint of a too-tight sock – or is it the imprint of grass on the skin – is about to disappear. Bock's works reflect this scanning of the infinite in a movement of thought between the microscopically small and the all-encompassing large. The artist herself says: "Heaven and the ocean are concrete realities that at the same time stand for longing and a horizon. It's possible that this sculpture even wants to achieve this ambivalence."¹

That sounds poetic, but Bock's works are neither symbolic nor metaphorical. They stand for nothing other than for themselves only – their material. As Bock writes: "I'm interested in the fact that a lemon is a lemon."² She uses the material, be it a lemon, copper or bronze, as a substance in an experimental set-up. When describing her work, one inevitably speaks of chemical or physical processes: they are oxidized, burned, evaporated – or even exploded, like the bronze "Ginny" (2018), actually the form of a carp that exploded during the pouring.

While Bock's works unfold their references based on the immanence of the here and now, the works of Sheila Hicks tie in directly with the metaphorical. In his essay "Weaving as Metaphor and Model for Social Thought" about Hicks published in 2006, the American art critic Arthur Danto writes about the ancient Greek idea of weaving as an analogy for the polis, the state: a finely woven network of dependencies. Like Bock's works, those of Hicks are mostly also site-specific. For instance, she builds a tower out of bales of fabric stacked on top of each other into the exhibition space in such a way that they appear to support the architecture. Yet her works, always made of soft materials like wool, linen or silk, come into direct dialogue with the architecture as such and less with the social and historical references on which these are based, as is the case with Bock. Yet Hicks' works are still dependent on the conditions and the forces in the room – above all on gravity. Often, the cords or fabric nets of her works hang vertically from the ceiling or from their supports and then fold luxuriantly over each other on the floor, as in the work "not yet titled" (2024), which can be seen in the exhibition.

Hicks studied at Yale in the 1950s with the Bauhaus painter Josef Albers, who is known for his color theory, lived in Mexico and travelled through the South American countries to learn traditional weaving techniques. The modernist school of the Bauhaus, which declares the distinction between fine art, decoration and design to be outdated, is continued by Hicks in her work. For this, textiles as material are a suitable link. They are in everyday-life objects, in clothes, and in interior furnishings, but they also offer a reference to classical painting in its use as fabric for canvases.

Although she turned to textile art early on, Hicks has employed painting as an artistic basis in her works up until today. "Untitled" (2024) follows the tradition of abstract painting. Through the connection to various colored linen threads, Hicks aims for subtle, oscillating color effects. In contrast to painting, however, the image carrier and colour are not separate, but they form a unit.

Color plays a role for both Hicks and Bock. But while it takes Bock some effort, as she herself says, to add a new color to her artistic cosmos (so far, she has primarily used blue, and the yellow on display in the exhibition is a new addition), Hicks always combines new colors and brings the different colored fibres close together, as in "Meeting on the staircase 1 and 2" (2023). Together they create an image of opulence and abundance.

While the foundation for Hicks' works is the addition of something (a color, a thread), it is limitation that forms the basis for Bock's work. These artistic approaches can be better comprehended in dialogue. Even if they do this in different ways, they are both sensitive observers of us humans, our rituals and the contexts in which we move every day – in this gap between heaven and earth that we call life. (Alicja Schindler)

¹ Christophe Gallois: "Wo endet das Meer? Gespräch mit Katinka Bock" in: *Katinka Bock: Tomorrow's Sculpture*, Amsterdam 2019, 67.

² Judith Frey, "Das Kunstwerk des Monats", 2015, lwl.org/lmkukdok/KdM_04_2015.pdf, 2.