

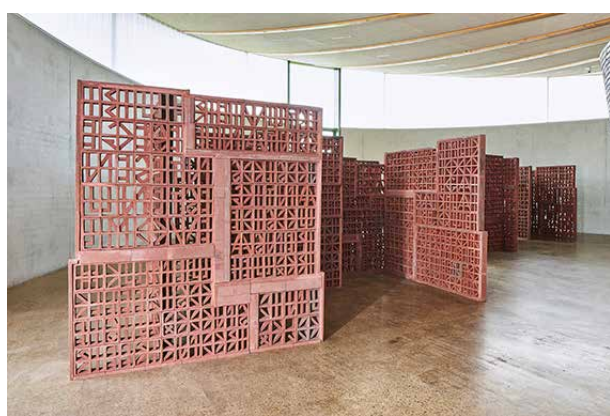
October 2021

Cristina Iglesias

The exhibition “The 80s” at the Albertina Modern in Vienna confirmed my negative view of 1980s art—its vulgarity, those brash effects, and its cheap opportunism. There is no need to mention names—we know them well. I, for one, was in a hurry to leave the exhibition galleries as fast as possible and attend to something else: what this show unaccountably left out. For in this decade there was also art of the opposite kind to the aforementioned, namely art that engaged in-depth with what had happened in previous years and drew intelligent conclusions. The younger artists paid special attention to those who signalized dissent in their work, such as Dan Graham and Robert Smithson or Luciano Fabro and Mario Merz. Some of those artists who came to the fore in the 1980s have been presented in exhibitions I have curated in recent years at the Skulpturenhalle of the Thomas Schütte Stiftung in Neuss—Richard Deacon, Matt Mullican, Juan Muñoz—and now Cristina Iglesias.



Cristina Iglesias' works break with the traditional notion of sculpture as a freestanding figure or fixed three-dimensional object, in that her constructions, which are often architectural in character, relate strongly to the surrounding architectonic space and the natural environment. Instead of an enclosed space she offers an open passage, and the integration of the substance of the sculpture and fluid elements. What is more, she introduces the realm of the imagination—the fictional—into the sphere of the visible. The earliest work in the exhibition, a wall object dating from 1991, already demonstrates some of these ideas. Berlin II is neither a picture nor a wall relief: it is more like a glass canopy. This object departs from any functional purpose, however, in that its structure is slightly asymmetrical. Instead of offering the viewer a frontal view, the particular angled perspective implies an independent spatial entity. The blue glass canopy that projects forward out of the wall is mounted in front of fabric decorated with motifs, redolent of eighteenth century decorative wall coverings or cushion covers. The pattern can only be seen on stepping under the ledge and looking up. The fabric refers to an interior space, while the motifs evoke a faraway pastoral life, set behind glass to indicate the quote. We find ourselves in an indeterminate situation hovering between the interior and the exterior.



This ambiguity is also one of the themes in “Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias”, which consists of a series of free-standing terracotta screens. The structure of these lattices offers scope for ornamentation. Iglesias takes advantage of this potential by inserting letters of the alphabet into the horizontal, vertical and diagonal compartments. We get the impression that they could be grouped together to form the words of a text, in the double meaning of being woven together from individual strands. The fragmentary perception of letters and words along with the alternation of abstract construction and linguistic elements are in keeping with the configuration of the components of the piece. While walking through the installation we experience a sequence of entrances and exits as inviting passages along which the visitor may catch glimpses of the fragments of writing.



Other works by the artist are inspired by the concept of a labyrinth or a garden pavilion; the interior is made up of casts of plants, or offers a glimpse into depths submerging in flowing water. This is not actual depth, but the non-quantifiable profundity of an imaginary subterranean world. Her cardboard architectural constructions are impenetrable in a different sense: they have been photographed, enlarged and then screenprinted onto copper plates. The life-size doors and windows open onto vistas of intricately staggered spatial sequences, while the shimmering copper plates reflect the viewers back to themselves, as if they were at the center of the scene. We thus involuntarily become part of a fictive reality from which we are simultaneously excluded—an inextricable situation full of ambiguities, which is just what Iglesias' art aims to create.

The Cristina Iglesias exhibition at Skulpturenhalle der Thomas Schütte Stiftung, Neuss, is on show until 12 December 2021.

Dieter Schwarz