Ursula Döbereiner in a Conversation with Oliver Koerner von Gustorf

Why is the work titled silber004?

It's the fourth work I've done with silver foil.

How did you begin working on this series?

I took a series of photographs of the storefront windows on Kottbusser Damm, which is very close to my studio in Kreuzberg. I like these stores—the way they arrange things in their windows; the typography of the store signs and the great names they have, like *Remnants from London* or *Star*. And the word *Royal* turns up quite a bit. I love the manufactured stickers and cardboard signs reading *SALE* or *REDUCED*. The stores convey a surrogate character that appeals to me. This industry is incredibly modern and fast. Almost immediately after something appears in a glossy magazine, a Miu-Miu handbag or a Versace scarf for instance, a version of it turns up in these stores. It's not the originals that set the trends on the streets of Neukölln, Riga, or Bangkok, but the surrogates. Conversely, designers at the big brands also keep a close eye on the bargain trends and copy them. This is what gives the storefront windows on Kottbusser Damm their unique and modern look.

The photographs became the departure point for the collages.

Yes. I've amassed an entire arsenal of photographs of these storefront windows. And I often discover things in the photos that I didn't notice in the original situation. It's a completely normal mechanism of perception not to absorb everything at once. You focus on something specific and ignore the "background noise," for the most part subconsciously. You look at a dress, for instance, and fail to see the amazing pattern that arises from the superimposition of a fabric pattern and the reflection of the cobblestones in the window. I became fascinated studying the things I would otherwise normally ignore. At first, I began drawing the spots of light that appear on the storefront windows, but then I quickly noticed that tracing them was far too realistic. I wasn't interested in representing a particular spot, but rather a phenomenon. I wanted to convert the fleeting impression of reflected light by using drawing in a more structural or general way. And so I entered the word "spot" into the Google image search and began drawing all kinds of spots from the Internet.

What is it about these forms that interest you?

A spot is something that is relatively uncontrolled. It usually happens by chance. You spill something, and then you have this shape. On the other hand, drawing a spot is almost the complete opposite. There's no chance involved; the shape is defined and constructed.

In the paintings of Art Informel or Abstract Expressionism—particularly Pollock's drip paintings—the spilling and splashing of paint were implemented as an expressive gesture, as an affect.

What I do is pretty much the antithesis of this. On the one hand, there's the complete lack of control that gives rise to the spot; contrasting with this is the drawing that reconstructs the image in a controlled and painstakingly precise way. *silber004* contains a strong reference to painting, but not in terms of these spots; the reference lies in the process. In the paintings that interest me, the material always plays a key role. The process is kept transparent; it always remains clear why a particular material is used in a particular area. This tells us about the way in which decisions are made. This approach is also reflected in my exhibition, in which I have pre-determined that the DIN A4 formats are to be hung in a particular grid and the DIN A3 formats in another. The individual pieces can then be arranged freely within these parameters. They are not hung intuitively on site, but are subordinated to this grid; I prefer these things to be decided beforehand—to define a method and then to enjoy the freedom that exists within the strictures of this method. Another pre-determined decision is to work as economically as possible with all the materials I use, including the remnants left over from cutting. In this sense, the refuse arising out of the work becomes a part of it, so to speak.

At the same time, silber004 *is an installation that reflects the experience of urban space.*

The visual appearance of my work is measured by the things I see on the street and by how I respond to them. For me, my work is not only measured against art history or the works of other artists. It also enters into a relationship with the surface of a car, with the reflection in a pane of glass, or with a mass-produced product. My work is always about space—public and private space. It's about how we live, how we set things up—if you make do with a given situation or if you change it, for instance. It's about the fact that architecture not only represents social conditions, but also creates them. In addition to this, I am always keenly interested in formal decisions—both in my own work and in the things that I see. The content often conveys itself to me through the formal decisions, which is to say through the way in which something is made. And architecture is always staged and idealized—it is an image of itself, actually. And then there are spaces that invite the projection of desire in a very particular way. I find it interesting how forms express something about the way we want to live.

You've begun over the past few years to combine drawing and collage and to incorporate reflective foil in your work. What led to this decision?

It all goes back to a work I made in 2006 about the Linderhof Palace of Ludwig II of Bavaria. I was interested in his vision of constructing an artificial world and in how he had this artificial world built as real-life architecture—in order to escape from the outside world. One means of translating this flight from reality into architecture were the mirrored halls of the palace. Nowadays, creating your own artificial world has become a much more democratic affair—you can do it on your own computer. I took Ludwig's existing phantasm as a model for my computer drawings. But I didn't merely draw the architectural elements from Linderhof in a realistic manner; instead, I took this principle of the dissolution of spatial boundaries that was implemented in the mirrored halls and translated it into drawing. I was also interested in transferring this virtual portrayal back into real architecture, which is why I

wallpapered the drawings as plotted computer images from floor to ceiling in an exhibition space—to allow the viewer to move within it. Actually, what I'm doing with the storefront windows is very similar. In any case, it was the reflections that excited me. And while I was doing the recent collage works, I thought, okay, I can take this literally and actually use reflective foil and not merely draw this mirroring effect, but use it directly. In a way, the reflective foil recalls the mirror mazes in amusement parks. I really like it when things come from a banal world.

You work with deliberately "cheap" materials. What is it that you like about neon colors, copy paper, and thermal foil?

The fact that the material is cheap is agreeable to me, but not essential. What is important is that it has something ordinary, unsophisticated, everyday about it. Copy paper can be found in every household.

The colors have something extreme about them—the neon yellow, pink, and bright red.

But in certain contexts these colors are highly functional. The bright red is a color used in street building or on construction sites to mark something, for instance when a screw has to be inserted somewhere or a board is missing. I'm interested in precisely this relationship between the subjective perception of a material and the function it fulfills in certain economic and social contexts. The dresses in the storefront windows along Kottbusser Damm often have great patterns, simply because they have to be sewn as economically as possible. They're not allowed to cost very much, and so entirely pragmatic decisions have to be made. To simplify the patterns of these mass products, the arms are sewn on in a particular spot. And that often looks really, really good—because the decision is so clear.