

Berta Fischer

Galerie Karin Guenther, Hamburg



KARIN GUENTHER

Galerie Admiralitätsstraße 71 20459 Hamburg Fon +49 40 37503450 info@galerie-karin-guenther.de www.galerie-karin-guenther.de



Berta Fischer
Untitled, 2019
Acrylic glass, 105 x 63 x 30 cm



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Berta Fischer
Untitled, 2018
Acrylic glass, 65 x 45 x 33 cm



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Berta Fischer
Untitled, 2018
Acrylic glass, 45 x 44 x 34 cm



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Berta Fischer
Installation view
SCAT, Museum of Art, Savannah, USA



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Berta Fischer
Untitled, 2016
Acryl glass, 260 x 230 x 116 cm



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Berta Fischer
Untitled, 2016
Acryl glass, 260 x 230 x 116 cm



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Berta Fischer
Dywanox, 2013
Acrylic glass, 256 x 125 x 120 cm



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Berta Fischer
Untitled, 2015
Acrylic glass, 150 x 110 x 35 cm



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Berta Fischer
Installation view
Galerie Karin Guenther, Hamburg 2015



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Berta Fischer
Untitled, 2015
Acrylic glass, 130 x 110 x 36 cm



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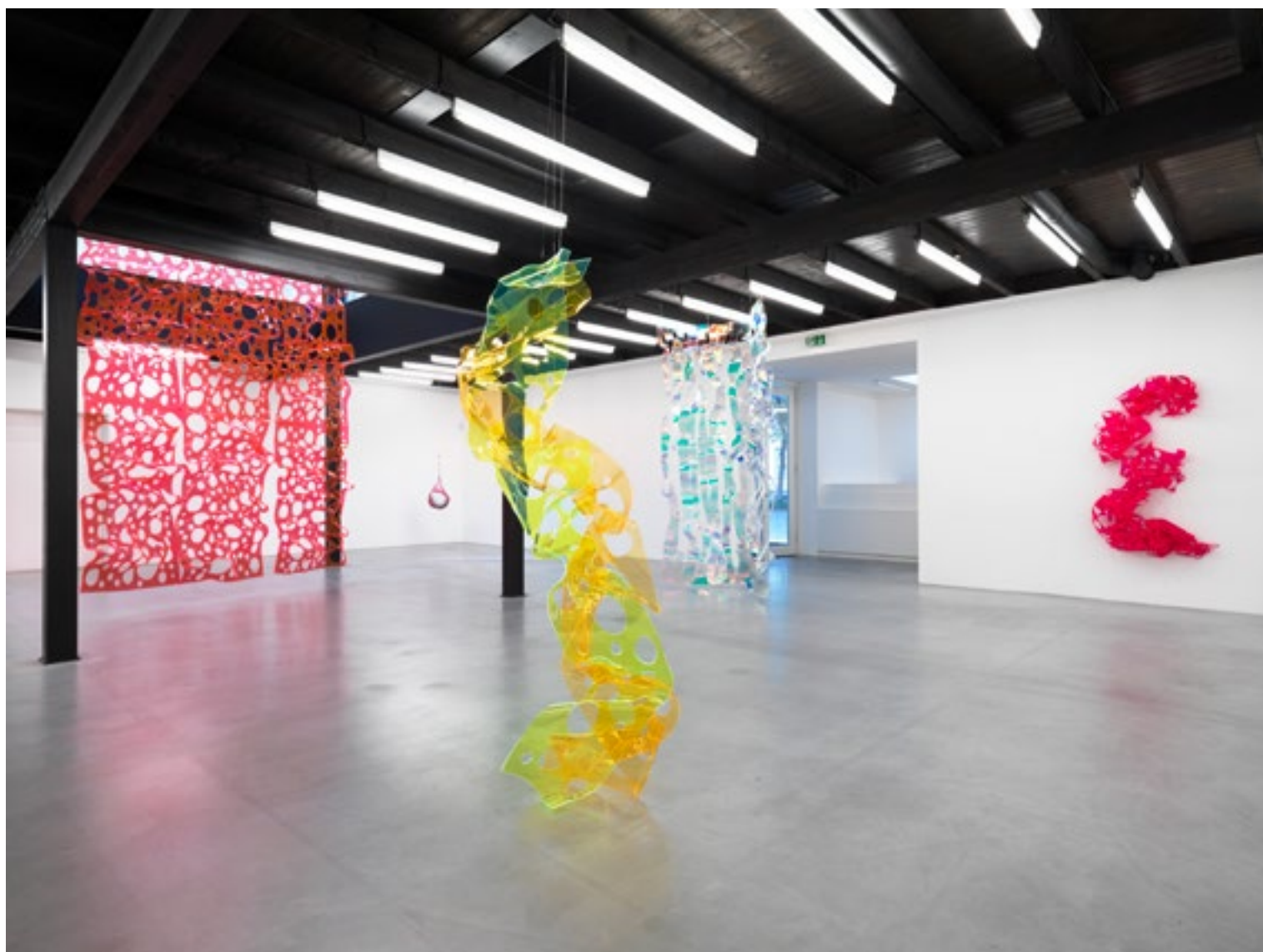


Berta Fischer
Untitled, 2014
Acryl glass, 190 x 172 x 67 cm



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Berta Fischer
Installation view
Kunstverein Oldenburg, 2013



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Berta Fischer
Installation view
Kunstverein Oldenburg, 2013



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Berta Fischer
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Berta Fischer
Installation view
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Berta Fischer
Installation view
Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin 2013



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Berta Fischer
Sora, 2012
Acryl glass, 260 x 200 x 45 cm



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Berta Fischer
Elepo, 2012
Acryl glass satinized, 130 x 125 x 40 cm



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Berta Fischer
Sawap, 2012
Acryl glass satinized, 115 x 105 x 95 cm



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Berta Fischer
Zoniri, 2012
Acryl glass, 200 x 2,5 x 2,5 cm



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Berta Fischer
Hadin, 2012
Acryl glass, 75 x 70 x 55 cm



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Berta Fischer
Installation view
Galerie Karin Guenther, Hamburg 2012



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Berta Fischer
Awan, 2012
Acryl glass, acryl glue, 75 x 45 x 50 cm



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Berta Fischer
Zomni, 2012
Acryl glass, 80 x 75 x 55 cm



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Folds in Plastic

Andreas Schlaegel

How do folds come into these works of art? Let's start with a little digression, to the very beginnings of modernity and the folds in the robes of the figures in the paintings of Giotto.¹ In these folds Giorgio Vasari recognized, as early as the sixteenth century, a radical departure away from the then dominant Byzantine aesthetic canon and its extreme formalism that pre-defined every detail, including the folds in depicted garments. As Vasari describes, Giotto did not follow doctrines, but painted after nature. This can still be observed today, in the works attributed to the painter, in the emotions his figures show, the mundane weight of depicted objects and the rendering of space.

However, what makes Giotto's work particularly interesting today is not its naturalism. Especially when directly compared to the work of his contemporaries, one can trace within them the manifestation of a true individual artist, daring to articulate his own unique and subjective perspective on the world. Even on small scale: for in fact, the less important a detail was, the more the artist enjoyed the freedom of interpretation it granted him. The negligible folds in the robes thus gave the artist room not only to create dramatic representations, but also to display his craftsmanship and painterly virtuosity, as a form of uninhibited, even playful artistic expression. Here one can draw a parallel with Berta Fischer's work, even if she refuses to subscribe to familiar notions of virtuosity and craftsmanship and requires no mythical personnel. In weaving her repertoire of folds, twists, curls, spirals and pirouettes into space, she relies on the power of her imagination—and a workshop specializing in processing plastics.

"Maybe one can find this affectation to make oneself at home 'in between' two arts, in between painting and sculpture, in between sculpture and architecture, in the modern art informel, to reach a unity of the arts this way, as a 'performance,' and to include the viewer in this performance."²

The term "performance" probably goes too far in describing the involvement asked of the viewer in exploring Fischer's sculptures. And yet, addressing the space between the classic disciplines of the visual arts, as well as the idea of art informel (and its preference for the grand gesture) does make sense regarding her work. Because, as abstract structures, these works animate the space surrounding them and react to the architectural properties of the exhibition space, as for example, when the artist forms her sculptures to be presented inside right-angled corners, where they sit snugly, albeit with the immediate physical presence of a minor explosion.

The multiple and expansive forms of her works are thus cut out of a surface and bent and folded into space, coquettishly circumnavigating an almost always empty center. The deconstruction of the originally flat sheet is condensed into the third dimension in a consciously impulsive artistic action. This action can be construed as an anarchic variation on the ancient Japanese art of origami, where a plain piece of paper is converted, through a succession of precise foldings, into a highly specific form, a crane or a flower. In contrast to such formal rigor, the forms of Fischer's sculptures appear nearly haphazard, as if there was no premeditation on the part of the artist at all, and her crumpling of the plane was merely a

demonstration that the most simple transformation from one dimension to the next produces the most complex form. However, only the most superficial viewer would characterize her sculptures as devoid of form. On close inspection, the sculptures reveal themselves to be carefully composed, full of drama, not only jutting into space, but sculpting and animating it.

Even if the artist also turns to other materials, the apparent wealth of her formal vocabulary is due to the characteristic qualities of her preferred Perspex. Apart from its transparency, which means it can never exude the symbolic weight of cast bronze or marble, one of its main characteristics is its striking surface quality. The industrial, mass-produced, standardized sheets the artist uses come in flawless, glossy and reflective or lightly structured surfaces and are available in a broad range of colors, including the artist's preferred palette of Day-Glo and neon, making it a perfect material for interior decoration and advertising signs.

In her sculptures, the cut edges of the Perspex sheets concentrate incident light, creating glowing lines that shine through even the overlapping areas of the sculptures. Already highly intricate spatial structures, these glowing lines make them even more intriguing visually, even magical, as well as more complicated: as drawings radiating inside the sculpture, they cut through and thereby subvert their complex sculptural outer form.

Maybe even more important for the artist is a quality of Perspex not usually associated with the tough and hard material: the fact it can be transformed under heat. This quality allows Fischer to design her works directly and intuitively.

She prepares the sheets in her studio, has them cut out following detailed plans, occasionally preparing additional illustrative models on the way. Upon arrival at the plastic workshop, she moves on to the production of the actual works. Here the pieces are

heated and brought into shape, in a process that takes only a few minutes. The artist acts as conductor and composer at the same time, precisely instructing a group of assistants in how exactly to achieve the desired form. The dynamics of this process remain conceivable in the sculptures and their seemingly chaotic forms, since the heated material is easily manipulated but also precarious in terms of its consistency. Once formed, it has to be supported while cooling so it does not collapse under its own weight. Once hardened, however, it can support itself and display its own dynamics, in dialogue with the viewer and the surrounding space, remaining visible through the sculpture.

For her approach to transparent sculpture, Berta Fischer returns to ideas from artists of the group Abstraction-Création³, in particular the kinetically inspired celluloid works of Naum Gabo, the twisted sculptures of his brother Antoine Pevsner, and the late Perspex works of Georges Vantongerloo⁴ serve as art-historical points of reference. The interest of these artists in transparent materials reflects a new understanding of sculpture that is less invested in negotiating classical notions of sculptural volume, but sees it as a way to render spatial potential, not only on a formal, but also on a symbolical level.

Berta Fischer's interest in transparency can be regarded in extension of this position, placing emphasis on dynamics and levity, the reduction of mass to an absolute minimum and the sculptural potential of the surface. Transparency constitutes a motif in itself in her work, from the early sheets of spray-painted polythene sheets hung from the ceiling, to her latest work that explores new materials and their properties, such as intertwined colored plastic nets, cotton, and latex. The individual character of the works is accentuated not only by means of form, but also by material and the works' titles or names that are invented by the artist.



Still, her works provide a sense of continuity by requiring neither plinth nor frame, and, with their bold colors, reach out into space and the reality of the viewer. They always emerge from a flat surface, even as a massive stack of red cut-outs around a metal core. Or in an ensemble of small, round and rather plumpish rubber latex cushions, filled with white cotton, popping out of holes. These give the artist's ideas on surface, transparency and content an abysmal, chapped and humorous twist. As constructions of thin rubber latex skin, they animate space in a different way and with a renewed sense of energy. Just like naughty children would, they defy the cool, elegant, even slick appearance and the space-invading dynamics of their shimmering Perspex predecessors, countering them with their own cumbrous, corpulent and porous presence. While the Perspex pieces appear to render a moment of transformation frozen in time, for example, an explosion, the latex cushions generate a sense of suspense, not by presenting an image of bursting or slackening, but by inspiring the viewer to associate the possibility of transformation or disintegration.

By having her works reveal their inner selves, virtually through their holes, and present themselves merely as stuffed hulls, Berta Fischer takes her motif of transparency to a new level. Beyond the interplay of closed and open form, she introduces, in a nearly conspiratorial way, a notion of the corporeal—and transience, but does so with the ease so characteristic of her work.

It is like the fold in the robe. It is there for a moment—but with the next movement it is gone.

mainly focused on geometrical and abstract art and were forerunners of an idea of abstract art as a world language of the arts, a notion that gained popularity in Germany only after WWII.

4 The late works of Georges Vantongerloo, such as his *Cocoon*, *chrysalide, embryonnaire* (1950), a transparent stick of Perspex bent into a loose-knit coil, refer not only to geometry as such, but also explicitly to astrophysics and cosmic energies. To him, transparent materials conveyed nothing less than infinity. Other works bear resemblances to the solar system, with singular dots of color, appearing to hover freely in space, like planets.



Giotto di Bondone, *Der Judaskuss* /
The Kiss of Judas, 1304–1306 (Detail)

1 Giotto di Bondone (1266–1337)

2 Translated by the author from German, in: Gilles Deleuze, *Die Falte, Leibniz und der Barock*, Frankfurt am Main 2000, p. 201

3 This group was made up of artists in Paris in the thirties, who were