

Ursula Panhans-Bühler

Mariella Mosler, Filiations of Ornament and Memory. An interview

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Ursula Panhans-Bühler Mariella, you work with what are rather unusual materials: sand, hair and fruit gum. How did you get the idea for this?

Mariella Mosler Sand and hair are obviously commonplace materials and available anywhere. But in the form I use them, they have already gone through several industrial processes, even if they look very 'firsthand'. The sand is industrially pulverized and filtered, the hair is imported Asian hair, bleached, dyed and then assembled by me into representative types or ages. With the fruit gum, what attracted me was symbols found there that are infused or coded to a great degree in medial images. To then be able to efface this symbolization of desires via consumption supplies a promise of satisfaction which is then extracted from the work. Sand seems cheap and is first temporarily ennobled through the work process that is exactly opposite to the playground association we normally have with the material. Hair is very ambivalent as to its value: on the one hand, the greatest prize but, once separated from the body, dirty and an absolute taboo.

UPB Sand as raw material is quite uncontrollable ...Is there a connection between the ornaments, the materials and their disposition in the room?

MM These materials are per se formless and this results in a certain logic in their use, which with sand follows physical principles, but always structurally has to do with ornamentation, e.g., with layering, interweaving, knots, overlapping, etc. With wall art made of fruit gums the viewer finds himself opposite something in which, by means of physical proximity, a linear; colour structure turns into a picture or an object made of single parts; what I'm aiming for is the suspension of the viewer's distance. With my sand art I wanted to make this principle a physical experience in spatial extension. My idea was to create a walk-in spatial situation in which the interlocking ornaments can be recapitulated while walking and thus can coincide with the meandering of your gaze. Empty places among the ornaments or geometry intersections left unworked and empty become viewing stands within the area, whereby the relationship to an opposite number is changed to a...

UPS A very interesting angle, crossing the image side of the ornament that is defined with that of the paths the imagination follows ...

MM Yes, that is perhaps the connection between the different work forms.

Sometimes the visitor can move within the ornament - with even the possibility of destroying it - and sometimes only the eye can follow its way around the room. The sand works are dependent on the room situation, whether the ornament relates in a decentralized way to the architecture and seemingly goes beyond it into an imaginary infinity, or whether it seems to behave affirmatively and generates a dynamism by way of structure and the way the light falls.

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UPS The fruit gum works often have recourse to ornamental floral structure. With the sand works, it's serialization that is more striking.

MM The serial is something found in all the work groups, either by repeating the motifs create a pattern or -with the hair sculptures in diverse variations - different motifs that formally relate to each other and are realized as a series by lining them in a row.

UPS You spoke of the relationship to the room. What was intended by the "floating" hair stars in the Herzliya Museum?

MM 'Yes it was very important to me that they seemed to float in front of the wall. By means of the material and of a physical proximity to the object, an almost immaterial detachment takes place.

UPB How heavy is such a hair star?

MM It weighs a few grams.

UPB Then it fits... as if it had only landed in this room *for* a fleeting moment in time. Does the role that ornaments have played in cultural traditions interest you at all?

MM Historical developments have generated a certain art history with a corresponding repertoire of forms ... and ornaments have always drifted *from* one culture to another - just as modern ornaments and logos constantly migrate - in many cases their origin or authorship cannot be determined, have often been lost by being taken over culturally. Sometimes ornamental forms have appeared at the same time in different cultures. These migrations of form across continents and cultures in association with imperial and religious conquests correspond today to the signs of global capitalism and its product imperialism.

MM I think that the structure of ornaments like, e.g., the construction of bands of waves or knot ornaments across certain cultural techniques like weaving and braiding, stand in a strong association with language, with different verbal structures, different systematic orders of grammar and tense that are superimposed, woven together and able to switch hierarchy with each other.

UPS Does cultural memory in these optically semantic structures interest you at all?

UPB With weaving and braiding there is a down and an up...

MM Having just begun to get involved more with knots, I have noticed that many of the superimposed ornamental structures do allow their being pulled together into knots. Many graphic instructions *for* making knots were already known to me as ornaments, that is, the structural possibility of spatial concentration, the ornament or linear network, is dormant in the two-dimensional set-up and, at the same time, in my sculptural *form* of the knot... Some knots can be quickly unknotted, others can't.

UPS Which artistic positions or standpoints have interested or impressed you?

MM There are aspects of very different artists that interest me, Yayoi Kusama. e.g. Since I have studied under Stanley Broun, among others, the standpoint that he has consistently kept to has impressed me. I also admire his conceptual position. In association with a great formal strictness and an extreme selection from his production.

UPB Sand is formed from wind and water. Cultures are based on structures. but are conscious of their increasing fragility. Do your sand sculptures have something to do with the fragility of structures?

MM Systems of order are always necessarily temporary. I am at least aware that actually everything that is at the moment present could disappear in the shortest of time or only exists temporarily. This is

exactly the case with me and my works. I think very little beyond my own lifespan.

UPS Then the artwork is nothing more than a strategy of reification shored up against one's own timeline?

MM That is not a strategy I believe in. Transformative energetic processes do not emerge as objects, therefore objects have inevitably something compensatory about them. particularly since the available potential in images, which luxuriously enfolds strategies of reification, becomes ever more self-referential and empty. You once said that my works operate like pictures from memory, like an animation of a subjective potential perhaps, although I, for instance, have tried to do something like compress energy within the object.

UPB Over time then, your works offer something that no one can take over or take in hand?

MM It seems to me that the constant outstripping of technical development comes down to a battle against time manifested in the objects, which coincides in a conservation of the physical form and of memory. In a steady flux of things an attempt is being made to halt the processes in time and to generate an everlasting present. Subjective time structures hardly find a correspondence in the images that surround us.

UPS A capability for memory is thus alienated to a pretense at permanence, a memory-destructive instrumentality?

MM We are being forced into the role of Kafka's hunger artist, who, when asked why he had never eaten anything, could only answer: nothing tasted good to me. That is a position of denial that, at the moment, is not very reputable.

(laughter)