

# JUST A FAÇADE?

ARCHITECTURE AS ABSTRACTION

text by GÉRARD A. GOODROW

# Since time immemorial, architecture has been praised at the 'mother of all the arts'. Already in ancient Egypt, for example, the temple complexes in Luxor or the sepulchres of the Pharaohs such as the Great Pyramids in Gizeh have been seen as being more than mere religious structures, but rather also and especially total works of art, which were quite literally 'worthy of the gods'. In ancient Greece and Rome, but also in the spectacular civil and sacred buildings of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance throughout Europe, the genres of architecture, sculpture and painting were virtually inseparable. Isolated examples from the Modern age, such as the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the church of the Sagrada Familia by Antoni Gaudi in Barcelona or the 'Merzbau' of Kurt Schwitters in Hanover carried on the tradition of the architectural 'Gesamtkunstwerk'. At the very latest since the Wiener Werkstätte in Vienna and the Bauhaus in Weimar (and later in Dessau and Berlin), the common bond between architecture and the visual arts has become coherent and logical for nearly everyone. It thus comes as no surprise that, today as well, visual artists – be they painters, draughtsmen, sculptors, installation artists or especially photographers – frequently take architecture as a point of departure for their own fascinating compositions.



# The exhibition 'JUST A FAÇADE?' sheds light on the fascinating interrelationship between architecture and contemporary visual art. The title makes reference, on the one hand, to the architecturally based contents of the exhibition while it simultaneously attempts, with a certain sense of irony, to lead the viewer behind the surface of simple aesthetic stimuli in order to reveal the underlying contents and attitudes that drive the artists and their works. On view are photographs, paintings, drawings, sculptures and objects by nine artists, for whom architecture has been a recurrent source of artistic inspiration: Boris Becker, Hélène Binet, Tobias Grewe, Dong-Yeon Kim, Ola Kolehmainen, Heinz Mack, Heribert C. Ottersbach, Apostolos Palavrakis and Kris Scholz



SPIEGEL-PAVILLON 1980

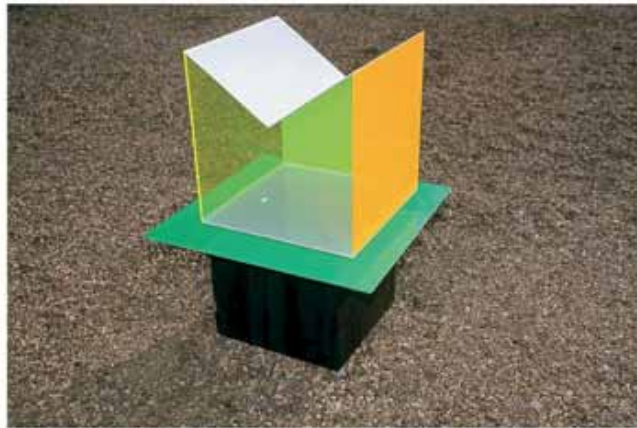


OHNE TITEL 1960



SPIEGEL-PAVILLON 1980

all photos © Heinz Mack, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn



FARBE UND RAUM II 1968

# The architectural models of *HEINZ MACK* (born 1931 in Lollar, lives and works in Mönchengladbach and Ibiza) from the 1970s and '80s are closely tied to his works from the ZERO period (1957-1966). A perfect example of this is his mirror pavilion from 1980 — a cube comprised of mineralogically vaporised glass plates. Since everything that surrounds it, be it the interior of an art gallery or a park landscape, is reflected in its mirrored façade, the architectural form appears ephemeral; the outer walls seem to disappear and the very objectness of the pavilion becomes negated.

# The Korean sculptor and installation artist *DONG-YEON KIM* (born 1960 in Seoul, lives and works in Seoul and Düsseldorf) also plays with the objectness of architecture. By bringing the simplified architectonic forms onto the wall as two-dimensional stencils in fluorescent signal colours, the forms become chiffre-like signs or symbols for 'housing' and/or urban space in general.



FLAT BUILDING NO. 2011  
all photos © Dong-Yeon Kim



STRUCTURE BUILDING 2009/2010



FLAT BUILDING Y 2011



FLAT BUILDING NG 2011



1923 2011  
all photos © Oja Kolehmainen



EXPERIMENTELLE FABRIK 3 2011

# For *TOBIAS GREWE*, the architects behind the buildings that he deconstructs with his camera are completely irrelevant. He is concerned more than anything else with pure form and colour, as well as the greatest possible complexity that can result from these, whereby the most humble apartment building by an anonymous architect can be just as fascinating as the spectacular modern masterpieces by international star architects.

# Among the nine artists represented in the exhibition, five employ the medium of photography, whereby each artist does this – even when certain affinities can be seen here and there – in his or her own unique and highly individual way. *OLA KOLEHMAINEN* (born 1964 in Helsinki, lives and works in Berlin) and Tobias Grewe (born 1975 in Arnsberg, lives and works in Cologne), for example, both use the camera in a certain sense like a paintbrush, transforming the three-dimensionality of architectural structures into enigmatic two-dimensional painterly compositions. Kolehmainen is perhaps the most prominent member of the so-called Helsinki School. His generally large-scale photography investigate space, light and colour in an effort to reassess or question his own patterns of perception as well as those of his viewers.



TWISTED 2010



HONG KONG ISLAND III 2010  
all photos © Tobias Grewe, DGPh



OHNE TITEL 2662 2009

all photos © Boris Becker, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

# **BORIS BECKER** (born 1961 in Cologne, lives and works in Cologne) and **Kris Scholz** (born 1952 in Hanover, lives and works in Düsseldorf) both studied at the famous Academy of Art in Düsseldorf in the internationally acclaimed photography class of Bernd Becher. The various formal languages of architectonic structures play a central role in the works of Boris Becker. For him, architecture – as well as landscapes – are translated into graphic signs. The weight of the voluminous buildings is negated to create minimalist colour compositions characterised by a floating buoyancy.



OHNE TITEL 1695 2000

Mar 2012



FLOORS (#1 BARCELONA) 1998

all photos © Kris Scholz

VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn



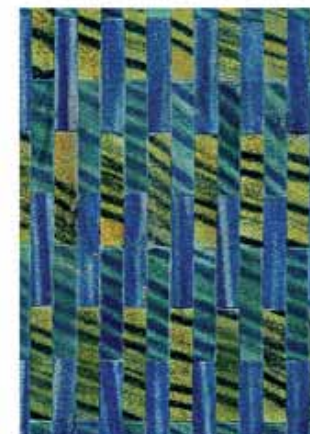
FLOORS (#2 BARCELONA) 1998



FLOORS (#3 BARCELONA) 1998



FLOORS (#4 BARCELONA) 1998



FLOORS (#6 BARCELONA) 1998

# And even when architecture plays a subordinate role in the oeuvre of his colleague **KRIS SCHOLZ**, the 'Floors' series, which the artist captured with his camera in Barcelona in 1998 is a prime example of the way he perceives the world around him. Here as well, the interrelationships between photography and painting cannot be overseen: antique tiled floors are photographed with the objectivity so typical of the Becher School, but as a result of the contextual shift from the floor to the wall the decorative tiles are transferred into exquisitely colourful abstract paintings.



FELDKAPELLE FÜR DEN HEILIGEN BRUDER KLAUS 01 2009  
all photos © Héléne Binet  
gabrielle ammann // gallery. cologne



FELDKAPELLE FÜR DEN HEILIGEN BRUDER KLAUS 03 2009



FELDKAPELLE FÜR DEN HEILIGEN BRUDER KLAUS 05 2009

# Among the five participating photographers, *HÉLÈNE BINET* (born 1958 in Sorengo, Ticino, lives and works on Osea Island, Essex) is the only 'architectural photographer' in the truest sense of the term. Since many years, she has worked together with some of the most influential architects of our time, including Zaha Hadid, Daniel Liebeskind and David Chipperfield. One of her favourite projects is the Brother Klaus Field Chapel in Wachendorf, built by the famed Swiss architect Peter Zumthor, which she has deconstructed with unusual and unexpected perspectives, transforming these into fascinating graphic compositions.

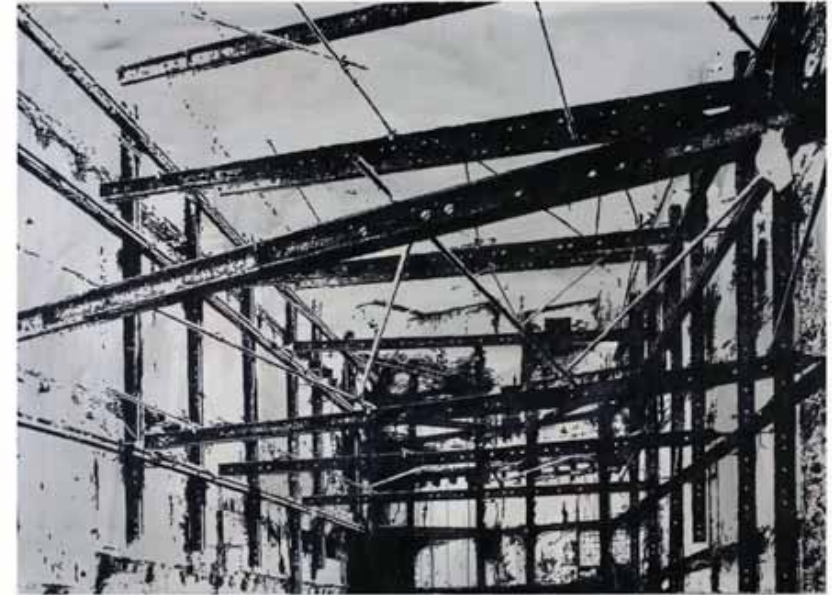


UNTITLED (OPEN SPACE I) 2010  
all photos © Apostolos Palavrakis



UNTITLED 2010

# A similar deconstruction of architectonic forms can be found in the large-scale works on paper by the Greek multimedia artist *APOSTOLOS PALAVRAKIS* (born 1962 in Trikala, lives and works in Dortmund). With his most recent works, the trained architect-come-artist investigates the role of architecture in politics and society and creates impossible utopian forms which seem to nearly burst with inner tension.



ABSTRAKTES BILD 2010  
all photos © Heribert C. Ottersbach  
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn  
Photo: Carl Victor Dahnen, Köln



ERZIEHUNGSANSTALT 2005

# More quiet and contemplative are the paintings and drawings by the conceptual painter *HERIBERT C. OTTERSBACK* (born 1960 in Cologne, lives and works in Leipzig and Bettna, Sweden). With his figurative works on canvas and paper, which frequently take up the theme of abstraction, he investigates the meaning and the very essence of painting as well as the relative significance of art in general in contemporary society. His critical, philosophical and socio-political analyses of the pregnant concept of 'modernity' play a central role here.

# 'JUST A FAÇADE?' is conceived as a conceptual investigation into the multifarious possibilities open to artists who analyse architecture at the dawn of the 21st century as a starting point for a new form of abstraction, which provides insight into the fascinating world of human perception and puts this up for discussion. The exhibition 'Just a Façade?' is on view until April 21st at the Düsseldorf based gallery Beck & Eggeling Contemporary.

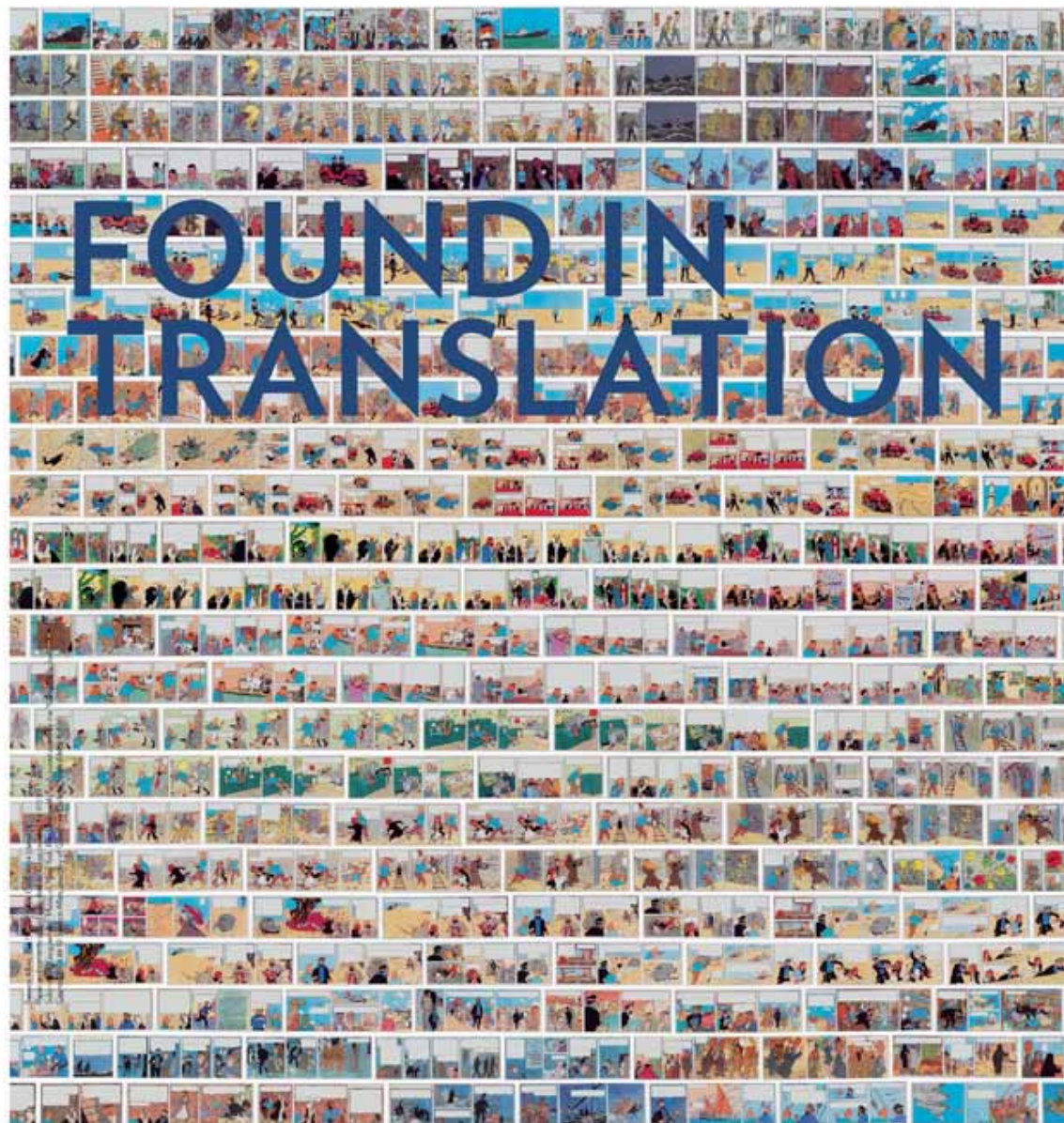


link to GERMAN TEXT



link to INTERVIEW  
WITH TOBIAS GREWE

DEUTSCHE+GUGGENHEIM



28.1. — 9.4.

UNTER DEN LINDEN 13/15, 10117 BERLIN, DEUTSCHE-GUGGENHEIM.DE  
DAILY, 10 A.M. – 8 P.M.; MONDAYS, ADMISSION FREE

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