



That's Field Research

Peter Pakesch, September 2019

UNTITLED (ZZZ) is a 2015 work made of pressed quartz sand, comprising two columns in the exhibition space that primarily invoke a play on geometrical shapes while also recalling formalist sculpture. With respect to Angelika Loderer's oeuvre as a whole this points in the wrong direction, but works such as this nonetheless occupy an important place in her body of work, since they represent something entirely different from what a cursory glance would suggest. One of the first things we notice is the coloration, which is owed to the material, namely quartz sand of the kind used in casting sculpture. This sand has specific properties that make it possible to construct spatial objects without losing its shape, something that makes it an indispensable material for the casting process. This material has been reinterpreted by Loderer in that she casts the sand, as it were, which thereby changes its role to become not the mold, but the form. In so doing she displays the sand in all its fragility and in stark contrast to traditional cast objects made of materials like bronze, iron, or aluminum, which seem eternally solid and stable. With this reinterpretation, the artist exposes the paradoxes of materials and highlights inherent contradictions that significantly help to define her work.

Angelika Loderer grew up with form. As the daughter of a foundryman, she was exposed from an early age to how things take shape and grew up with the craft that so strongly defines her work. Even though she did not inevitably associate the craft with art at the beginning and only came to art after some considerable time, the craft does seem to have influenced her very deeply. Casting is an ancient technique for creating volume and producing objects. It differs from other sculptural techniques: molding with clay and other soft materials, carving wood, or working stone. All these techniques have different connotations in the process from the positive shape to the negative, from the additive to inverse creation.

One might think that reflections of this kind had become irrelevant to modern artistic practice in the age of 3D printing and virtual worlds—but one would be wrong. Personalities like Bruce Nauman and Rachel Whiteread were quick off the mark to start exploring these negative spaces. Their casts and constructions based on such considerations show that many questions about studying space remain unanswered—to say nothing of the semantic questions of context that are similarly always in play.

It is a kind of knowledge that is almost unconsciously inherent in Loderer's works; emerging in a wide variety of different places, it allows for a specific self-image that gives rise to additional, different questions beyond the issue of whether to use a plinth, including the question of inverse spaces. Her basic training, solidly rooted in artisanry, occasionally also allows her the luxury of a certain naiveté, which can be traced in a highly variable relationship to the cast; it often allows materials to appear in places for which they were not originally destined, as we have seen above. At the same time, process, structure, and narrative are cast into *disarray* in what is an occasionally outlandish relationship. This outlandishness can become downright eerie: seemingly familiar, but also pretty subversive.

The intensive penetration of the material we encounter in Loderer's work is rare. Typically materials are used additively, while casts are interpolated into works of contemporary art as though they were quotations. Loderer's assemblage of methods and materials stems from a different practice, one that is espoused by an artist who has repeatedly thought about what can be cast and what is necessary for casting; what remains and what vanishes; what persists "forever" and what is ephemeral, of brief duration. All these things are contradictions inscribed in this process in particular and in art in general.

Her perception addresses everything and everyone. Just as she rubs processes against the grain in creating her art, so she seeks her subjects in a variety of different places, conducting research that is contingent on the method: curiosity guided by action and *techné*.¹ Not only does she address the materials that are used (and potentially misused) for the work, and that change from auxiliary substances to the intrinsic subject, but in a wider context she also focuses on the objects that are to be transformed, illustrated, and depicted in the cast, or the spaces and hollows that only become objects via the process of being "captured." This gives rise to various dimensions of field research that discovers the unexpected. The materiality of an underground mole tunnel (*Pouring holes, An attempt to be visibly absent, 2012*) or the attempt to create a cast of water (*Poems to Gadgets, 2018*) represent extreme examples of this research. Its results are forms of special quality that allow us to gaze deeply into the genesis and polymorphism of natural shapes.

What is remarkable is the extent to which Loderer is capable of touching upon very different aspects of sculptural practice, then reformulating and addressing them in her work. Her methods are unconventional in the best sense and in the best tradition; her results are intriguing and enlightening.

1 *Techné* —τέχνη (téchnē)—is an ancient Greek term that has remained significant in European-influenced philosophy to this day for understanding art, science, and technology.