COMMEDIA DELLA LUCE – SUSANNE ROTTENBACHER

For her new series *Commedia della Luce*, Susanne Rottenbacher has for the first time conceived abstract theatrical figures from light.

Whereas past works of the Berlin-based artist visualised ephemeral phenomena such as speech or dance, now the spectrum of characters from the Italian Commedia dell'arte of the 16th - 18th Century provide the impulse for new works which – another premiere – are spatial wall-pieces.
The *Masques et bouffons (comédie italienne) (1860)*, a large scale study of the figures of the Commedia dell'Arte by Maurice Sand, the son of George Sand, served as immediate inspiration for Susanne Rottenbacher.

The series *Commedia della Luce* starts with *Harlequino (2016, 115 x 105 x 50 cm)* – a hypnotically formulated composition of dynamic violet curves and energetic yellow lines of light: playful and powerful, and strong enough to make the entire space oscillate – just as the Harlequin brings a story to life, veering between good and evil, the comic and the tragic. The placing of the character amongst travelling people, jesters and acrobats, explains the curious effect of a coil spring that is always ready to bounce. Susanne Rottenbacher also created sculptural equivalents of the stylised characters of *Pantalone*, an elderly wealthy merchant, *Dottore, Zanni* and *Pierrot*. The latter is realised through artistic, dance-like curves that contrast the irregular and angular form language of the sculpture *Zanni*. The poetry and mobility of light in analogy to sound and dance-like choreography is characteristic for the artist's oeuvre.

Susanne Rottenbacher's artistic vision is informed by her fascination for contemporary dance and classical music – her many years of experience as a stage designer at, among others, the Deutsche Oper developed her exceptional ability to comprehend rooms of any calibre and to radically change or re-establish them with minimal shapes. To fill space with light instead of matter is a lasting interest of the artist. She always thinks in and with the space. Because her fascination for space marks the beginning of her preoccupation with light; and the urge to translate her own narratives into space and light lead her from stage design to art.

In Susanne Rottenbacher's works LED-light is inserted into transparent materials such as acrylic glass with technical virtuosity and embedded into the encountered architecture. Her sculptures evoke – often levitating in space – vibrant movements that go beyond the static form of the light fixtures.

In the composition, the viewer surmises the visualisation of the human field of vision, the flow of wind and water, rhythmic choreographies and our own movement within space: we, the viewers, attend a process of motion. The hypnotic and radiating effect of the new wall-based works includes their surroundings and reaches into the exterior space – the work and its field of reception is thus extended and dynamically reconstitutes itself afresh at different times of day.
To this end, the artist mixes the colours of the lights in a spectrum of modulations, and with the use reflective foils develops an eclectic multi-perspectivity.

Susanne Rottenbacher's work with light always oscillates between control and loss of control: the contingency of the synthetic materials, as well as of the magic that happens in the space – of the radiating effect of light and therefore the opening of the works. The emotion finds its antithesis in the meditative component of light, that for example is characteristic of the reduced colour field painting of Rothko – particularly the box format of Rottenbacher's earlier light works triggers associations with panel painting and iconography. Art historical associations range widely from Lucio Fontana's *Ambiente Spaziale* and Dan Flavin's iconic fluorescent tubes to Toulouse-Lautrec's sketches of Loie Fuller's *Dance of the Veils* at the Folies Bergere: which was one of the first presentations of electric light in the theatrical context. As

matter and energy, electrical light determines the state of the modern world, and since its invention at the beginning of the last century has fascinated artists as creative material. And so the fluorescent tube can aesthetically stand by itself as a minimal form or extensively unfold its mesmerising effect, which it also obtains in the *Commedia della Luce*.

Susanne Rottenbacher's new wall-pieces visualise physically and metaphysically emotional movements and sensitivities as well as the fundamental contextualisation of the *dramatis personae*.

Charismatic people are said to have a quality of radiance, an intangible motivation, talent or inspiration – it is this emanation that the artist describes in her new works. Cast in light, the stereotypical human qualities that the *Commedia dell'arte* employs become universal and timeless.

Commedia della Luce visualizes the subtlest of psychological forms and is in constant transformation ¬ ¬– none of the figures ever appear the same in different places. This enables every viewer on every occasion to see and conceive the sculptures anew and to create their own spatial narratives.

Susanne Rottenbacher's elaborate compositions unfold an intriguing and multilayered effect: they build stages and form protagonists for new realities and radically change our views towards the space we move in.

Susanne Rottenbacher (*1969, Göttingen) studied stage design at Barnard College of
Columbia University New York and finished Bartlett School of Architecture and Planning London with a Master of Science with the focus on lighting. She worked as a stage designer at the Deutsche Oper Berlin and as a lighting designer with 'Licht Kunst Licht': in this context she conceived, among others, the lighting design of the Federal Chancellery as well as other newly built government buildings. Since 2004 she works as a freelance lighting artist and -designer. She received numerous awards and scholarships, for example: 1st Prize, Kunst am Bau C.O.R. Düsseldorf (2013), IIDA Award of Merit, IESNA for the planning of the lighting design of the Marie-Elisabeth-Lüders-Haus, Bundestag, Berlin (2005), as well as the Josephine Paddock Fellowship at Columbia University New York (1991).

Among her exhibitions are: 'Der Flug der Königinnen. Women at work', ROMPONE kunstsalon, Köln (2016), 'The Difference between Sunrise and Sunset', Schloss Tüssling (2016), 'Unpainted LAB 3.0.', Kesselhalle München (2016), 'deLight', Galerie FeldbuschWiesner, Berlin (2016), 11m2 Projektraum, Berlin (2015, Solo), Galerie Teapot, Köln (2014, Solo), Art Dubai, Salsali Private Museum, Dubai (2014), 'Scheinwerfer, Lichtkunst in Deutschland im 21. Jahrhundert', Kunstmuseum Celle (2014), as well as The Prague Contemporary Art Festival, GASK gallery (2013).

Celina Basra