

-- And the things are hiding in the middle of the room

On the work of Eva Chytilek

Dominikus Müller

A crate stands in the middle of the room. It is not exactly small, but that is not to say it is very big. Oversized. Half-opened and propped on its side with a small brass grip on its front. First and foremost, however, the top, which faces forward, drawn slightly opened, is painted with a black, gray and white camouflage pattern. This has been done by means of accurately painting the individual wooden pieces of the common chipboard, of which the crate is made. What Eva Chytilek displayed here in the middle of the Startgalerie in Vienna is unmistakably a shipping crate, surely used to bring artworks from point A to B, from the atelier to the gallery and back again. Box in, top off, art out, top on, box out.

But this box stayed. And, here in the exhibition space, it became an art object in its own right. It is retrieved and fittingly placed in front of the entrance to an art lending library, where art can be borrowed and brought home for a length of time – a reminder of its not too distant past as a practical object within the realm of things. And, one may almost see this thing ducking as under its camouflage print, shying away from its existence as art, this shipping crate aptly named *Cover* (2012). An artwork that, until recently, wasn't; a thing that moreover disguises itself here in the bright lighting against the white wall, armed with a pattern appropriate – though not immediately obvious – to this purpose, attempting to appear as an “artwork”. One may ask, as what else in an exhibition space? Though while the crate would so much like for its original purpose to take a backseat to cunning decorativeness or a separate art existence, in the end, its provenance is always completely palpable and evident.

This type of a suspended dialectic, which results in a persistent, precarious condition that challenges the status of things, is characteristic of an entire series of

Chytilek's work. She seems to effortlessly tread the fine line between the definitions that often emanate from every day objects and then proceed forth from there. Chytilek takes furniture, fitments, things from daily (work) life – chairs, shelving units, tables, chests of drawers or even shipping crates, as in this case – and rededicates them. She dismantles these objects in performances, subsequently arranging the individual parts within the space and along the wall, assembling them anew and differently, rendering them seemingly futile and unusable, or even painting them. A strangely mute, introverted quality is often inherent to these sculptures: volumes with opaque surfaces, handicapped bodies of weight and materiality. The works carry the traces of their past purpose with a conscious helplessness, and they treat their past as practical objects much like their present life as art: always with a bit of doubt and slight confusion, with a degree of unease and perhaps a little bit of melancholy. In this way, the work *Der fünfte Stuhl* (2008) – “the fifth chair” – employs an exact number of necessary pieces, taken from four identically constructed chairs in order to build a fifth. From very normal chairs, rickety works result, themselves falling between two stools, becoming art with a built-in self-resistance.

With such inter-categorical experiments, Eva Chytilek is also concerned, time and again, with the question of how bodies and space are constituted and of what they are made: what is a space, actually, and what is a volume? What fills this or brings this forth – if nothing else, socially, through the conventions of use? Crates and cubes often appear in her work, as do pedestals or transitional parts – basic architectural elements that are sometimes abstracted to their naked forms, sometimes already transcribed with a past life and meaning as an interior fitment or construction material. These works then create their own space within the exhibition room, transforming and mirroring it, overriding or upsetting it.

Also at the entrance of the aforementioned exhibition, entitled *Double U* (2012), a fine, almost transparent curtain of thin and mostly hexagonal aluminum elements hangs here from the ceiling like long chains between two columns, dividing a part of the exhibition space and scanning it: a permeable wall where none exists; a new,

semi-virtual space within the old one. In this work, *Ohne Titel (Wandfragment)* (2012), meaning “untitled (wall fragment)”, these elements take on the form of construction materials as they are applied to the erecting of a wall, for instance.

In some cases, when Chytilek translates practical objects and interiors – or even an entire space – into sculptures and installations, she takes a third step, further transforming these precedent works into another space: one of the two-dimensional image. The work *Index (Ausstellungsansicht 2009)* (2012) explicitly gets to the heart of this renewed shift. As the title signals, the artist used an exhibition view from 2009 and further manipulated this photographic documentation of the exhibited work, *Untitled* (2008). First, she copied the image of the original pedestal sculpture, constructed from wooden inlaid furniture parts. Around the image’s border, some sections were enlarged to differing scales, recopied, and then the whole thing was composed as a collage and re-photographed. The resulting pictorial space is repeatedly broken with differing granulation and shifted size relations and composed differently than the real space of the original installation view (and, of course, differently from the space of this conventional photograph). In order to create its own depth, the image employs the signatures of the applied media techniques: the depicted room is stretched, disrupted, alienated. In doing so the traces of transfer are carried out in front in a constitutionally similar sense as some of Chytilek’s sculptures, which display the blunt deformations of their transformation from object to artwork. A continued hint of absence – of incremental abstraction and disassociation or even obliteration – is pulled along the path from the original exhibition to the photographed installation view and on to the re-appropriation of this image, once used for the purpose of documentation, to a self-contained artwork. Yet the path traveled remains recognizable, despite its having been covered over.

Another work in the *Double U* exhibition heads straight in the other direction on this path of renewed transformations between two and three-dimensionality. The piece *+ 47° 33' 26.98" + 21° 7' 22.79"* (2010) is actually composed of a photograph of three sculptures, referred to in the title by the exact coordinates of their location in

the Hungarian Puszta. Here the artist installed the photograph as a column-like stack of postcards in the middle of the room. Through this re-translation, she adds a sculptural dimension to this work, which bears less connection to the photograph than to the sculptures depicted by it. Suddenly, these are reimbursed with a strange, second-order materiality that had been taken from them through the act of being photographed. This style of spaces and conditions conducive to leaping references is typical of Chytilek's work, which can just as well take up things like furniture or shipping crates as architecture and artworks, re-exploiting them and, moreover, exploiting them *further*.

And so, in the end, it is perhaps a work like *Horizon 1+2* (2010), which is rather inconspicuous at first glance, that more precisely grasps the point of Chytilek's practice with its calm and quiet circling. These two metal rings, leaning almost loosely and seemingly randomly against the exhibition wall, were created alongside $+ 47^{\circ} 33' 26.98'' + 21^{\circ} 7' 22.79''$. The rings are strung with a fine braid of polyester threads. And, depending upon which way the light falls, these threads shimmer in different colors and open up a pictorial space where there is actually none: a perfect hybrid of object and painting, a constant oscillation between the dimensions and differing spaces, and foremost, an artwork that is newly and differently composed in each exhibition, according to placement and incidence of light. Thus, it exists in different states, always re-activating itself as if of its own accord. And this, in fact, would be the literal squaring of the circle.