

Olaf Holzapfel*My personal interweaved habitats*

September 4 - October 2, 2010

Tue - Sa, 11am - 6pm

Johnen Galerie
Marienstrasse 10
10117 Berlin, Germany

Olaf Holzapfel's exhibition of new works presents pictures made of braided hay, a temporary tent-like dwelling woven of Chaguar-cactus fiber and a timber-framed structure made of oak wood. With his works Holzapfel maps the surroundings of our bodies, the limitations of space and images of general orientation. Beyond these 'envelopes' around us the public space opens up as the other entity, like the mirror image that is not directly visible: a topography. The new body of work that is shown in this exhibition consists mainly of natural materials that carry a traditional symbolic meaning for the people who are surrounded by them in their daily lives. The sculptures refer formally to the territories and ways of life where they were made in: Poland, Germany and Argentina. They consist for the most part of ephemeral materials that are of no particular concern to contemporary art practice. From an ecological point of view, however, they are of great interest. Holzapfel investigates to which extent the landscape and its material influence our bodies and thinking, which covers are sought out and built to inhabit a given territory. Is it by sheer chance that pioneering areas of mechanical engineering such as Japan, England and Central Europe show a predominant occurrence of timber-framed housing - buildings that are logical but at the same time overdeterminate like a tree? The artist asks why, with all their interminable, stormy and rugged territories, would the Argentine Indians not opt for more temporary housing? Why do farmers in Poland braid monstrosities out of straw or use straw ornaments for Christmas decoration?

Holzapfel designed a timber-frame structure shown in this exhibition that could function as a studio. The tent made out of Chaguar cactus fibre was executed with the help of Argentine Wichi-Indians who weaved its elements after the artist's designs. This 'temporary house' forms a symbiosis between nature, abstraction and virtual notions of space. This work was installed in various places in Buenos Aires, a city that exists as if it was stand-alone, in no need of the country it is surrounded by.

The sculptures in the third room are made out of acrylic glass. Although the material is rigid in its materiality, it appears to be soft and fluid due to its treatment with high temperatures. Depending on color, surface and light one can barely grasp its shape with the naked eye, as it shifts between abstract sculpture and folded covers. The sculptures seem like membranes between exterior and inside and embody a state in progress between different forms.

The artist is less concerned with the international, comprehensive character of art works but puts his focus on the work and activity at a specific place where the sculptures were executed. He analyzes the characteristic criteria, always in reference to his western identity. His approach is romantic as he assumes that the elemental, even if built by man, contains direct responses to our actions. By intensively reflecting upon nature, its fundamental systems reveal themselves. Like with the Wichi-Indians, the idea of the world is not being derived from culture but from issues that have always been in existence.

Olaf Holzapfel, born in Görlitz, East Germany, in 1969, studied from 1996 until 2001 at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Dresden where he was later master student of Professor Ralf Kerbach, from 2001 to 2003. He was visiting professor at the Kunstakademie in Karlsruhe and at the HfBK Hamburg. He did various international projects in places like Japan, India and the US. Holzapfel lives and works in Berlin.