

NONNEGATIVE META DRČAR

Slovenian artist Meta Drčar, AIR – ARTIST IN RESIDENCE Niederösterreich guest in November/December 2020 and June 2021, is concerned—always site-specifically—with the relationship between body, perception, space, and architecture. Sculpture and architecture are situated in a dialectical relationship to one another. In *Nonnegative*, her installation developed specifically for Galerie Stadtpark, the artist employs an exceedingly minimalist formal language. Yet her structures of glass surfaces and steel frames, evocative of drawings, cannot be reduced to their sculptural articulation and presence. Rather, the artist questions how such simple geometric spatial elements—e.g. vertically positioned, rectangular forms, fashioned from thin-profile steel, or a repetitive structuring of large-format, black-glass surfaces—impact the viewer’s perception and negotiation of space, how and in what ways these elements are capable of effectuating a kind of augmented perception of space. Drčar’s works therefore also possess a subtle, performative quality. Created is a highly perceptive, spatial and process-based experiential phenomenon that is articulated in neither a merely physical nor perceptual sense but in a clearly distinct, active process of spatial diegesis.

Meta Drčar draws on certain formal elements of the building, such as the repetition of rectangular shapes, as reference forms for her own abstract “frames” positioned in the space. This spatial constellation of rudimentary geometric forms verges on a kind of spatial drawing, a graphic constellation comprising various geometric forms of steel, glass, and water. Drčar brings into play—as a further aesthetic register—the viewer’s capacity to expand on what is missing, to fill out or complete in their minds, forms such as incomplete rectangles or cubes or even connect together implied spatial elements. In this way, Drčar’s spatial “drawings” are capable of spanning imaginary volumes.

In terms of material language, Drčar’s sculptural elements—vertically positioned frames and rectangular surfaces of glass and water—are characterized by a visual simplicity and purity. Her formal language comes across as highly minimalist on first impression; the artist employs steel, glass, and water as intrinsically homogenous “elements.” This purity of form, however, is not intended to play into the ideality of a specific form or concept of art. Rather, the artist strives for an absence of handwriting so that the viewer’s negotiating and exploration of space is directed by these reduced forms in a direct, subliminal way. Meta Drčar activates in this manner the kinetic energy of the abstract spatial configuration, setting in motion each individual viewer’s choreography through the space.

With her work *Frame Series, Work No. 9* in the building’s main gallery, Drčar alludes to another spatial characteristic fundamental to the modernist exhibition pavilion: its inherent transparency. The artist is not simply doubling/copying the front facade of seven large-format glass panes, but “translates” these into black glass. She thus does away with the transparency of the glass, transforming it into a (black) mirror, a potential

extension of the space that turns the entire structure into a kind of “viewing machine.” In a similar vein, the artist translates the glass of the overhead windows in the foyer of the gallery building into water in *Frame Series, Work No. 8*. Three glass surfaces are each presented as a thin layer of water in a specially fabricated, minimalist steel receptacle. Stated simply, Drčar embraces, develops, or even autonomizes sculpturally certain specific elements of the space, while changing, inverting, or transforming others.

In her spatial installations *Frame Series, Work No. 8*, in the foyer of the gallery building, and *Frame Series, Work No. 9*, in the building’s main gallery space, Drčar focuses on features specific to the exhibition venue. Properties, in fact pairs of contrasts such as black/white, opaque/transparent, solid versus liquid, are juxtaposed as complementary but also dialogical poles. One encounters black (glass) that contrasts with the white of the walls, opaque versus transparent, or solid versus ephemeral (light, water). In metaphorical terms, the artist explores the outermost poles of the space and then displays its most significant spatial features. But, as mentioned previously, she is not interested here in formal concerns, in clarity or purity of form, etc., but in the tension generated and made perceptible between the respective “poles”, i.e. black/white, opaque/transparent, solid/liquid. Drčar’s intended transformation of the ostensibly given space essentially occurs between these poles, between such binaries. The simplest spatial features as well as their contrasts thus become an implicit call to action to explore the space for oneself aesthetically. The transformation takes place essentially in each individual’s perceiving and negotiating of the space. Drčar understands space per se in diegetic terms, as a function of the dialectics of thing (given, physical) and visual object (perceptual process and negotiation). Her sculptural structures reference (initially) solid, fixed forms, each of which, once perceived, becomes the focus of an aesthetic manifestation and can therefore take on a variety of (subjective) forms.

The element of repetition, such as the seven, black-glass surfaces or the welded rectangles (frames), lends Drčar’s work a metrical quality, one that structures perception. In any case, this repetitive aspect reflects a temporal dimension of seeing and perceiving space that holds meaning for Drčar. Given Drčar’s background in contemporary dance and choreography, both of these artistic-biographical strands fundamentally condition her thinking around space; the relationship between subject/body and space per se proves to be grounded in kinesthetics, time-based, and process-oriented. The artist’s de facto material is therefore neither the “drawing” with rudimentary, geometric-sculptural forms, nor their formal purity (minimalism), but the process(es) of active, spatial perception that these are capable of triggering. The “performance,” how the viewer negotiates the space, the individual’s process of spatial diegesis, and ultimately the production of space itself, assert themselves as the artist’s true focus.

Drčar’s installations examine the interdependence between moving body and (ostensibly) given architectural space. The sculptural structures function as a kind of medium, as an aesthetic or even epistemological intermediary between subject (observation), body, and space. The installations challenge the viewer in subtle ways, they condition bodily movements, in a kind of latent, reflexive choreography that resonates with and reacts to the installation elements and their compositions.

A central element already evident in Drčar’s earlier works is her exploration of light, with the tension between light and space. Although the installations in *Nonnegative* do not directly examine or translate the light in the space sculpturally, changes in light nevertheless play a constitutive role for the presence of her spatial configurations, or rather, the particular ways in which they are manifested. The light not only forms an

atmospheric element that contrasts with the rigidity of the minimalist spatial compositions and, so to speak, transcends them. But the light, as well as the changing shadows, also function as a kind of visual component to the installations. The “medium” of light makes the spatial configurations, which are themselves static, appear mutable. A fixed installation in space gives rise to various other spaces within the space. This variability of visual impressions, of the installation’s particular manifestations, plays into the kinetic energy of the spatial features. The viewers themselves become part of a variable installation that is revealed to them through walking around and observing.

The impact of the light, i.e. the question of whether the installation is accessed when the sun is shining, the sky overcast, or in the evening under artificial light, gives the sculptural entities, such as the vertically positioned iron rectangles (frames), a different appearance. But the lighting situation also has a significant impact on the second perceptual, optical “workings” of Drčar’s installation, specifically the reflectivity of the black glass plates positioned on the floor. The dark glass surfaces, in fact a darkened replica of the building’s glass facade laid on the floor, morph into a kind of “viewing machine”; created is a reflective phenomenon that opens and expands in a downward direction the visual appearance/form of the space, at times transforming it completely. Depending on one’s angle of view, the glass panels—for instance, when only reflecting a white wall—appear either almost matt and dull, or become an extension of the space, revealing the corners and layers of the room.

Light occurrences and reflections—as well as transparencies—makes space, which initially comes across as exceptionally clear, austere, and serene in Drčar’s work, appear as mutable, setting-specific, even relational. Space here is the opposite of a direct, given, physical circumstance; it has long ceased to be a straightforward accumulation of objects, walls, and bodies. Nor is space in this case homogeneous, a geometric (Euclidean) extension envisioned in the form of drawing. Rather, with Drčar, space can only be understood through a process of its negotiation, of walking around, of observing while moving. Ultimately, taking place here is a process of spatial diegesis, an interconnecting of varied spatial impressions and taking in of perspectives.

When extrapolating Drčar’s subtle instructions for negotiating space, her installations prompt us to consider space per se on a meta level, to reflect on the various ways we experience, perceive, or even question certain architectural situations. Drčar creates spatial settings that ultimately not only reflect and subvert conventional ways of perceiving and conceiving space, but significantly also involve an intuitive, non-linguistic, kinesthetic “understanding” of space. Drčar seeks to create spatial structures that penetrate and transcend the given form, the given space, by means of an explicitly subjective experience.

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