

# frieze<sup>d/e</sup>

## Bettina Allamoda

Erfurt, Germany

Kunsthaus Erfurt



Bettina Allamoda, *Pazuzu*, 2010, 3D pop-up relief, digital archive print on corrugated cardboard, 70 × 100 × 7 cm

In 2004, whilst watching William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973) on a tour of duty in northern Iraq, US Army captain Nik Guran realized that the opening sequence of the film was shot in the very same ruins where he was stationed. He came up with the idea of constructing an Exorcist theme park called 'The Exorcist Experience' near the ancient Sun Temple ruins of Hatra close to Mosul. This proposal won funding from the Pentagon and garnered praise and support from Friedkin himself.

This story, which Bettina Allamoda used as the basis for a 2008 show in Berlin, gets the redux treatment for the artist's exhibition *No Go – The Exorcist Revisited / Brick Security*. The alternative title *Brick Security* refers to the name of a multi-national force that guarded the ancient archaeological sites during the Iraq war, reinforcing the strong bond between archeology and power. The layering of material, as well as the artist's decision to delve into her own exhibition archaeology, exposes the hidden meanings Allamoda is teasing out.

*Gerüst Mix* (2010) shows steel barricades and female cage dancers in nightclubs. Inevitably barricades recall borders and control; in the same manner pink and glitter point to boorish stereotypes of femininity. The way the artist assembles images and fabrics, such as in the colourful series of collages including *Sahara* (2013), *Los Angeles* (2013) and *Matamba* (2013) – which shows a photograph of phallus-shaped archeological ruins embellished with a piece of fuchsia fabric – is reminiscent of fashion style boards; the artist seems to delight in the manipulation of anachronistic tropes and clichés.

Allamoda's work contains further details and surprises. In the 3D paper pop-up, *Exorcist/Hatra* (2010) which shows the levitation scene from *The Exorcist*, there is someone hidden behind the door about to enter the room – Guran, himself, perhaps?

As has been noted by Jörg Heiser in his review of her 2008 show, tension may be considered one of the key aspects of Allamoda's works. The tension between opposite dualities, the force occurring as a result of pulling and pushing, stretching and twisting – both context and material – is a game for the artist. Consider the galvanized steel pipe wrapped in shimmering bluish polyester material in *Hammerblow #2* (2013), which summons up overly-sexualized notions of masculinity and femininity to the point of caricature. The fabric becomes rigid through the act of stretching. Conversely *Truppenbetreuung* (2010) and *Truppenbetreuung #2* (2011) fashion another traction with the draping of spandex and PVC glitter nets.

Despite a rather unappealing use of the gallery space, Allamoda's works are vigorous and uncanny. The artist takes the archeology of a story, and her own work, and digs out typical phallic notions and colonialist connotations: female-male; East-West. But Allamoda's sharp and playful critique should not be taken with a pinch of salt. Instead of deducing, Allamoda dismantles ideas, bodies and lands. Just as armies and governments have done before her.

—by Göksu Kunak