

Nicole Doth – Finding new answers in the in-between

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A Triad: Craft - Design – Art

In Nicole Doth's case, her artistic career and her personal biography go hand in hand. She grew up in a designer family with its own furniture factory in southern Germany and became acquainted with the family as a space of possibility at an early age: Here she was provided with a basic foundation for artistic thinking along the way, but also an understanding of materiality and form. Later, in her training as a carpenter and then as a master carpenter, she quickly learned that even today it is a rocky road for women in craft professions that requires special perseverance and self-assertion. To this day, the theme of perception is an essential core in her work. Questions about how we perceive the world and position ourselves in it shape her artistic works.

However, it is not only as a woman a challenge to take up a craft profession. Basically, the profession of carpentry is having problems attracting new talent and is being taken up less and less frequently. This is certainly due to the physical strain of the profession, but also to the increasingly complex requirements.

Bauhaus – Gender

With her approach aligned between art and craft, design and visual aesthetics, formal language and the pushing of functionality, there is some overlap between Nicole Doth's artistic practice and the Bauhaus. The Bauhaus was a way of bringing together the vision of art and craft. Those familiar with the history of the school, however, also know that there was a change of direction as early as 1920, when almost as many women as men studied at the Bauhaus and women were already regulated upon admission out of founder Walter Gropius' fear that too many women could damage the school's reputation. With few exceptions, the textile class remained for women.

The digression about the Bauhaus is important, because Nicole Doth's art deals with many formal aesthetic ideas, but also incorporates feminist elements without making it the central theme. You can't talk about craft without including gender aspects, you can't talk about innovation without talking about entrenched structures either. In art, the credo of separating art from the artist has long been celebrated, yet contemporary art lives from contexts and making processes visible. How did a particular series develop? What factors led to ideas? Interpretation and the judgement of quality are always possible only with the evaluation of context. In Nicole Doth's case, the story cannot be told without the triad of craft - design - art. This becomes evident in her series of works „mirror, mirror on the... throne“.

Throne – in the mirror of our time

Again and again, Nicole Doth explores the boundaries of functionality in her works, and this becomes particularly visible in „the throne“. When is a chair no longer just a chair? When does it become an insignia of power? A chair tells us a function, namely sitting; a throne, on the other hand, shows context, asserts a claim to leadership. Suddenly, a functional object becomes an interpretative space, which Doth expands even further by using mirrors as her material of choice.

The fragile material automatically positions itself in the space, because where the throne is built, the context is reflected. This creates an interesting inversion, for a throne, through its imposing nature, elevates the regent to the centre of attention, while in Doth's work the mirror throne, through its reflection, blends into the context of the environment in such a way that it itself almost disappears. In some photographs, only the fine outlines can thus be discovered. The series questions power and claims to power: Who still has the sovereignty of interpretation today? Who presumes to determine where the boundaries of design and art run? Can art be democratised? These are questions that the artist and designer herself confronts again and again and meets with her personal credo "don't be afraid of art".

In this way, Nicole Doth explores the boundaries of functional art, objects that are primarily designed and created from a utilitarian character and at the same time have their own aesthetic or artistic aspect - art as part of everyday life. The central point, however, is that the throne could not exist without the craft behind it. Her throne does not want to sit theoretically in an ivory tower, but is meant to prove itself in action and therefore keeps changing its installation sites, such as on a gravel pit. Of course, the association between the throne and the colloquial term for money is obvious there, but it is also about thoughts on resources and waste.

The throne also experiences a translation into the medium of photography, as it is artistically photographed in the places where it is set up. The supposedly utilitarian object thus experiences another level of content. The images from the series raise critical questions about the responsibility of humans in its production. In times of climate change and scarce resources, we have to ask ourselves what priorities we have to set. As the material of choice, the mirror holds up the proverbial mirror to us and invites us to engage in a socially critical discourse without making us believe we have easy answers. Taking responsibility ultimately starts with each individual, just as our reflection appears in the throne, we are the decision-makers of our lives connected to the world.

Shifts in context

Nicole Doth's works are interestingly located within various contexts between art and design, craft and formal language, and function and process. She repeatedly explores the boundaries of functionality and continues to explore materiality.

It is therefore not surprising that the objects are increasingly becoming the tools of her thoughts and that she is currently experimenting with photography as a medium and now also with performance and that the topic of NFT is also coming into play.

Doth chooses a visual language that lures the viewer with harmony and aesthetics and can then direct the attention to certain topics. It is an intelligent trick to a direct dialogue, because beauty has something disarming about it, especially when it comes to socio-critical topics, because it opens up the space to engage with something new without provoking a dismissive attitude that one has with supposedly familiar images about certain topics. In general, Nicole Doth likes to take the direct route, while others still lose themselves in the boundaries of definitions, she finds new answers for our complicated world in the in-between.