

“City Explore”

Chi-Han Feng for Wabisabi in conversation with Aileen Treusch (founder Galerie 3AP)

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A few general questions to start with. Could you please introduce yourself to our readers? What name would you like to be called, and what is your role in this gallery?

My name is Aileen Treusch. I am the founder and director of Galerie 3AP in Düsseldorf. Thank you for the invitation to the city explore series, I look forward to the conversation.

We are curious to know about your decision to establish a gallery with a background in art and architecture?

Establishing a gallery was not an idea that I had planned on for a long time. Rather, it was the many exciting and inspiring artists & architects in my environment that prompted me to do so. Most of those I work with I know through previous joint project work. Then came the opportunity in the Fürstenwall to set up the gallery space in these rooms. Ultimately, my work is always about the activation of places, of knowledge, of experience. I am very interested in questions of spatial theory. This can be an interplay between art and architecture or art in urban space, but also the pictorial or a socially constructed space.

Since 2015 you have been engaged at the intersection of art, science and urban development as an independent curator, focusing on questions about the relationship between humans, architecture and nature, urban topologies, art-in-building and politics of public space. In addition to small festivals, temporary exhibitions in public spaces or on construction sites you have also curated more classical shows or dealt with large-scale urban development processes, such as the Blaugrüner Ring in Düsseldorf. Increasingly, permanent installations are added. Could you give us a brief insight in your working method as a curator? Where do your ideas come from?

I always try to keep the artist's entire oeuvre in mind and then transfer individual aspects of it into an exhibition context. Within group exhibitions there are rather few aspects that then form a connection; in solo shows, art in architecture or in public

space there are a variety of themes that I try to incorporate curatorially. I don't reinvent anything, I just sort, structure or contextualize - sometimes arbitrarily. I try not to close myself off to interdisciplinary thinking and working. Therefore my exhibition titles quote from art, music, design, architecture or even literature such as the short poem by Aram Saroyan „Opera of the nervous system“ which was the subtitle of the second exhibition in the gallery. On this occasion experiences of architecture and nature led to artistic spatial constitutions that found expression in photography, video art, drawing, sculpture and even architectural models. The permanent was contrasted with the fleetingly impermanent, decay was followed by overgrowth and resurrection. The various positions expressed a feeling of our age that is characterized by fragile, highly efficient systems and networks, at the same time cut off connections to oneself, others and nature. The core aspect of the exhibition was growth. I admire artistic work that creates experiential spaces, shakes things up or inspires new perspectives.

You studied art history, social sciences and economics at the Ruprecht-Karls-University Heidelberg and the Goethe-University Frankfurt with stations in Ghent and Florence. In addition to the basics, you focused on the Italian Renaissance, the history of architecture, and the role of women in Western trading societies. Can you give our readers a brief insight into your journey?

After my studies, my path first led me to the Städel Museum in Frankfurt. Under the direction of Max Hollein, whom I admire for his incredible creativity, his numerous novel exhibitions and event formats, I was able to gain valuable insights into museum practice. Before that, I worked with small interruptions for about 10 years in a concert hall located in a former power station. The spectrum ranged from jazz, pop or electro concerts to exhibitions, scientific colloquia and children's theater. Such diversifying venues hardly exist today. The constant change, not only in terms of content but also in the audience or the flexible uses and setups on site have had a great impact on me. I am becoming more and more aware of that. I guess the desire to open up classic audience spectrums and to work across disciplines also has its origins here. In the gallery I try to combine all my fields of interest. But it's very important to me not to simply convolute all disciplines with each other. Sometimes it is more interesting to show the separating before thinking about ways of cooperation.

Today, you are equally involved in very different fields, but always with a strong connection to art and to the topics that are relevant to you. What motivates you?

Expressing art and culture, in whatever form, is a privilege. It is important to advocate for different forms of presenting and promoting art. As a board member of the art association Mañana Bold or member of the cultural commission of the city of Offenbach, I can do so in many ways. I am very grateful for that, because it broadens the view. I founded the gallery in Düsseldorf only last year, and since then I have been on an exciting journey in which the role of art and artist, curator, buyer, or in our case

explicitly architect, is constantly being explored anew. At the center of the gallery's program is the examination of aesthetic and spatial theoretical issues and the related works of contemporary artists and architects. It motivates me to see how many fields in contemporary art and architecture have yet to be tapped to give them a greater consideration. I am magically attracted to complex statements and to people who have a vision and stand behind it. Even if they do not address the classical audience or the canon.

Why did you choose the name Galerie 3AP? Additionally, what environmental aspects of this area attracted you?

I like synonyms that invite association and, moreover, open up spaces for thought. Maybe I also like to hide behind it and I think it's also an attitude of not taking yourself too seriously. After all, I'm only one aspect of what's going on in the gallery. At the center stands the idea of bringing together art, architecture and people and to open up a platform for discourse. In this sense it intrigued me to work with artists as well as architects over longer periods of time, going through difficult phases together and being closely involved in the process of creating art. Surprisingly, this triplebond of architecture (in the sense of place) culture (in the sense of attitude) and people (in the sense of acting and engaging) also plays a very specific role within the historic context of the galleries site.

What are the historical issues associated with the site?

In the flat of the master baker Josef Lauxtermann (Fürstenwall 74) members of the Düsseldorf resistance group met from the beginning of the Second World War to discuss politics and plan how the city could be handed over to the Allies. This is where the „Aktion Rheinland“ was organized. I didn't know that at first but found out later. The fluid exhibition and residency project WOHNUNG LAUXTERMANN located on the upper floors of the site enables young artists to make use of the premises for their own work and projects to bring this historic address back into the active life of the city. From the beginning, I was attracted by the floor-to-ceiling windows and the people in the neighborhood. Inside you have the feeling of almost standing on the street.

How was the style of the exterior design determined? What significance does it hold within the urban context? What message do you want to convey to passersby and the local neighborhood?

It is important to me to create a closeness and publicity - which is still difficult despite the large windows, because the hurdles to enter a gallery are still very high. That's why some projects extend into the street space and can be experienced from the outside such as the façade installation CURT planned for 2024 or the performance project THE MOVING SCENE in 2022 which contained projections into the window and into

the outside area. I am also increasingly reversing this visual relationship and projecting from street space into the gallery. So there is a reversal and condensation, as in the work HIROSHIMA IM KOPF.

The surrounding houses are characterized by the style of the imperial period. Historically there are even references to the Tuscan Renaissance. I think my biggest audience in terms of numbers are the curious children who daily press their noses and fingers against the windows on their way to school or kindergarten of which there are many here. Our gallery dog Enzo, a Lagotto Romagnolo, regularly causes a great amount of curiosity while resting within the exhibits.

Is the aesthetic design inside and outside the gallery all handled by yourself? What specific needs did you have in mind when designing this space?

To this day, the gallery is undergoing a gentle transformation process. I am trying to give the place a simplicity and have, for example, removed the ceiling sails from the previous tenant and only installed additional light in a few places.

What challenges did you face during the renovation of the old house? Are there any interesting stories related to the process?

There are countless strange room edges or columns that have developed over decades of renovation. Presumably, this site is the retail space of a former bakery inside an old building structure. The first floor could have been the old sales area and the rear areas and upper floors were reserved for the bakery and the apartments of employees. Traditionally, many creative offices, agencies and concept stores settle here in our neighborhood. I tried to keep the charm of the old building as pure as possible and to stage the works on white walls through a soft and flexible lighting system. Besides that, there is only the old wooden floor and technical elements like radiators and electricity. A special detail is the wall niche in the back of the gallery, which I always imagine as an old bread display. Basically, everything is kept very simple and I think the spirit of the place is still palpable, partly due to the intricate architecture.

How did you strike a balance between preserving the old structure and incorporating new elements within the space? Could you specify which parts retain the old structure and explain the reasons behind those choices?

From the spacious and bright first floor, a narrow and steep staircase leads to the smaller upper floors. Here the rooms are unconventional and rather intimate, imperfect and rough. In this area I did not renovate or rearrange anything. These rooms space for smaller works or video works. Even before my time here, an old tile was found in the basement, painted with the bakers' guild coat of arms. Two upright lions hold together a pretzel and each a sword that they cross through the pretzel. There is also a crown and 4-buns depicted.

You collaborated with Karlsholz for the interior furniture. What were the main factors that influenced your decision to work with them? How has the user experience been so far? What inspired you to use different styles, elements, and modern aesthetics? Where did this inspiration come from?

Karlsholz is a small start up company founded by a young employee of the neighboring architecture firm raumwerk, who I also collaborate with i.e. the mentioned façade installation which is in fact a prototype and miniature model for a large scale art in building installation on a school and will open in 2024/25. Via this collaboration I met the founders of Karlsholz who develop modular furniture and have a very architectural at the same time ecological and sustainable approach in their design philosophy. Everything is reduced to a minimum, especially the functional. I liked that right away, as it allows a nice clear contrast to be formulated with the existing old building. The system can be adapted to all conceivable different formats, and we have taken all the modules apart and reassembled them for every opening so far. This has resulted in pedestals, stages, stools, tables that have been used for a wide variety of gallery needs. From dinner to performance. In contrast the beer for the opening came from the hold of a transport. Again, from a friendly neighbor who happens to run a brewery.

Flexibility is essential for art galleries. How do you define „flexible“ in this context? What conditions do you think are necessary for an art gallery? Do you have any keywords of Galerie 3AP?

What fascinates me most is the liveliness of gallery work. Flexibility arises in the mind, less through the external circumstances that affect you. I am interested in exploring different themes and bringing together various perspectives in a communicative exchange. Key words, of course, are resembled in the triplebond of art, architecture and people; progressive and interdisciplinary with a focus on voices of a generation close to me. Routine is something that bores me deeply. No exhibition - not even the preparation runs like its previous one. As a small company I am able to respond very quickly to interests or observations. This is certainly a reason why I seize opportunities and why I am among the first to exhibit works by young emerging artists even before others have the chance to do so. In this sense I consider my role as a sparring partner for artists and to reflect on their work. Often there is a mutual interest on both sides and a sense in discovering good ideas for a further workflow. In most cases I immediately know what interests me. In the sense of the exhibition spaces we are not so flexible, because the architecture is very specific.

Ideally, artists work from the basic idea of their complete oeuvre. As a curator and gallerist I in contrast enjoy the great freedom to think from one exhibition to the next. Therefore, I have the ability to establish relationships within different works and artists. This creates a stimulating tension and allows for new perspectives when one and the same work can be exhibited in a different context and surrounding. This freedom creates a huge flexibility.

How do you typically layout each exhibition, and what is your curatorial strategy? How does it relate to your large floor-to-ceiling windows, the surrounding city streets, and environmental context?

After working within the field of cultural institutions, and the urban sphere the galleries program reflects shared interests and is curated out of an enthusiasm for aesthetic and spatial-theoretical questions and related works. What happens when architects give free rein to artistic strategies and fantasies? How far are artists allowed to go as architects? What can be thought, designed, built and for what purpose? By exhibiting contemporary positions by both artists and architects, I am considering art and architecture as producing, at the same time crafting disciplines that help us understand how we matter as human beings. How can atmospheres of cities be captured artistically? What dramaturgy does the second nature of man follow? Who or what are its heroines and protagonists? Increasingly I am also dealing with more abstract ideas of atmospheres - like light, sound, language, colors, buildings!

How do you guide visitors through the gallery? Are there any differences in approach for artists and general visitors?

As individual as my selection of artists is, so is my approach to the gallery's visitors and collectors. I take a lot of time for this. It is important for me to understand what expectations and knowledge my visitors bring with them. I always find out surprising things that I didn't know myself or that the artist may not have been aware of. Accompanying essays by selected experts delve deeper into various connections between art and culture, urban space and urban societies.

In terms of collaborating with commentators or narrators to provide texts for each exhibition, how did you initiate this process? How does it benefit the gallery?

The additional exhibition comments are important to me as a corrective and commentary, and they are not always congruent with my own intentions. It is often surprising to me how little space is given to a multi-layered perspective on art when it comes to forms of presentation within museums, galleries, exhibitions. That is why I like to share individual associations and thoughts, gained from a sustained and personal focus on art.

I am interested in thoughts of people with different backgrounds; people who have a lot and important things to say, people who get involved and people who deal with very different topics in their everyday life, such as natural science, design, art criticism, psychology, humanitarian commitment, cultural work, digitization, theater, improvisation. It has already happened that a commentary has become a manifesto: „On the melancholy beauty of concrete“ summarizes in four short observations the aspects of concrete that have occupied us in architecture and our everyday lives since modernism. It was very exciting to see how this text - without referring to individual works -

nevertheless circled closely around the exhibited works. I'm tired of reading copied high-level texts that no one cares about anymore.

Each exhibition presents different layouts for the titles. What is the inspiration behind this idea? What message do you aim to convey through these symbols?

For me, the titles and graphics are the first visual and intellectual approach to the exhibition. I want to create a connection between art, artists and language. As mentioned, I often use quotations to establish references - both historical and thematic. For example, there was the computer game „space invaders“ or the Doors' song „Riders on the storm“. The titles not only play with language, but also make it the subject of the graphic itself and thus of observation by giving the words a certain form. I see it as a door opener or like a sip of hot soup consumed at the beginning of a meal to open the palate. Sometimes letters fly through the gallery like loose thoughts - also due to the shadows cast. The title inscribes itself in the exhibition space, on the floor and walls. It fascinates me every time, but is by no means a product of chance. Together with the graphic designer Mathias Bär, the titles are developed according to recurring design principles. Sometimes I have to be careful not to overdo it with these gimmicks and ideas - after all, I'm not an artist.

Now to your business philosophy. Please share your philosophy on running a gallery. What kind of vibe does Galerie 3AP create for customers, visitors and artists?

The philosophy of my business is that it is not just a business. It is a place where people meet and where people enjoy themselves and feel safe to share time and thoughts. Sometimes I cook dinners, sometimes I just invite my friends and family, sometimes I invite people I have never met before. At times I wish I could treat the gallery as just a business, because I invest a lot of time. This is certainly due to the fact that I always give 100%, a strength that is at the same time my greatest weakness. Nevertheless for me, the investment pays off in the relationships I build.

Galleries face fierce competition in every country. How do you attract customers, visitors, and artists? Does Galerie 3AP offer a unique consumption experience? How do you differentiate yourselves from other galleries in Düsseldorf or Germany?

This is a complex question that I ask myself every time before planning a new show. The question itself I cannot answer in all its parts but one thing is clear: I am still in the beginning of building my gallery so the work I have to do right now is on me and not on others. I neither place ads nor do I have an advertising algorithm installed on Instagram. In the world of digital and social media it is quite easy to achieve visibility but to build up loyalty takes time, which I try to focus on. There are many artists located in the Rhineland, with an incredibly rich cultural landscape and progressive gallery program. My aim is to link this potential more closely with the Rhine-Main region, espe-

cially my home town Frankfurt. Already now I have the feeling of building up a very loyal collector base, which is a great honor because you get to know a lot of great people, who not only enrich my everyday life, but also my expertise.

I am already proud of the website, although it has not yet reached its full potential, because dealing with information on the Internet also takes a lot of time. I don't want to be one of those galleries that try to create a mystical veil around their activities through invisibility or cryptic forms of expression online. Ultimately, this preserves elitist forms of presenting art. I try to ensure the visibility of participating artists and authors so that they can still be easily found at a later date. But here, too, I am still at the beginning.

What difficulties have you encountered in your business? Have these challenges helped shape your own business philosophy?

The biggest difficulties connectes to emotions and every emotion request an upfront investment...I am lucky that my passion for art keeps my motivation high and sometimes even the mood of my artists. Dialog and transparency are important to me: about common goals and how to achieve them. The approach to art has sometimes become very superficial. In my gallery work I am interested in profound communication and exchange. Not only with the artists but also with the collectors and visitors.