

Geometric Opulence

Feb 10 –
May 8, 2022

MEDIA ORIENTATION
Feb 8, 2022, 11 am

OPENING DAY
Feb 10, 2022, 11 am to 8 pm

Curated by Sabine Schaschl

Museum Haus Konstruktiv presents the exhibition *Geometric Opulence*, a large group show that celebrates a playful approach to geometric and abstract art. Works by John Armleder, Claudia Comte, Sylvie Fleury, Franziska Furter, Peter Halley, Mary Heilmann, Timo Nasser, Nathalie Du Pasquier and Elza Sile can be experienced.

Geometry and opulence are generally perceived as opposites: While geometry represents rationality, order and reduction, opulence is associated with engrossing lushness, excess and redundancy. However, a look at art history shows that they are definitely interconnected, especially when a geometric motif is multiplied in such a way that it takes on ornamental characteristics or becomes a pattern. In a 2012 text (published in the anthology *Ornament: Motiv – Modus – Bild*), art historian Markus Bröderlin notes that the ornamental kept showing up as an important driving force in 20th-century abstract art, the most recent clear expression of which being the “tendency toward the ornamental” seen in the 1980s’ revived abstraction.

Taking nationally and internationally renowned artists as examples, the exhibition *Geometric Opulence* at Museum Haus Konstruktiv asks: How intertwined are geometry and opulence today? When does something start to be read as opulent? And how is contemporary art addressing these matters? The invited artists assign a special role to playing with multiplication, densification and spatialization strategies for abstract geometric elements. Here, opulence arises via imposing formats, a huge amount of paint, or an accumulation of any kind of material, for instance. Another form of play consists of leaving the two-dimensional image space and taking over real space. Entirely in the interests of opulence, all the artists have been given as much space as possible, so this group exhibition is made up of largely independent solo presentations. What they all have in common is an artistic language that reflects an interest in geometry, structure, variations and systems, as well as mastery of opulence’s prerequisite grand gesture.

The exhibition begins on the first floor with a room-filling installation by [Claudia Comte](#) (b. 1983). In particular, this Swiss artist’s work is characterized by her use of a simple language of forms, which she probes and spatially presents via engagement with various media, such as sculpture, printmaking, installation and painting. For this show at Haus Konstruktiv, Comte has for the first time conceived an indoor freestanding curved wall, four meters high, with a pattern of wavy lines. This piece is the continuation of a series of freestanding walls installed outdoors (for instance in Palm Desert, California, in 2017), with which Comte has explored the notions of painting and sculpture in equal measure: What happens when a two-dimensional painting is applied to a three-dimensional object? And what relationship does the work have with its surroundings? Making reference to historical works by op-art artists like Bridget Riley and Victor Vasarely, and reflecting an interest in artistic translation of naturally occurring patterns and structures, Comte also plays with visual vibration effects in her new installation, *Heads and Tails*, which points to the wavy pattern that snakes create when they glide through water. At the same time, this work enters into a dialogue with the mural *Easy Heavy II*, which Comte realized in 2013 in our museum café and has been part of our collection ever since.

The second floor features a selection of pieces by Swiss conceptual artist John Armleder (b. 1948). In his works, Armleder mixes chance with order, and the everyday with high culture. This is also the case in the multi-part artwork *Apparences confuses*, which comprises six paintings in combination with five lametta strips. Here, the impression of opulence arises not only from the glistening of the festive decorative threads, but also, and to a greater extent, from the sheer volume of material dumped on the canvas, including paints and varnishes, as well as sparkling pigments, shells, shards, polystyrene balls, and pompoms. The blending of high and low is also evident on the opposite wall, where more than 70 commercially available lava lamps are arranged to generate an atmospheric all-over effect. Armleder complements his presentation with two geometric paintings, nonchalantly demonstrating that he does not see the relationship between opulence and geometry as contrary, but as fruitful.

In the columned hall on the fourth floor, German conceptual artist Timo Nasser (b. 1972) presents works in which he addresses so-called razzle-dazzle patterns, a type of camouflage that was painted on ships in World War I, so as to make it impossible for the enemy to determine their position and course. On one hand, Nasser transfers such camouflage painting to the two-dimensional surface of the canvas. The combinations of forms and colors that result from this 'unfolding' are reminiscent of the visual language that can be discerned in cult objects from indigenous peoples of the Americas and Africa. On the other hand, Nasser breaks down the patterns into the smallest of units and, on this basis, makes folded metal forms that take on mask-like characteristics in miniature. Attached to the end walls of the exhibition space in their hundreds within one rectangular form, they present themselves as a kind of universal graphic alphabet. With both groups of works, Nasser inscribes forms and patterns in a rich and globally intertwined history that stretches back well beyond the 20th century.

The columned hall's wall with a petrol-colored coating leads visitors into cabinets painted in the same hue, which have been set up by Swiss artist Franziska Furter (b. 1972). She and Nasser, who have already exhibited together several times, jointly arranged the coloring of the walls for the presentation at Museum Haus Konstruktiv. Furter sees her primary medium as drawing. This is also evident in her large-format three-part work in ink on paper, *I Can See Clearly Now*, which was produced specially for the exhibition. Furter developed it through recourse to standardized background images for manga drawings, orienting herself toward templates for explosions, which take on ornamental characteristics when enlarged. The explosion pushes into or out of the space, depending on how it is viewed; the space itself has become unstable. In the neighboring cabinet, silver beads strung on nylon threads loop through the air in a grid-like arrangement, as a spatial drawing. These lines condense to form tangles, loops and knots: According to the artist, they visualize trains of thought or paths through life. While simple in terms of linear form and coloring, this work exhibits an opulent abundance of individual beads.

French artist and designer Nathalie Du Pasquier (b. 1957), who made a name for herself in the early 1980s as a founding member of the collective Memphis, was invited to use the second room on the fourth floor for a presentation of some of her works. The architectural conditions of this space and the fixtures from the previous exhibition proved particularly appealing to Du Pasquier. The result is a walk-through all-encompassing artwork that incorporates architecture, painting, objects and exhibition display in equal measure. The artist combines objects reminiscent of reliefs by Russian constructivist Vladimir Tatlin, and of modernist architectural models, with abstract geometric murals. The tonality of the latter, attuned to Le Corbusier's color scheme, is echoed in the pedestals on which the objects are placed. Spatial appropriation takes place on both a small and large scale; each element becomes an image carrier and a component of an all-encompassing artwork.

Four paintings by American artist Peter Halley (b. 1953) can be seen in the first room on the fifth floor. While engaging with American color-field painting in the mid-1980s, Halley began to produce abstract geometric paintings characterized by a simple vocabulary of forms and a brightly colored palette. Many of his paintings have a square or rectangle in the center, with its surface roughened by the addition of fine-grained sand, thus bringing plastered walls to mind. Each central form is enclosed by an orthogonal composite network of bars and lines in bold colors. For Halley, the geometric forms are not neutral, but

symbolic; he compares them to infrastructures, such as prisons, cells or pipelines. In his works, he reflects on the increasingly evident shaping of social space according to sober planning standards.

In the next room, American artist Mary Heilmann (b. 1940) shows a selection of paintings, ceramics and furniture, produced between 1982 and 2020. Heilmann occasionally arranges her abstract paintings, characterized by expressive gestures, to form bold multi-part compositions. Film, music and literature influence her work in equal measure. For instance, the small-format piece *Driving at Night* brings to mind the cones of light cast into the darkness by the headlights of a moving car and calls for this scene to be embedded in a story or film. The delicate palette and visible grid in works like *Green Kiss* or *Our Lady of the Flowers* (a reference to Jean Genet's 1943 novel *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*) play with stylistic devices from American minimal art, though Heilmann immediately thwarts their reductiveness with poetic placements in bold dark green or pink. The presentation at Haus Konstruktiv provides insight into the oeuvre of this influential artist, which is characterized by an energetic style, subtle irony and playful engagement with the stylistic principles of modernism.

Visitors encounter a different mood in the next room. Here, Zurich-based Latvian artist Elza Sile (b. 1989) exhibits four aluminum panels that she has intensively adapted: beating them out, perforating them, scratching them and adorning them with paint – be it squeezed directly out of the tube or carefully applied. These works were created specially for the exhibition and completed on site. Among other things, they evoke the enchanting cosmos of imagery in *Alice in Wonderland* and the protagonist's journeys into tiny or oversized worlds. Some particularly densely worked sections draw special attention to themselves. At the same time, a glance across the installation as a whole is like an astronaut's view from space – we see a universe that encompasses many narratives.

Glamour, luxury, trash, seduction and consumption are concepts that Sylvie Fleury (b. 1961) negotiates effectively in her artwork – and not without (self-mocking) irony. Using strategies of appropriation and imitation, this Swiss artist draws attention to parallels between the art market and the consumer world, for instance with a bronze casting of a Celine handbag, or with shaped canvases in the form of oversized glittering eyeshadow and makeup palettes. Evidence that Fleury plays not only with popular culture, but also with male-dominated 20th-century art history, can be seen in two series of works, in which she harks back to iconic (geometric) abstract works and deliberately alters them with interventions that have feminine connotations: In reference to Piet Mondrian, she has created neoplasticist compositions with black orthogonal linear formations on a white background. Some of the surfaces are not painted, but consist of fluffy fake fur, humorously subverting the strict order, as well as the immediate recognizability of the 'Mondrian brand'. Fleury generates a similar effect when she adds an excessive quantity of sparkling Swarovski crystals to the surface of square image carriers. With their contradictory nature, Fleury's objects show binary attributions such as male/female, rational/emotional, hard/soft or productive/reproductive to be socially constructed categories.

The exhibition *Geometric Opulence* demonstrates how inspiring it can be to break apart long-cemented perspectives and supposed contradictions, such as those between geometry and opulence, thus making room for surprising interplay.

MEDIATION PROGRAM

PUBLIC GUIDED TOURS

Wednesdays at 6.15 pm and Sundays at 11.45 am

SONNTAGSATELIER – WORKSHOP FOR CHILDREN AGED 5 AND ABOVE

March 6 / 13 / 20 / 27, April 3 / 10, May 8, 11.15 am to 1.15 pm

For more information and events, see: hauskonstruktiv.ch

The digital program and the mediation offered on site are constantly being updated and adapted to the current situation.

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