

Galería Elba Benítez



ISA MELSHEIMER

If We Dissolve Now

We Are More Than We Ever Were

25.11.2023 – 10.02.2024

‘De-differentiation’ and ‘de-architecturization’: these are terms used by Robert Smithson in his work *Hotel Palenque* to refer to the way that built structures and organic growth, decay and renovation, ruins past and future, all merge ineluctably into an a-centric, entropic object-site-process on the grounds of a decrepit hotel in the encroaching jungles of the Yucatán peninsula. Moreover, *Hotel Palenque*, in its own shifting form — initially a live and witty lecture-cum-slideshow that the artist presented to a group of architecture students, a low-quality recording of which was later retrieved and reassembled after his death so as to be exhibited in museum settings around the world as an ersatz art work — echoes its subject matter: *Hotel Palenque*, like the Hotel Palenque, is a ruin in reverse, something that does not fall but rather rises into ruin.

‘De-architecturalization’ and ‘de-differentiation’ are also apt terms to consider in the context of Isa Melsheimer’s current exhibition at the Galería Elba Benítez. Titled *If We Dissolve Now / We Are More Than We Ever Were*, the exhibition presents new works in various formats — ceramics, textiles and photographs — throughout which the intertwining of the inorganic with the organic and of stasis with flux functions both as motif and as concept. A number of the ceramics on view consist of rectilinear structures over and through which amorphous shapes seem to melt and surge and ooze — a kind of ‘de-architecturalization’ in which the apparently ‘natural’ world overtakes the built environment, as in an encroaching jungle or a rising bog — whereas in others the sequence seems to be reversed, where there is the suggestion that natural forms are propulsively acquiring engineered-like structural characteristics. The process conveyed by these works seems more reciprocal than juxtapositional. In a similar bidirectional fashion, Melsheimer’s gouaches depict movement via their content — not infrequently human figures in flight — while simultaneously embodying movement in their dynamic, fluid brushwork. And the textile-photographic works, with their literal conjoining of manual production and mechanical reproduction, maintain this sense of intertwined organic-inorganic synthesis.

To ‘de-differentiate’ means to return something that was differentiated (at least to our experience) to an undifferentiated state: or, to use another word, to dissolve. In this sense it functions as the operative principle throughout the works on view in the exhibition *If We Dissolve Now / We Are More Than We Ever Were*, where it is reinforced by the persistent references to nature, natural processes and, ultimately, to the earth (and what medium is more deeply linked to the earth itself than ceramics, as Melsheimer’s ceramic work so exquisitely shows?). But nothing can dissolve into nothing. In terms of earth and earthly matters, the biosphere is a closed system. Anything that *dissolves* *re-solves* into something else. Ruins rise, ruins fall. As does everything, always.

George Stolz

Galería Elba Benítez

Isa Melsheimer (Neuss, Germany, 1968; lives and works in Berlin) creates work that centers around a research-driven dialogue with history, and in particular with the architectural and design history of the 20th century with all its political, ideological and social complexities. Melsheimer employs a wide variety of media and materials, primary among which are sculpture (often in concrete or glass) and gouache paintings, but also extending to ceramics, textiles, embroidery, living plants, and video. Melsheimer frequently arranges these objects and materials into autonomous installations characterized by juxtapositions of sharply contrasting and even opposing characteristics, such as between the inorganic and the organic, monumentality and intimacy, delicacy and stolidity, observation and imagination.

Melsheimer has had solo exhibitions at the Centre international d'art du paysage Île de Vassivière (Beaumont-du-Lac, 2022); MAMAC Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain, (Nice, 2021); KINDL - Centre for Contemporary Art (Berlin, 2020); Kunstverein Heppenheim (Heppenheim, 2018); CRAC Centre d'art contemporain (Montbelliard, 2018); Städtische Galerie Delmenhorst (Delmenhorst, 2018); Fogo Island Art Gallery, Fogo Island (Newfoundland, 2018); the Mies van der Rohe Haus (Berlin, 2017); Ernst Barlach Haus (Hamburg, 2015); art3 – art contemporain (Valence, 2015); Ikob, Museum für zeitgenössische Kunst (Eupen, 2014); Santa Monica Museum of Art (2012); Kunsthaus Langenthal (2010); Carré d'Art – Musée d'art contemporain de Nîmes (2010); Städtische Galerie Nordhorn (2008); Stiftung Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck (Remagen, 2008); Mönchehaus Museum Goslar (2007); the Chinati Foundation (Marfa, 2005); Bonnefantenmuseum (Maastricht, 2004).

If We Dissolve Now / We Are More Than We Ever Were is Isa Melsheimer's second individual exhibition at the Galería Elba Benítez.

Image: Isa Melsheimer, *Habitat I*, 2023

If you would like to receive more information about the exhibition, please send an e-mail to diana.delacruz@elbabenez.com