

Carla Arocha & Stephane Schraenen in Berlin

## IMAGINATION VERSUS REALITY

The artistic duo Carla Arocha and Stephane Schraenen, from Venezuela and Belgium respectively, have installed a solo exhibition at Isabella Czarnowska's gallery near Berlin's Checkpoint Charlie, entitled 'What Now?'

David ULRICHS

Upon entering the first, often sun-drenched gallery space visitors see a shiny, geometric three-dimensional structure on the floor. While moving around it, scrutinizing it and trying to find out what it is, flashes of sunlight jump into our eyes, momentarily blinding us. The structure looks like three tumbled-down bookshelves stacked on top of each other, plated with mirrors. Indeed, the exhibition's text informs visitors that the work in question, 'Memory I' (2013) is modeled on a photograph of three contorted shelves lying on the streets of New York in the wake of Hurricane Sandy. The artists were in New York at the time and obviously this sculpture is a memory of the turmoil of the high winds that hit the artistic community in New York hard in the fall of 2012.

Indeed, everyday objects often provide a point of departure for much of their work, such as the mirror-covered chairs at their 2011-exhibition 'After'

at Centro de Arte de Caja de Burgos, Spain. The sculptural piece is supplemented in this room with specifically designed wallpaper. Hardly noticeable, the visitor sees the geometric white-on-white design only as he passes into the next room, turns back to re-examine the situation.

### FOLDING GLASS

In the second room, ten unfolded box cutouts made of glass lie stacked on top of each other upon a white plinth. In our mind we fold them, but in reality it is impossible. Bearing the title 'Box' (2013), the sculptural piece investigates the discrepancy between the power of the human imagination, which can envisage these specially shaped sheets of glass folded into boxes, and the reality of the situation, which is that glass cannot be folded. Two white low relief sculptures hang on the walls. Made completely in white, they show geometric plains tilted at different angles. Upon a closer look, or better even from a distance, the sloped plains are reminiscent of ceiling corners of a room. We look upwards (funny enough, the works themselves are entitled 'Up 1' and 'Up 2', both 2013) and compare the sculptures with what we see. They do not match, but we continue our exhibition visit with occasionally looking up to the ceiling.

Along the main wall that joins the second and third space hang in one straight line at eye-level eight monochromatic square small-scale paintings. 'Breath' (2013) is a work based on previously living animal material, like leather. Attracted by the soft natural colours we move from one square to the next and are led into the third room. As we turn around we see on the floor a replica of the first piece of sculpture we encountered. This one



Carla Arocha & Stéphane Schraenen, 'Memory I', 2013, steel and glass mirror, 135 x 300 x 165 cm, © courtesy Galerie Isabella Czarnowska, Berlin, foto Pieter Huybrechts

is entitled 'Memory II' (2013). It is non-reflective and coated in white. Of course it reminds the viewer of the first work of the exhibition, but we can never really be sure it is the same, since it was so difficult to determine the structure of 'Memory I' in one glance as the fact of the mirrored surface distracts and blinds the viewers' vision.

The last piece of the exhibition is found on the head wall in a separate and otherwise empty space, bathing it in an air of religiousness. It is entitled 'Framed' (2013) and is a silkscreen print on red plastic. Three triangularly shaped pieces of plastic are arranged so that it almost resembles the halo and shoulders of an icon of Our Lady. At Galerie Isabella Czarnowska, Arocha and Schraenen have managed to install a beautiful and varied exhibition giving visitors a good idea of what their work is about.

Carla Arocha & Stéphane Schraenen 'What Now?' until 30 November at Galerie Isabella Czarnowska, Rudi-Dutschke-Straße 26, Berlin, DE. Open Tue-Fri from 11 am-6 pm, Sat from 11 am-4 pm. [www.galerie-czarnowska.de/](http://www.galerie-czarnowska.de/)