

DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present Grids, Vases, and Plant Beds, an exhibition of new work by Andrea Büttner, on view July 17 through August 28. The exhibition features several new bodies of work, including a group of hand-blown glass vases based on floral bulb forms; a series of photographs of former plant beds at the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site; a monumental painting installation housed in an aluminum structure; reverse glass paintings; and Karmel Dachau, a video about a convent of Carmelite nuns established on land that abuts the Dachau memorial.

Andrea Büttner uses different mediums, materials, and conceptual approaches to explore a range of inter-related themes. Her exhibitions are places where emotions and intellect are synthesized in highly visual, often tactile, works that are notable for their rich colors and formal directness. Projects born of historical research exist alongside those in which the presence of the artist's hand is the most prominent element.

In the exhibition, nine new glass vases combine several of these tendencies and are a notable addition to Büttner's overall project. Their forms recall Delftware and other vases designed to hold flowers grown from bulbs, such as tulips. They also respond to the organic shapes of flowers. Many feature globular protrusions; on three of the works, the protrusions function as feet. These elements are in turn reflective of Büttner's own watercolor sketches, as well as her long-standing interest in humble, natural things like potatoes, stones, and moss. The vessels rest in groups on wooden tables that further emphasize their connection to craft and interior design.

The glass works are also driven by Büttner's research into what has been called the "brown roots of the green movement": in Germany and elsewhere, the modern development of organic planting methods and back-to-the-land tendencies is inextricably linked with fascist political movements like Nazism, whose anti-Modernism was part of an overall vision of "traditional" life, nationalism, and racial purity. At the Dachau Concentration Camp, experiments were conducted in organic agriculture with the aim of establishing reliable

German sources of various crops and their derivatives. Prisoners were tasked with cultivating these plants; among them were *Gladiolus* bulbs, regarded as potential sources of vitamin C.

The large-scale photographs entitled Former plant beds from the plantation and “herb gardens,” used by the Nazis for biodynamic agricultural research, at the Dachau Concentration Camp provide visual documentation of the remnants of these practices. Aside from their historical import, Büttner’s images are abstract compositions in which grid-like forms (the decaying plant bed structures) rest on quasi-monochromatic backgrounds of grass and earth. Reflection upon the role played by grids as organizing structures, especially in modernist aesthetics, is another prevailing theme in this exhibition.

“Grids,” a 1979 essay by Rosalind Krauss, explores the compensatory use of the grid in modernist art. Krauss observes that “now we find it indescribably embarrassing to mention *art* and *spirit* in the same sentence. The peculiar power of the grid... arises from its power to preside over this shame: to mask and to reveal it at the same time.” In a related fashion, Büttner takes up the grid as a form in which the problems and potential of modernism are constellated, and through which abstract art enables the willful forgetting of criminal acts. She juxtaposes the ad hoc grids of the Dachau plantation with an installation-based work in which nine oil paintings on canvas—each of which features an open rectangle painted in a single color, flush to its edges—have been set into an aluminum frame constructed in front of one of the gallery’s walls. Behind it, covering the wall itself, is a large painted grid. The architectural scale of this work is derived in part from Büttner’s ongoing engagement with the history of painting ceilings, frescoes, and other room-wrapping interventions, and represents the latest example of her interest in altering white-box spaces through the introduction of color and pattern. In this case, the installation recalls a contemporary cassette ceiling turned on its side. The canvases it holds, meanwhile, evoke twentieth-century experiments in color and geometry produced by modernist artists like Joseph Albers. Seen alongside the reverse glass paintings that also appear in the show, as well as

the plant bed photographs, the installation works to reverse the tendency of abstract art to obscure historical narrative. Büttner allows the grid to mirror the layout of the Dachau plantation; in so doing, she also calls attention to the questionable politics and supposed moral superiority of an organic “lifestyle” that often goes unquestioned in contemporary life.

Karmel Dachau, a video first produced for the Documentation Center for the History of National Socialism in Munich—and the most recent in a series of videos about nuns Büttner has made since 2007—documents a Carmelite convent established on land that abuts the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial. While carefully, and even lovingly, showing the midcentury modernist buildings and pastoral grounds that the nuns inhabit, Büttner records their stories of joining the order, relating to the horrors of the Holocaust, and living their religious calling. Granted a high degree of access to the intimate spaces and thoughts of the nuns, and allowing the nuns themselves to film those spaces where access is restricted, Büttner creates a group portrait in which devotion, suffering, cultural appropriation, and the tragic sublime reveal individual as well as collective effects.

Andrea Büttner (b. 1972, Stuttgart, Germany) was shortlisted for the Turner Prize in 2017. She has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions at institutions worldwide, including Bergen Kunsthall, Norway (2018); Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2017); Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen, Switzerland (2017); Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2016); Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2015); Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany (2014); Tate Britain, London (2014); Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff Centre, Canada (2014); National Museum Cardiff, Wales (2014); Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin (2014); and MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt, Germany (2013). Group exhibitions include Affective Affinities, 33rd Bienal de São Paulo (2019); dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel, Germany and Kabul, Afghanistan (2012); and 29th Bienal de São Paulo (2010). Her work is in the permanent collections of museums including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Reina Sofia, Madrid; and Tate, London. Büttner is also the author of several books, including the recently released Shame (König Books, 2020). Büttner lives and works in Berlin.

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