

4≠4 | brigitte kowanz
27 April – 24 June 2023

For the solo exhibition 4≠4 of the Austrian artist Brigitte Kowanz (1957–2022), the gallery in Berlin is transformed into a black light space where her phosphorescent and fluorescent works are presented within a spatial installation for the very first time.

By juxtaposing historical and new works, it becomes clear how Brigitte Kowanz consistently reflected the influence of new light-generating media on society and art since the early 1980s. From the very beginning, this analytical engagement addressed aspects of virtualization as well as new forms of image and space. As a pioneer of a media-reflective approach, Kowanz developed destabilized, moving spaces. With light serving as a mediator of transgression and specification an integrative relation between work, space and recipient emerged.

In the early 1980s, Kowanz began experimenting with black light and reflective pigments, exploring the boundaries of sculpture and painting in relation to space. Between 1979 and 1984, together with Franz Graf, they developed paper transparencies and everyday objects made of phosphorescent and fluorescent paints, as well as black light installations, which reflected the influence of New Media, such as video, VHS, and music on art and society. Inspired by Punk and New Wave, they looked for ways to transfer transcendent experiences from club and pop culture into art. Their exploration of light can also be traced back to the new (light-based) technological medias of video, film, and photography. They explored how influences of these new media and their perception could be translated into painting.

The exhibition presents early works as historical points of reference – the wall work *Ohne Titel* (1985) stands for Brigitte Kowanz' early exploration of the dissolution of painting through light. The fruit box is lined with plaster and phosphorescent paint, which glows in the dark. This way the in daylight factual object is virtualized when combined with black light and about to dissolve.

The exhibition is centered around her rarely shown installation *Light Steps* (1990), a minimalist staircase made of black light tubes. The work highlights Kowanz' ongoing interest in the mutability of architectural and spatial elements through light. The installation *Light Steps* blurs the contours of the gallery space and highlights other aspects of perception that remain hidden in day light. The artist plays with changing light situations and explores the boundaries between the visible and the invisible, always understanding the process of perception as a process of cognition.

In addition, more recent works complement the presentation, in which she quoted and evolved her own earlier work. Within the wall installation *High Five* (2021), whose reflective textile can be activated by flashlight photography. Five short black light lamps are placed horizontally and connected to the fabric by glowing orange cables. The result are five lines that seem to float in space and establish a formal proximity to Kowanz' expansive installation *Light Steps*. The location of the recipient in the space plays a decisive role, as well as with *Flashback Look Ahead* (2021), depending on the viewer's point of view and the lighting situation of the room. Kowanz describes these changes as choreographies or constellations that can only be experienced through movement.

With reference to the gallery's location near Checkpoint Charlie, Kowanz' *Fall of the Wall 09.11.1989* (2017/2019) and her engagement with milestones of political decisions or digitalization that brought social and political upheavals with them can be related to in particular. A curved

spatial drawing composed of a neon yellow cable on a metal element divided into short and long segments reproduces the date of the fall of the Berlin Wall as morse code, while the sequence of numbers is simultaneously morphed by an iPad as a light and acoustic signal.

The edition *Lichtverschmutzung* (2021) made of two black light bulbs and a long neon-colored cable stretches through the gallery in form of a spatial drawing. The bulbs remain switched off, while the cable glows and illuminates the space. For Kowanz, cable is not a means to the end of illumination, but an essential part of her works in terms of form and content.

In the second room, *Flashback 4#4* and *Flashback 4x3*, reference her earlier engagement with painting and remain visible through the use of pigment, line, surface and space, but at the same time move into the background with the activation of black light. Instead of a traditional static image, a virtualization occurs, which focuses on the volatility and instability caused by the propagation of light. Here, Kowanz refers to the aesthetics of disappearance in the sense of the French philosopher Paul Virilio and addresses the increase of speed and hecticness in a rapidly growing world in her work. With her Flashback series, she creates works that take up light as a technology of image creation and information, signaling their immateriality and ephemerality.

The virtual reality work ... *sollte die Reise weitergehen, suchte man Neuseeland, in diesem fremden Gelände ...* (1980/2020) reproduces one of the first black light installations by Brigitte Kowanz and Franz Graf at the Krinzinger Gallery in Innsbruck 1980 in the virtual space. Through the VR extension, it is possible to relive this experience while simultaneously standing in a current black light space by Kowanz. Visitors thus become an integral part of her work, in which they participate in several levels and realities.

The exhibition takes place in close collaboration with the Estate of Brigitte Kowanz.

Brigitte Kowanz exhibited at the Austrian Pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017 after having participated in the 41st Biennale in 1984. Recent major solo exhibitions of the artist were held at the Schlossmuseum Linz (2022) and the Museum Haus Konstruktiv in Zurich (2020).

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