

Antonia Low

Schutzgebiet

September 8 - October 28, 2017



Exhibition view, Schutzgebiet, 2017

Münster, the city where I got to know Antonia Low during her studies at the Academy of Fine Arts, is currently advertising itself with a pilot project. Under the headline “Bollard Premiere at the Catholics Day” in the *Westfälischen Nachrichten* of 17 Aug. 2017, a report shows the Governing Mayor and representatives of the Catholic Church and of the Office of Public Order presenting the elegant grey bollards with a red band of light that, in dangerous situations, can be raised out of the level ground as if out of nowhere. They will be tested first when the city is hosting the German Catholics Day in 2018. Following the terrorist attacks in Nice, Berlin, and Barcelona, this pilot project is powerfully charged. At the same time in the city, the *Skulptur Projekte* are being held, as they have been since 1977 in a ten-year rhythm; they have become part of the most important international exhibition of art in public space. Already in 1987, participating artists like Siah Armanjani, Scott Burton, and Isa Genzken delved into the design of public buildings and urban furnishings. Today barriers and bollards have become components of the lifestyle of city marketing, and artists like Ange Leccia and Manfred Pernice have used the beauty of these elegant yet prosaic components for their sculptures.

When Antonia Low now declares the gallery rooms of the EIGEN + ART Lab to be her own “protected area” and outfits them with precise and well-fashioned barrier systems – it is ambiguous. On the one hand, the artist protects her art; on the other, she blocks visitors out, assigning them the role of potential destroyers. The barriers have a resistant and gleaming presence, somewhere between design and folklore. Consequently, the patterns and materials of the barriers are taken from traditional patterns like Burberry and Pringle.



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In the rear part of the gallery, dark pictures bear traces of – and breathe the aura of – valuable paintings and prints. This essentiality of the glass panes and frames makes them presences in the room and a counterpart of the visitor. In their dark black and reflection, they also refuse detailed grasping. Low thereby places visitors in a double bind between rejection and acceptance.

At the same time, the artist operates in a zone in which many artistic positions have moved since the 1990s and in which artistic engagement oscillates between obscurity and speechlessness. A few artists, like Thomas Hirschhorn with his aesthetic “Terror” and Pawel Althamer with his poetic charisma, successfully navigate this position. This was the same after 9/11 as today – art is implored to take a stance, and in the same way, art criticism could not write fast enough about how powerless artists actually are. The debate continues about socially engaged versus formal, aesthetic art (as if they were incompatible) and on “art for the walls” versus performative art (whereby the latter is automatically attributed a politically correct status). How can the artist proceed here? Failure is preprogrammed; what remains is feeling one’s way with deliberation between associati-

ve speculation, personal biography, and political events. Antonia Low works precisely in this aesthetic minefield, including addressing her own limits and potential powerlessness.

Low's final project at the Münster Academy of Fine Arts, *Rückwärts Richtung Ferne*, 2003, was a gangway placed out in the open field behind the Academy's new architecture. The work was perceived as escapism and romantic poetry; today I see it entirely differently. Because of the 40-year arc and the explosiveness of the events, images of the hijacked Landshut plane on the runway in Mogadishu in 1977 and of Donald and Melania Trump descending the stairs from Air Force One replace the more comical images of the television hairspray ad from the 1970s. Sometimes so much changes in the world around us and in our own perspectives that the arts are reduced to mere observers.



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Text by Carina Plath
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Antonia Low, Shadows of Aubrey Beardsley I, 2017, oil paint sediments on glass, 26,5 x 20,5 cm, 2017