

Joachim Bandau - Figures and Machines
 15 November 2014 - 14 February 2015

Something profoundly dystopian inhabits Joachim Bandau's post-war "Figures, Machines, Monsters" - as he calls the shiny enameled, anthropomorphic plastic sculptures that date from the late 1960s through the early 1970s. Fitted with hoses, bathroom fixtures or shower heads that lend the objects the appearance of self-maintaining systems, the sculptures have been perceived as "golem figures" (Rolf Wedewer). As crosses between technical device and anthropomorphic form, they have elicited a great deal of confusion, in part because they turned standard conceptions of sculpture upside down.



Der Späher, 1974, 223 x 55 x 85 cm (l.); Weisses Duschtor, 1969, 180 x 110 x 35 cm (r.)

When they originally appeared, Hanno Reuther described the uncanny quality of the works as "terror disguised in slick design". Their machine-like movements, size and of course the titles, by means of which reference was made to the threatening, destructive force of technology ("Der Späher" [The Spy], "Foltergerät" [Torture Machine]), were interpreted as a warning that some day machines could somehow run amok and assume dominance over humankind. According to this view, Bandau's objects are signs of the time, reactions to the political climate in post-war Germany, or even - as in the case of "Großes weißes Hörchelmonument" [Large White Hörchel Monument] (1968/69) - direct, ironic commentaries to contemporary political events.

Bandau's objects are not, however, rooted in time, but extend far beyond it. They cast common sculptural conventions aside and in surface aesthetic and materiality have more to do with design - a reference that many artists, from Joep van Lieshout to Anselm Reyle, now take for granted. Bandau emphasizes this disregard for norms in another small, but in its effect quite radical gesture: he places some of his objects on wheels. In this way the division between applied and fine art is placed in question, as objects on wheels were then generally considered furniture or vehicles. In this context the inclusion of Bandau's "Kabinenmodelle" [Cabin Models] - made in 1973 in the Daimler Benz AG factory in Sindelfingen, Germany with the support of a grant from the Federation of German Industries - in the Utopian Design section of documenta 6 seem completely logical from the present perspective.

Not just because of their formal break with conventions is it so difficult to classify Bandau's sculptures in a specific art historical tradition. Due to the flawless enamel finish that casts the objects in a kind of technical shell and their modular construction they are often mentioned in the same breath as minimal art. Yet in Bandau's work artificiality is combined with the organic, which goes against the central tenant of minimal art formulated by Donald Judd in his programmatic essay "Specific Objects": "Three-dimension-

al work usually doesn't involve ordinary anthropomorphic imagery." In Bandau's work the figurative element does not just provide the form, it is the substance itself, as he often used parts from mannequins as construction material for his sculptures.

To what extent Bandau's artistic strategies differ from Judd's objectives is made clear in the draft sketches that he made for each sculpture and that he considers works of art in their own right. These sketches demonstrate that the artist hardly identified with the aesthetic agenda of the intellectual minimal art movement. On the contrary, in the sketches we recognize how Bandau worked out the proportions, shapes and mechanics of each individual sculpture and how the objects emerged from the dynamics of this development process - something that characterizes all of his work. The spectrum of his creations, which range from watercolors to the series of enameled wood wall objects he called "Bagan Lackarbeiten" [Bagan Lacquer Pieces], reveals his enduring, ever expanding search for innovative sculptural forms, which he has also begun to transfer to painting.

Christina Landbrecht

Joachim Bandau (born in 1936) lives in Aachen, Germany und Stäfa, Switzerland. He studied at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf from 1957 to 1960. Recent solo exhibitions have been held at the Neues Museum Nürnberg and the Ludwig Forum Aachen. Joachim Bandau's works have also been featured in numerous group exhibitions at such institutions as the Sculpture Center, New York (through 5 January 2015), the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, the Städtische Kunsthalle in Mannheim, the Lentos Kunstmuseum in Linz, the Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels and documenta 6.

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