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Horvat, Katja. "Helmut Lang 'Various Conditions.'" *www.interview.de (inter/VIEW)*, 17 June 2017.

**inter/VIEW**



*'Various Conditions' is Helmut Lang's latest exhibition based on the dualism of black and white.*

In every aspect of his oeuvre, Lang's work possesses a mixture of experiences, feelings, and settings. Despite its often deconstructive shape affinity of romance frequently appears in Lang's work. He embraces, rejects, depersonalizes and newly personalizes old scavenged, (non)traditional materials. Lang stated he prefers materials "with a certain history, elements with irreplaceable presence and with scars and memories of a former purpose." And in order to create a form from something existing one needs to focus on the craftsmanship itself, and Lang has always done so. For 'Various Conditions' the white, relief-like wall panels made from resin, fabric, and enamel and the whitewashed forms of phallic sculptures plunge the room into contemplative silence. Silence that confronts the audience and makes them aware of their own perception, even though works are based on Lang's perception.

We talked with Helmut Lang about his new project, his work process and if fashion is a form of art.

*Mr. Lang, how did you set on sculpture work and not something else? What interests you the most when it comes to sculptural work?*

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I got set on sculpture and the intersection of painting, reliefs and wall sculpture. I guess I am more intrigued by creating an imaginary physical form as I have spent all the years before working around the body. I'm not painting in the classical sense, as I don't have the skills for it. But I am interested in everything else which comes along in my work procedure, as I don't want to be restricted by any pre-defined classical divisions of art practices.



Helmut Lang, Various Conditions, Sammlung Friedrichshof, Burgenland, Austria.

*You once said that sculptures do have a sexual side to it, tell me more.*

This is actually a verbal variation of mine of an art piece by Jenny Holzer that says “Murder has a sexual side.” I guess at one point I thought that sculptures have that too. But like anything in life, some do, and some don't.

*For “Various Conditions” you designed a space that bases on the dualism of black and white. What do black and white stand for?*

It was a response to the conditions of the two very different spaces I am exhibiting in at Sammlung Friedrichshof. I wanted the space in Burgenland to be somehow light and sparse, as the primary focus is a rather large relief consisting of 9 pieces in different shades of white and non-whites. It felt like the right work for the space. At the Stadtraum in Vienna, which is a very interesting but small space, I wanted it to be rather tense, crowded and dark. Maybe because someone once said, and I can't remember who it was, that the golden Viennese heart is actually made out of stone or coal, and I always found a certain humor in that – black Viennese humor, so to say.

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*Tell me more about your work process.*

I am not aiming for any projected outcome as to what I am working on. It is quite intuitive, and it is also getting more psychological than anything else. It is the search for something new that is guiding the work process, well knowing that it contains my experiences of my life so far, or that I am dealing with not yet defined issues which I am trying to understand and have not admitted or formulated for myself.

*How do you know which idea is worth making a reality?*

I never know for sure. I start with the material, and I see what the response is and allow myself to take it from there. It either leads to something I feel and want to express, or it leads nowhere. It is good not to know the outcome when one is looking for an undefined/defined. It gives me more freedom in achieving something new.



Helmut Lang, Various Conditions, Stadtraum, Vienna, Austria. Photo: ©Alexander Rosoli

*Do you get attached to your work? Does a certain piece hold a certain emotion depending on what you were going through while making the piece?*

I do get attached to my work. I am going through a lot of emotions with every piece, really. I have had to learn to let it go, as this is part of the natural procedure, I am aware of that, and of course, I also want to hand the work over to the public, because that is really the end result of what art should be all about. Once the work leaves the studio for an exhibition, and there is emotional feedback and interaction from the audience, it becomes a bigger and more important issue for me than the original attachments, and it moves



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everything forward. There is always a piece that I kind of want to keep, but that's also always the one that is definitely getting sold.

*When do you think an art piece gets valuable? Is it the name of the artist? Some kind of external connection?*

You mean valuable in the art market?

Yes.

It is a puzzle of different factors. There is the work itself that later on gets mixed with the hype that is created around it. Occasionally, it is speculation, as a diversified portfolio also includes art as an investment commodity. So somehow along this line, I think that is how it works now, but there is one unique thing about art; it is not seasonal, it is timeless. Simply said, only time will tell which art is good enough to be timeless as an artistic achievement, which is what the artist actually wants. It doesn't hurt if the value goes up over time, as this is also a way of validating the work. But the truth is, it also helps when the artist is dead.



Helmut Lang, New Work, Sperone Westwater, New York. Courtesy of the artist and Sperone Westwater, New York

*Did you always want to be an artist or fashion was your primary interest?*

I originally wanted to be an artist, but the circumstances at the time were not in my favor, and fashion came as something unexpected – nothing I had planned. But the unexpected turned out to be rewarding, exciting and worthwhile pursuing once it got going.

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*Do you consider fashion as a form of art?*

Personally, I don't consider fashion as art. It should be smart, intelligent, surprising, but always wearable. It also has a seasonal cycle. That does not mean that certain achievements in fashion or single pieces are not coming close to art.

*On occasion, you use found materials that had a life prior you got them, and therefore they hold a certain value/emotion to it. Let say you know where the material came from and what it went through, do you use that information while sculpturing or you rather give it a new form, therefore, a new life?*

The use of found materials or non-precious materials is a good starting point for me. I don't consciously use the information of where it came from. It kind of doesn't matter. I'm not literally interested in the history, but rather in the possibilities. I treat it like every other material. Not using the assurance of classical art materials, it leads to uncertain outcomes, and one has to work harder for newness, but at the same time, the history of found objects is also giving it more soul, I find.



Helmut Lang, Burry, Dallas Contemporary, Dallas. Courtesy of the artist and Sperone Westwater, New York

*What is your idea of beauty? Where do you find it?*

I don't have a defined idea of beauty, but I always found a slight 'off-beauty' much more interesting. There is definitely no leitmotif, and I always like to be open to various possibilities. I think it is also important to not underestimate the value of inner beauty. Sensuality, passion, loyalty, honesty, etc. – seem to be the virtues that are completing the definition of beauty.

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*Is your work an extension of your personality or your work is your escape?*

My work is an extension of my personality, and also the extension of everything I have experienced in life so far and that has brought me to this point. It comes unconsciously and deep from inside of me, and I often cannot quite explain it, as I might not have consciously defined it for myself but, I think, it is an important part of the artistic procedure to take that risk. It is not an escape. It is rather the opposite. It is like finding out about oneself and about everything else one is interested in. As Louise Bourgeois once said, "My work keeps me sane."

*What kind of impact do you hope your work has?*

Naturally, I would hope for a deep impact.

*What inspires you?*

I don't think it is anything in particular which I would be able to define. It is rather coming from a psychological and intuitive space.

*Do you vacation?*

Not in the sense of what vacation traditionally means. My life and work are so intertwined that the mix creates a very organic flow that sometimes goes in a faster or slower speed, and I'm not so interested in taking a vacation from it.

*What was the last movie you watched?*

The last ones I watched are always the ones that become available on pay-per-view. I stopped going to the cinema when they changed it from an experience into small boxes with old popcorn smell and bugs. But anyhow, the last movie I saw was Queen of Katwe.

*Do you buy a lot of clothes?*

No, I don't. I am a pretty basic guy when it comes to clothing, and I am basically still wearing my own stuff.

*What is your most prized possession?*

My most prized possessions are probably my memories (often times selective), and fearlessness in going forward.

*Helmut Lang, Various Conditions, 06.05.17 – 19.11.17, Sammlung Friedrichshof, Burgenland, Austria*  
*Helmut Lang, Various Conditions, 09.05.17 – 14.11.17, Stadtraum, Vienna, Austria*