

COLLECTION ON DISPLAY:

Phyllida Barlow, Jimmie Durham,
Daniel Knorr, Mark Leckey

November 17, 2012–January 27, 2013

Opening: November 16, 2012, 6 pm

Curator:
Judith Welter,
collection conservator,
Migros Museum
für Gegenwartskunst

With the renovation of the Löwenbräukunst-Areal, the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst finally has a permanent framework for the presentation of its collection: a spacious exhibition floor will host temporary shows offering insight into different aspects of the museum's holdings. The first three presentations from the collection are dedicated to contemporary work in sculpture. Selected works illustrate multifaceted and dynamic developments and the growing dissolution of the boundaries that conventionally define sculpture. The first chapter features works by Phyllida Barlow, Jimmie Durham, Daniel Knorr, and Mark Leckey.

In recent years, issues of sculpture have been a major focus of the exhibition programming at the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst and the museum's efforts to enlarge its collection. The three-part presentation of works from the collection brings together works that raise questions concerning the possibilities of sculptural production. As a genre, sculpture—whether figural or abstract—occupied a central position in the history of art from the classical age to the modernist era. As the art historian Rosalind Krauss has argued, since the onset of postmodernism, the conception of sculpture has been expanded as its boundaries have become blurry—sculpture has quite literally been knocked off its pedestal. Sculptural work extended into a variety of media and materials, exploring the possibilities of space.

The works on display in the first chapter of the exhibition cycle interrogate the transformation and status of sculptural art and examine the ways it is perceived. They incorporate objects from urban space or address the role and function of sculpture in the public sphere. In the oeuvre of Phyllida Barlow (b. Newcastle upon Tyne, 1944), elements of urban architecture play a central part. In her expansive works, she often takes up elements of public architectures as motifs, exploring possibilities of processes in formal creation while also referring to the sculptural character of these objects in public space. Barlow has engaged with the genre of sculptural and installation art since the 1970s; in the tradition of the post-minimalists, she works to deconstruct the aura surrounding objects that is part of the modernist legacy. The artist's works, which frequently consist of raw materials she arranges in piles and layers, are distinguished by striking surfaces that heighten the physical presence of her sculptures in space. The two works on display are part of the series *STREET*, which examines the material qualities of urbanity and the political and psychological meanings implicitly associated with them. *STREET* was created specifically for a solo exhibition at BAWAG Contemporary in 2010. *STREET untitled: banners* is an installation made of thirty flags. Stripped of all symbolic content, these objects become purely aestheticized exhibits. Barlow thus reflects also on the political potential of these objects removed from the public sphere: *STREET untitled: signs* refers to signage and display boards in public spaces, which the arrangement in a series turns into a relief-like mural.

The traditional logic of sculpture is closely associated with that of the monument; the historiography of art has frequently defined both genres based on their representative potential and their ability to anchor remembrance. The 70-part photographic series *Stolen History* (2008) by Daniel Knorr (b. Bucharest, 1968) documents an intervention in public space. Knorr studies the monument's historically determined representational and memorializing function in a performative act: he makes statues in central Copenhagen wear masks and then takes their photographs. For one day, Knorr covered the figures' heads with so-called balaclavas; in the political domain, these black masks are

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now often associated with the strategies of disguise extremists employ. The covered faces articulate a critical comment on the representation and function of history in the public sphere. Simple actions temporarily transform venerable monuments to national heroes and historical personages into new sculptures. Performative and interactive interventions are the primary formats of Daniel Knorr's art. With spontaneous and humorous gestures, the artist investigates the differences and boundaries between private and public, artistic and natural, or political and apolitical spaces as well as the relation between artist and public audience and the status of the work of art between object and action.

The video by Mark Leckey (b. London, 1964) likewise addresses sculpture in the public sphere and the continuing legacy of a traditional modernist aesthetic in the plastic arts. Leckey's visual essays, videos, and installations examine aspects of different products of pop- and subculture as well as the relationship between high and popular culture. His primary interest is in the phenomenology and effects of the physical presence of imagery. Another central question concerns the beholder's perception, which he seeks to influence via physiological structures. In *The March of the Big White Barbarians* (2006), Leckey delves into art history, interrogating the effects of artistic products in a public and pop-cultural setting. The video's protagonists are public sculptures in London, here presented to the viewer as a digital slideshow rowdily accompanied by Leckey's band Jack Too Jack; the noisy soundtrack lends them an almost plastic and physical presence. The screaming men's chorus is a response to the ambivalence of the decoration and design of public space. Mostly fameless and unappreciated sculptures interspersed with works by well-known artists like Henry Moore are recalled to our attention as though in a ritual of reanimation and staged in a fresh perspective. The work illustrates different ways of reading the relationships between the objects, but also their effects on the beholder and the public space.

The production of Jimmie Durham (b. Washington, Arkansas, 1940) usually takes material form in sculptural compositions of "objets trouvés". Yet the artist goes beyond the tradition of the Duchampian readymade: his objects, which also preserve traces of artistic-performative actions, not only reflect on the status of the work of art, they are also metaphors for the sometimes complex and problematic encounter between humans, technology, and nature as seen in a variety of cultural perspectives. The critical engagement with social and political issues has often been a central feature of Durham's art; between 1973 and 1980, he worked as a political organizer for the American Indian Movement. He also addresses Eurocentric norms and the aesthetic conceptions of art associated with them. For example, he has repeatedly examined how Native American elements have been incorporated in contemporary art, seeking to disrupt standardized visual languages and discourses. Regarded as a leading "artists' artist," Durham has been a crucial influence on a generation of younger artists. A red VW Beetle with a massive boulder resting on its roof forms the sculpture *Alpine Substance on Wolfsburg Construction*. It looks as though the car had been hit by a falling rock or a meteorite while traveling at full speed. As with many of Durham's works, the static object evinces traces of a performative action—in this instance, the artist directed the boulder to be dropped onto the car's roof in an act of deliberate violence. In Durham's view, the rock, which plays an important role in the artist's most recent works, embodies the complexity of the interrelations between humans, technology, and nature.

Subsequent chapters of the exhibition cycle:

February 9–April 21, 2013

Chapter 2: Heidi Bucher, Thea Djordjadze, Loredana Sperini, Katja Strunz, Berta Fischer

May 4–August 18, 2013

Chapter 3: Valentin Carron, Manfred Pernice, Edward Krasinski, Stefan Burger

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Phyllida Barlow
STREET untitled: banners
2010
Plywood, timber, cement, scrim, spraypaint, paint,
sealant
400 × 900 × 500 cm



Daniel Knorr
Stolen History
2010
C-Print
Edition: 1/3
70 parts: 32 parts each 29.5 × 20;
38 parts each 20 × 29.5 21 × 30 cm



Phyllida Barlow
STREET untitled: signs
2010
Plywood, timber, cement, scrim, spraypaint,
paint, sealant
5 parts: ca. 125 × 120 × 93 cm each



Mark Leckey
The March of the Big White Barbarians
2006
Single-channel video projection (color, sound)
7 min.



Jimmie Durham
Alpine Substance on Wolfsburg Construction
2007
Various materials
Ca. 193 × 400 × 160 cm