

*JAN ALBERS. cuttingEdgEs*

Under the programmatic title *cuttingEdgEs* the artist Jan Albers, who lives and works in Düsseldorf, has gathered a group of abstract-constructive works from 2018 and 2019 for exhibition in the Drawing Room in Hamburg. These works are variations on the theme of ridges/edges, and the intersection of sharp edges and wedges. Albers thoroughly explores his theme in such varied industrial materials as polystyrene, bronze, wood, cast aluminium, concrete, marble, and ceramic, thus demonstrating the breadth of his conceptual and technical abilities.

Jan Albers is a crossover artist working between the fields of painting and sculpture. In recent years he has torn down the boundaries of two-dimensional panel painting and brought it, bursting from the picture frame, into three-dimensional space. With his free approach to the traditional disciplines, Albers creates exciting hybrids which impressively balance between geometric, minimal, and biomorphic abstraction and conceptual art, and which add new terrain to the fields of both painting and sculpture.



The exhibition's central piece is *rAmpAge* (2019), from the series "chainsaw massacres". It is made from the materials polystyrene and wood, and composed in fine, spray-painted grey-tone transitions. Its surface topography is reminiscent of a rugged rocky landscape, or an ancient city wall in a state of decay. Through his violent interaction with the material, the artist physically inscribes himself into the towering, relief-like work: Albers used a chainsaw to slash lengthwise and crosswise cuts into the grid of polystyrene blocks in a destructively creative act, then further broke up their minimalist order by using acetone to partially dissolve the surfaces of the wedges thus created. In this way he very deliberately engenders imperfections and "scars" in the material which, however, are subsequently cancelled out or smoothed back over by the gently modulated, grisaille-like transitions of the spray paint.

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Thus, Albers' dynamic compositional disassemblies are “*actually a permanent construction site alternating between disruption/destruction, and repair*”, according to Stephan Berg (Director, Kunstmuseum Bonn).

The piece displayed in the entryway, *pegAsusAufgAzelle* (2012), can also be read as an allegory of the dichotomy between vandalism and beauty, which runs as a common theme through Albers' work. This work, made of bicycle frames hydraulically pressed almost beyond recognition, is a good example of Jan Albers' alchemical process of transformation, distortion, and remodelling.

In comparison, the current “chainsaw massacre” seems more structured than the earlier work of this series, as can be seen in the example of *rOttencandyIOve* (2013). Seen from a birds-eye perspective, its deep lengthwise and crosswise cuts are reminiscent of apocalyptic landscapes or ruined urban canyons. Again, the spray finish in soft pastel colours and the glossy acrylic glass cover are all that seem to keep the chaos slightly at bay.

In general, constructed reality is an important point of reference for Albers; he uses the photographs he takes of modern, often brutalist building architecture as a source of inspiration. This can also be seen in the raw and brittle aesthetic of the grey concrete work *breAkingbAdbAd* (2018), which has rebar protruding from its broken-off right corner.



The architectural connection also becomes clear in the marble piece *scarpastEpsstEps* (2019). Even the title refers to Venetian architect Carlo Scarpa (1906 – 1978), who created the masterpiece of poetic concrete architecture known as “Tomba Brion”, a tomb near Treviso which must have fascinated Albers with its sublime pointlessness. The sculpture by Albers – reminiscent of a mysterious Mayan staircase – incorporates a

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significant design characteristic of Scarpa's with its pyramidally climbing staircase fragments running in opposing directions; the conceptual rigour is broken, however, by the elegant, playful patterning of the marble.

References to Minimal and Conceptual Art of the 1960s and 1970s can also be found in the three wedge works made of bronze, aluminium, and wood. The reduced design vocabulary and serial arrangement of these works hint at the artist's preoccupation with these traditional art movements. Yet here, too, he partially breaks up the grid by leaving out individual rows, so that the eye perceives empty spaces – or sees those wedges that have been included as the



skeleton of a full relief piece. While the bronze work *bOwdOwndOwntOwn* (2019) and the aluminium object *LiLLustrE* (2018) imitate Minimal Art's cool aesthetic with their materiality, the light-coloured wood piece *UpcrOwndOwntOwn* (2019), produced as a variation on the bronze, radiates warmth. Its individual wedges, each with its own fine wood grain, are perfectly harmonized with each other. Very much in the spirit of Minimalism, this emphasizes the wood's own 'unique handwriting' – which can be read like a drawing – while the handwriting of the artist recedes.

The destructive and subversive element in Jan Albers' work also surfaces in his ceramic objects. This "Boys' gang" of wild youths arises from an anarchistic impetus of the artist. Albers vigorously threw lumps of clay onto a board, and with minimal intervention formed them into archaic-looking "faces". With stoic serenity these now seem to defy the recognition that destruction and violence are a part of everyday reality, and that no social system is without failings.

Translation: Sean Gallagher



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## VITA

The artist Jan Albers (b. 1971 in Wuppertal) currently lives in Düsseldorf, and studied at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf with Jan Dibbets from 1992 – 1998.

Among other awards, Albers received the 2006 Pollock-Krasner Foundation Award, and in 2007 the Kaiserring Stipendium der Stadt Goslar.

Jan Albers has had the following solo exhibitions, among others, in the past few years: Fox Jensen McCrory Gallery, Auckland (2019); VAN HORN, Düsseldorf and Fox Jensen, Sydney (2018); Kunsthalle Wilhelmshaven (2016); Kunstpalais Erlangen and Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal (2015); Leopold-Hoesch-Museum, Düren and Kunsthalle Gießen (2013), and Langen Foundation, Neuss (2012). Albers is currently represented in the group exhibition *Feelings – Kunst und Emotion* in the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich, and in December 2019 an installation of his will appear at the Sharjah Islamic Art Festival in the Sharjah Art Museum in the United Arab Emirates.

The Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen and the Kunstmuseum Bonn each purchased a work by Jan Albers for their collections in 2019.

### **JAN ALBERS. *cuttingEdgEs***

Opening: Wednesday, 20 November 2019, from 7 pm to 9 pm. The artist will be in attendance.

Duration: 21 November 2019 – 16 January / extended until 30 January 2020

Artist's talk with Dr. Brigitte Kölle, Director Collection of Contemporary Art, Hamburger Kunsthalle, and Christian Hupertz, collector, on 25 January 2020

For further information please e-mail: [contact@drawingroom-hamburg.de](mailto:contact@drawingroom-hamburg.de)

Opening hours: Tuesday to Thursday 12PM – 7PM and by appointment.