



Title

Bettina Pousttchi

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About the author(s)

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Cover image:

Bettina Pousttchi

by Bill Roberts • 06.02.2020

In her adoptive city of Berlin, the Mainz-born artist Bettina Pousttchi is best known for a photographic mural that covered the exterior of the city's short-lived Temporäre Kunsthalle with 970 digitally manipulated, poster-sized prints for six months in 2009–10. Together, these formed a black-and-white image of Heinz Graffunder's Palace of the Republic, the former East German parliament building that had recently been demolished to make way for the reconstruction of the eighteenth-century Berlin Palace. Covering all four storeys of the host building – then facing its own imminent demolition – *Echo Berlin* (2009–10) denied the promise of renewal commonly associated with digital facsimiles used to screen the scaffolding of prominent buildings under renovation. Instead, it acted as both a shroud over the Kunsthalle and a memorial to a larger social and architectural history undergoing seemingly endless erasure in the German capital.

A decade later, Pousttchi's concurrent exhibitions at the Berlinische Galerie and KINDL Centre for Contemporary Art - appear as if in commemoration of *Echo Berlin* itself. At the former venue, *Bettina Pousttchi: In Recent Years* gathers (mostly steel) sculptures produced since 2018 alongside *World Time Clock* (2008–2016), a series of large-scale black-and-white photographs of public clocks, and *Berlin Window* (2019), an intricate decal lattice that adorns the glass façade of the museum. The exhibition at KINDL is a photographic installation on an architectural scale, and the latest in a run of site-specific projects in the twenty-metre-high former boiler house of the ex-brewery. Titled *Panorama*, Pousttchi's intervention takes a photograph of the sunlit view through the single fenestrated wall of the Kesselhaus and reproduces it, with subtle reversals and lateral shifts of perspective, across a series of eight floor-to-ceiling textile banners that hang around the remaining three sides of the interior **FIG.1**. In this way, *Panorama* imagines this industrial space as something altogether brighter and less forbidding – a whimsical nod, perhaps, to the wider reinvention of the former industrial site **FIG.2**.



Fig. 1 Installation view of *Panorama*, by Bettina Pousttchi. 2019. (Kesselhaus, KINDL – Centre for Contemporary Art, Berlin; photograph Jens Ziehe).

Pousttchi's interests centre on the built environment as an index of political and social dynamics. Through succinct and ambitious gestures, which often engage with histories of modernist sculpture, architecture and Minimalism, she explores the apparatus of control in public space as well as broader tensions between the global and the local. She frequently turns to the overlooked details of urban spaces for hints of larger forces at work, notably the processes of cultural homogenisation and hybridisation. These last concerns are evidenced in characteristically oblique fashion at the Berlinische Galerie by *Berlin Window* FIG.3 and by the glazed-clay *Framework* (2019), a lone wall-mounted ceramic FIG.4. In these works Pousttchi has manipulated forms derived from her photographs of German 'Fachwerkhäuser' (half-timbered buildings), abstracting and repeating fragments of their façades to create designs that suggest the repetitive intricacies of Islamic decoration. From one perspective, both works may be seen to invoke the utopianism of historical abstraction in order to imagine a form of patternmaking for a post-ethnic future.

By contrast, the twenty-four images of *World Time Clock* appear at first as a tribute to global cultural diversity FIG.5. Depicting the faces of public clocks in cities in twenty-four time zones, always at 1:55 (in the afternoon), each digitally manipulated photograph seems to reveal its own cultural specificity, although only a handful – the Thai numerals of *Bangkok Time* (2011) and the Art Deco stylings of *Los Angeles Time* (2011) – make this plainly legible to the casual observer. Back on view in Berlin, however – and for the first time in its completed form – *World Time Clock* invokes the

World Clock at Alexander-platz, a much-loved relic of an earlier global imaginary prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, before the entire world finally emerged to march in unison with the rhythms of capital. Complementing *Echo Berlin's* ambivalent 'Ostalgie' (nostalgia for aspects of East German life) *World Time Clock* thereby draws an implicit parallel between the fractured geopolitical fault line of an earlier Berlin and the tensions of our global synchronicity.

Berlin itself, nevertheless, emerges as a somewhat furtive muse across the two exhibitions, in line with Pousttchi's competing impulses towards universal and particular frames of reference. A group of seven sculptures with given names after the city's streets (*Käthe, Marie, Lotte, Arnold* etc.), composed of powder-coated stainless-steel tree protection barriers in two shades of green, are twisted and entangled in organic and delicate configurations, radically defamiliarising these utilitarian objects with a remarkable economy of means. These are complemented by two violently enmeshed bicycle rack sculptures [FIG.6](#) made from polished stainless steel, and a dancing ensemble of deftly anthropomorphised street bollards. All three sculptural groups are preceded at the Berlinische Galerie by a series of five towering works titled *A1* to *A5* (2019) made from crash barriers in grey, maroon and brilliant cadmium red [FIG.7](#). Similarly kinked, crimped and folded in literal as much as formal balance, they vacillate uneasily – and hence all the more intriguingly – between a sense of grace and poise, on the one hand, and a vestigial sense of struggle and violence, on the other.



Fig. 2 Installation view of *Panorama*, by Bettina Pousttchi. 2019. (Kesselhaus, KINDL – Centre for Contemporary Art, Berlin; photograph Jens Ziehe).

This kind of fine-tuned equivocation is central to Pousttchi's approach. For all her work's forensic attention to the shifting fabrics of cities, and her own erudition in the fields of architecture and critical urbanism, she handles her themes allusively, all the more effectively to provoke and sustain a multiplicity of impressions and possible readings for the viewer. This quality, which consistently emerges across the two Berlin shows, is what finally underpins the twin facets of her sculptural and photographic inquiry, as it evokes the complexities and contradictions – and, especially, the attendant anxieties – of our urban age.



Fig. 3 Installation view of *Berlin Window*, by Bettina Pousttchi. 2019. (Berlinische Galerie, Berlin; photograph Jens Ziehe).

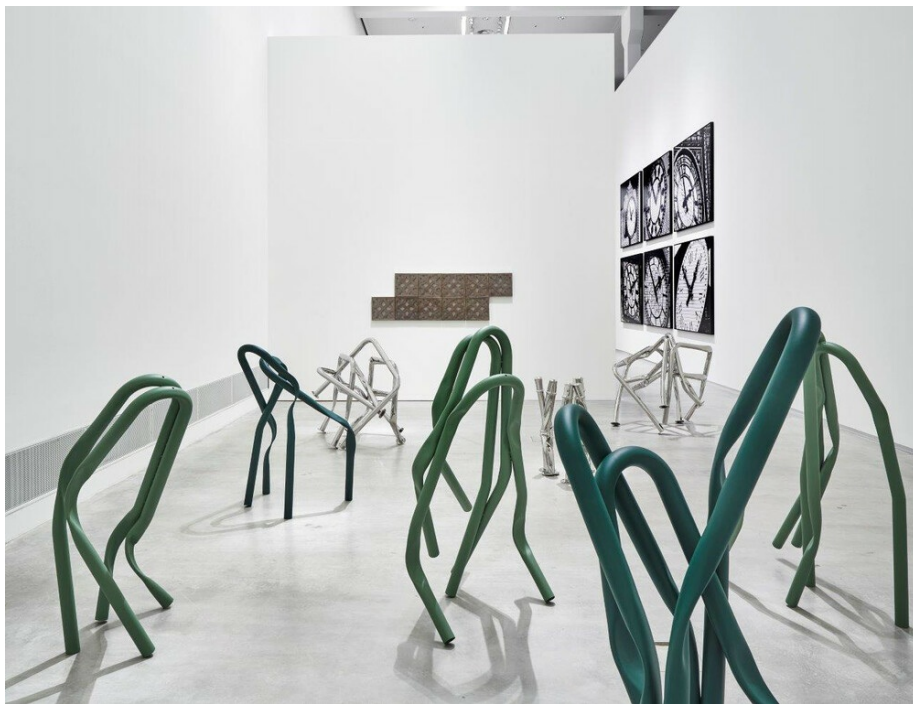


Fig. 4 Installation view of Bettina Pousttchi: 'In Recent Years', at the Berlinische Galerie, Berlin. 2019. (Photograph Norbert Miguletz).



Fig. 5 Installation view of *World Time Clock*, by Bettina Pousttchi. 2008–16. (Berlinische Galerie, Berlin; photograph Norbert Miguletz).



Fig. 6 *Felix*, by Bettina Pousttchi. 2018. Bike racks and polished stainless steel, 108 by 115 by 140 cm. (Courtesy Buchmann Galerie and the artist; photograph Roman März).



Fig. 7 A3, by Bettina Pousttchi. 2019. Crash barriers, powder-coated steel, 221 by 204 by 94 cm. (Courtesy Buchmann Galerie and the artist; photograph Michael Schultze).

Exhibition details

Bettina Pousttchi: In Recent Years

Berlinische Galerie, Berlin

12th September 2019–6th April 2020

Bettina Pousttchi: Panorama

KINDL – Centre for Contemporary Art,
Berlin

1st September 2019–10th May 2020

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