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## SPACE OF CHANGE

WASHINGTON

hard pressed to identify continuities in oeuvre, even if we might detect architecture of a different subject, and a latent criticism of modernism as part of her *modus operandi*. Instead, it is her heterogeneity that remains the prevalent constant in her work. Isa Genzken is certainly one of the least predictable artists of our time. From the beginning, she has worked independently. Admittedly, two of her catalogues documenting her oeuvre have already been published. Nevertheless, her work is so headstrong, so full of aesthetic conviction, so headstrong, so full of aesthetic conviction, that it still appears to be the work of an outsider. We seem to be continuously engaged with experiments whose outcome is unpredictable, upheld by her recent exhibition at the District of Columbia Arts Center [July 6—September 10, 2006].

Paintings and sprayed streaks cover collages, mirrors, photographs, and adhesive tape. The resulting material accumulations seem to be governed by the sequential logic of the creative process, nothing appears to be random. Nor is the work the product of chance. A cool precision has been observed in the placement of every detail. Likewise, the objects triggered by Genzken's bizarre objects-cum-objects are both constructive and ruinous: wheelchairs, crutches, seating, and so on all eventually serve as pedestals for accumulations of materials of various provenance. Baby dolls sit on worn-out chairs under faded umbrellas, their oversized forms transforming them into children who have grown up. Anthropomorphic wire silhouettes stand in for toys and stuffed animals.

Fragmented elements come together in a mixture of surrealism, expressionism, and abstraction. They may be the cornerstones of a story, but what kind of story do they tell? "My work," Isa Genzken says in her inimitable way, "comes from an intuition, which I have taken for thirty years and continues to develop. It is my intention to find a connection to that which 'we all already know.' I don't describe it like that."

—Manisha Jothay  
Translated from German by Christian Rattemeyer

Compact, yet highly intriguing, the exhibition *Space of Change* [District of Columbia Arts Center; September 8—October 8, 2006] featured the work of five artists who explore transitional experience, a concept defined in terms of liminality. Anthropology links this concept to rites of passage. Informed by this discourse, co-curators Margaret Boozer and Claire Huschle sought to examine its parallels with artistic processes. The exhibition's multi-media selection of works—from sound to ink on paper, from soil to teddy bears—delivered ambiguity and anticipation, cornerstones of the transformative process.

Wendy Weiss and Jay Kreimer's *Ground Shift*, 2006, was suspended over the stairs leading up to the gallery—a prologue to the exhibition. Incorporating sound, textile, and kinetic sculptural elements, this piece was activated by motion sensors' detection of viewers' presence, which triggered the emission of sounds of footsteps—to accompany the viewer's own steps—and the movement of small, skeletal figures crawling on all fours upon a semi-permeable membrane overhead. Moving, they were nevertheless going nowhere. The instability of the fabric causeway contrasted with the solidity of the flight of steps. In this, the work made liminality plainly apparent. Locked in a perpetual limbo above the transit zone that is the staircase, they existed, like the viewer, somewhere between the place they left and where they are headed. In Weiss and Kreimer's second work, *Invitation*, 2006, a long and narrow expanse of cloth was draped over two painted wood arms extending out from the wall, implying a rite of passage. These arms seemed to offer ceremonial attire that, judging from their height, may be readily placed over an initiate's shoulders.

By contrast to Weiss and Kreimer's somewhat literal approach, Amy Kaplan's *Praying Bears*, 2006, lent a humorous touch. Kaplan muted prayer-reciting teddy bears by wrapping them in white, non-spun wool. On one level, her work reacts to the repellent indoctrination role of these mawkish little clasped-pawed creatures. On another, she makes them into larvae by cocooning them, thus metaphorically giving them the opportunity to turn into something else. Their familiar shape dramatically altered, these objects became eerie presences, suggesting ancient objects of ritual or the limits of faith.

Metamorphosis and ritual also inform Justin Rabideau's works. Assembled out of tools and photographic evidence, *A Sense of Place*, 2005, memorializes the artist's soil-raking performances. With customized implements, Rabideau proceeded to erase his footsteps while leaving marks that show his passage exactly. Like a farmer who steadfastly tills the land, the artist describes the direct impact of his relationship to the land on his outlook and sense of self.

Martin Brief's drawings were the most surprising and impressive works on view. Minimalist, they could easily be overlooked—a mistake resulting from their focus on two forms of print media whose appearances we usually take for granted. In his *Newspaper Series*, 2006, Brief laid vellum over the paper's front page and filled in every letter "o." The resulting irregular smattering of dots reveals a geometry that radically alters our understanding of the page's structure. In *Dictionary Series*, 2006, he outlined dictionary entries, prompting us to consider the artist's interest in these inanimate textual columns. Here again, Brief's renderings challenge assumptions. They denude the columns, and give them another life. Reconfigured, the definitions become flow charts. The page's crinkled edges and the seemingly random placement of reverse indentations endow the drawings with a bristling, mechanistic energy that leads the eyes from right to left, scanning down the columns.

*Space of Change* intelligently opened up the spatial concept of liminality. The selected works explored rites of passage, incubation periods, psychological evolution, and re-definitions of the physical realm. While these developments are essentially private, they change our social location or perspective. They are also shared by many cultures, and punctuate all sorts of experience. As such, liminality also relates to the artist's retreat into the studio to model his or her observations, ideas, and impulses into something public. *Space of Change* visibly purports that, in the spatio-temporal gap that is the realm of change—a place between before and after—uncertainty is the only certainty. Most importantly, the exhibition's greatest achievement is the manner in which it allows others to share in such transitions.

—John Gayer

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Cologne; photo: Pez Hejduk] / ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Isa Genzken, *Invitation*, 2006, photo: Pez Hejduk; Justin Rabideau, *A Sense of Place*, 2005, photo-documentation, District of Columbia Arts Center)

ABOVE: Beth Lilly, *Will I Have A Meaningful Relationship With My*