

MIT List Visual Arts Center
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Alicja Kwade: In Between Glances

October 18, 2019–January 5, 2020



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Hayden and Reference Galleries October 18, 2019–January 5, 2020

Working primarily in sculpture and installation, Alicja Kwade explores structures of reality such as time and space, as well as systems of value that determine how we perceive the world and decide what constitutes the real. Typically working in a site-responsive mode, she is known for her sculptural works which use common, yet symbolically resonant materials like rocks, lamps, and clocks. Viewers encounter these and other found objects transformed by Kwade, often to unsettling and perplexing effect. Roadside pebbles are cut and polished like precious gems. Massive stone spheres seem to levitate in air like planets stopped in orbit. Clocks run incongruously, at once in and out of time.

Kwade's treatments of familiar things complicate and challenge our perceptual faculties. Throughout her work, the artist strategically blurs our learned distinctions between past and present, and high and low value. While she insists on approaching these concepts from the perspective of a layperson, Kwade's *oeuvre* evinces a keen inquiry into the scientific, economic, narrative, and social principles that structure how we understand and interpret the world around us.

FRONT: *abarchairisabarchairisabarchair*, 2018
Photo: Roman März

BACK: *Linienland II*, 2017
Photo: Roman März



Out of Ousia, 2018. Installation view, Kunsthall Charlottenborg, 2018. Photo: Roman März.

Reconstituted Objects, 2016-2019

The sculptures in this series are each composed of household appliances, like kitchen clocks and lamps as well as personal technology devices, that have been ground down to a granular, sand-like dust. Suspended in an epoxy mixture, the particulate remnants of each object are then reconstituted into sculptures in the shape of urns, bowls, and vases that maintain precisely the same volume as the original object. With deadpan titles like *Lamp* (2016) and *iPhone* (2017) that indicate their previous form and utility, the vessels are presented in glass vitrines typically used for museum display.

In a new work, *Fahrrad [Bicycle]* (2019), presented at the List Center for the first time, the artist's old bicycle is subjected to the same processes. Re-formed as a chair and similarly encased in a glass museum vitrine, green flecks from the bicycle's paint are clearly visible on the new object's surface. Related to earlier works like *Berliner Bordsteinjuwelen* (2007) and *Lucy* (2004) that convert coal and street pebbles (faceted and polished by professional gem-cutters) into forms resembling jewels, the series continues Kwade's ongoing interests in processes of transformation and in metrics for determining value, which the artist time and again reveals as a contingent construct.

Object-Tree Works, 2018

In this series of sculptures, the forms of bar stools, walking sticks, and coat racks seem to emerge from the interiors of the trunks of poplar trees, as if always there and waiting to be harvested. To produce these uncanny works, the artist employs a programmable robotic arm appended to a computer numerical control (CNC) machine, an automated manufacturing tool that follows a coded program to process a piece of material to specification. For these works, the robot was instructed to machine the forms—based on 3-D scans of the requisite

objects—in the most efficient way possible from a whole tree trunk without the use of a saw. Cross sections visible on the tree trunks occur when the robotic arm adjusts to a smaller diameter to mill out finer details. The cutting process is stopped before completing the entire shape so that the works hover in a liminal space. Suspended in a halted state of information-based transformation from a natural material to a manufactured commodity object, Kwade suggests that these two states are one in the same.

Trans-For-Men 11 (Fibonacci), 2019

This work unfolds as a procession of ten material permutations of a granite boulder. Including the original rock, the sculpture is comprised of eleven stone-like forms joined by rectilinear double-sided mirrors. Cast in alloyed and elemental metals, or

CNC milled from various natural stones and Berg crystal, each piece is derived from 3-D scans of the original boulder. This data is entered into an algorithm based on the so-called "golden ratio" of the Fibonacci sequence (in which each number is the sum

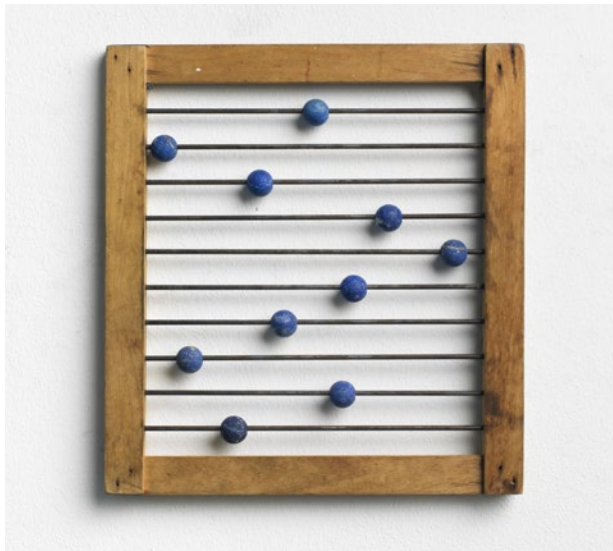


Trans-For-Men 11 (Fibonacci), 2019. Photo: John Berens.

of the two preceding ones) to develop ten objects that all maintain the same volume as their source.

The original boulder is positioned at the center of the floor-based arrangement and flanked on either side by five permutations. On one side, the forms morph from the original shape towards a perfect sphere, while on the other they develop towards a cube. In an illusion created by the mirrored reflections, each

form appears to seamlessly turn into the next, but when viewed from a distance, the “stones” maintain their semblance as a linear arrangement of discrete objects. The multiplicity and simultaneity of various material states in *Trans-For-Men 11 (Fibonacci)* speaks to both Kwade’s interests in processes through which matter becomes data, as well as in scientific and philosophical theories that question the existence of a single reality.



Linienland II (detail), 2017. Photo: Roman März.

***Linienland II*, 2017**

Kwade’s persistent efforts to question accepted conventions of measurement and quantification also find form in found objects, which she employs as manifestations of abstract concepts. *Linienland II* is comprised of a found and altered abacus, or counting frame, an ancient calculating device that predates the existence of numeric notations. Permutations of its basic form, a

rectangular frame with rows of mobile beads, vary in complexity and thus their potential to calculate larger sums and advanced arithmetic.

As each bead is assigned a unit of value, the abacus is a literal representation of physical material (the bead) turned into information (a number). In *Linienland II*, Kwade replaced the standard beads with perfect spheres of lapis lazuli. All but ten of these (one on

each row), appear to have fallen from the counting frame and scattered onto the floor below, rendering it functionless. Lapis, an intensely pigmented semi-precious blue stone, has been prized since antiquity—used both in jewelry and to create the sought after and costly ultramarine

pigment. A deep, brilliant azure mottled with specs of grey and green, the lapis beads Kwade selected for *Linienland II* (and the related *Light Touch of Totality*) each appear as tiny blue planets, confusing terrestrial and cosmic scales of measurement.

***Light Touch of Totality*, 2019**

Premiering at the List Center, *Light Touch of Totality* consists of a configuration of five stainless steel rings each with a diameter of approximately 16 feet and positioned at varying angles. The sculpture is adorned with over 1,400 strands of beads made from wood and lapis lazuli, which create a curtain-like effect on portions of its imposing frame. Pooling like water droplets, the arrangement of the blue natural stone beads increases in density on the lower portions of the strands. As in *Linienland II*, each bead represents a unit of information, that taken together generates a matrix of data. Resembling both planetary rings and the longitudinal lines on a map or globe, the ringed structure of Kwade’s sculpture evokes a cluster of off-kilter meridians.

Used in both maritime navigation and cartography, longitudinal meridian lines are a human-made system grafted onto the natural world. These imagined linear constructions encircle representations of the earth and create a framework that assigns exact geographic and numerical coordinates to any point on the planet. Unlike the equatorial meridian which is determined by the earth’s axis of rotation, the prime meridian (zero-degree point) is, like time zones, arbitrarily apportioned. Its formal structure referencing these systems, *Light Touch of Totality* continues Kwade’s persistent challenges to how we organize and measure the world around us.

***Against the Run*, 2019**

At first glance *Against the Run*, a freestanding clock with a restrained modern design sited on a patch of lawn adjacent to the Upper Courtyard, figures seamlessly into the plaza’s built environment. The clock’s unusual feature becomes evident on closer inspection; although its minute and hour hands tell the correct time, the second-hand ticks counterclockwise one beat and then returns to the twelve o’clock position, while the clock’s face rotates to

the left, one fraction every second. This jerky punctuation appears to jostle the entire dial counter-clockwise with each movement of the second hand—quite literally against the run of time.

As a human-made system of measurement, units of time like days, hours, and minutes, are an inescapable aspect of contemporary life, and govern the pace of human activity. In both *Against the Run* and a thematically related series of sculptures,



Against the Run, 2019. Photo: Tim Lloyd.

Zeitzone (*Time Zones*), Kwade questions the basis of metrics that index and quantify time, addressing the peculiar bureaucracies that maintain their global standardization. Time zones, for instance, are strategically hewn along national borders and economic zones to advantage industrial production.

Adherence to "the time" similarly regulates the schedules of urban and industrial workers. While the way we measure time is linear, *Against the Run* suspends the notion of its ever-forward movement, proposing alternate systems of timekeeping.

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Lampe [Lamp], 2016

Ground lamp, epoxy resin, glass, brass
61 × 15¼ × 15¼ in. (155 × 39.5 × 39.5 cm)
Courtesy the artist and König Galerie,
Berlin and London

Computer (PowerMac), 2017

Ground computer, epoxy resin, glass, brass
70¾ × 26½ × 26½ in. (178.8 × 67.2 × 67.2 cm)
Giverny Capital Collection

iPhone, 2017

Ground iPhone, epoxy resin, glass, brass
54¼ × 8⅝ × 8⅝ in. (137.8 × 22 × 22 cm)
Collection Sigurður Gísli Pálmason

Kaminuhr [Mantle Clock], 2017

Ground Kaminuhr [mantle clock], epoxy resin,
glass, brass
76¾ × 14 × 14 in. (194.9 × 35.5 × 35.5 cm)
Private Collection, Reykjavik

Küchenuhr [Kitchen Clock], 2017

Ground Küchenuhr [kitchen clock], epoxy resin,
glass, brass
58⅞ × 15⅝ × 15⅝ in. (148.4 × 40.4 × 40.4 cm)
Courtesy the artist and i8 Gallery, Reykjavik

Linienland II, 2017

Found object, wood, iron, lapis lazuli
Dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist and 303 Gallery, New York

Spiegel [Mirror], 2017

Ground mirror, epoxy resin, glass, brass
64¾ × 15½ × 15½ in. (164.7 × 39.6 × 39.6 cm)
Courtesy the artist and i8 Gallery, Reykjavik

abarchairisabarchairisabarchair, 2018

Wood
73 × 20½ × 18½ in. (185 × 52 × 47 cm)
Courtesy the artist and 303 Gallery, New York

awalkingstickisawalkingstickisawalkingstick, 2018

Wood
72 × 21¾ × 19¾ in. (185 × 55 × 50 cm)
Courtesy the artist and 303 Gallery, New York

aclothestreeisaclothestreeisaclothestree, 2018

Wood
98 × 19¾ × 19¾ in. (250 × 50 × 50 cm)
Courtesy the artist and 303 Gallery, New York

Against the Run, 2019

MIT Collection
Commissioned with MIT Percent-for-Art funds

Fahrrad [Bicycle], 2019

Ground bicycle, epoxy resin, glass
70 × 39⅝ × 39⅝ in. (160 × 100 × 100 cm)
Courtesy the artist and i8 Gallery, Reykjavik

Light Touch of Totality, 2019

Stainless steel, beads, lapis lazuli
181½ × 274 × 203½ in. (461 × 695 × 517 cm)
Courtesy the artist
Commissioned by MIT List Visual Arts Center

Trans-For-Men 11 (Fibonacci), 2019

Mirror, berg crystal, ceramic, sandstone, concrete,
limestone, granite, marble, volcanic stone, bronze,
aluminum, corten steel
38⅞ × 342½ × 26¼ in. (96.8 × 870 × 66.7 cm)
Winsing Arts Foundation, Taiwan

All images ©Alicja Kwade

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Alicja Kwade (b. 1979, Poland) lives and works in Berlin.

Alicja Kwade: In Between Glances is organized by Henriette Huldish, Director of Exhibitions & Curator, MIT List Visual Arts Center.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalog produced in collaboration with Dallas Contemporary. Published and distributed by Mousse Publishing, the book will feature installation photography from both the List Center and Dallas Contemporary solo exhibitions, and contributions by historian of science Jimena Canales and others.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Panel Discussion

Friday, October 18, 2 PM

Visibility of Time

Panelists: Alicja Kwade, Jimena Canales and Taylor Perron

Graduate Student Talk

Thursday, October 24, 6:30 PM

Objects in Mirror

Speaker: Sarah Schwettmann

Sketch Session

Wednesday, November 6, 12:30 PM

Transformation

Graduate Student Talk

Thursday, November 21, 6:30 PM

On Identity, Value and Importance of Counterfactuals

Speaker: Ryan Ravanpak

Sketch Session

Wednesday, December 4, 12:30 PM

Reflection and Reality

Curator Talk

Friday, December 6, 12:30 PM

Materialisms in the work of Alicja Kwade

Speaker: Selby Nimrod, Assistant Curator

All programs are free and open to the public. RSVPs are required.

For more information about these events and to RSVP: listart.mit.edu/events-programs.



MEMBERSHIP

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SPONSORS

Exhibitions at the List Center are made possible with the support of Fotene Demoulas & Tom Coté, Audrey & James Foster, Idee German-Schoenheimer, Joyce Linde, Cynthia & John Reed, and Terry & Rick Stone. In-kind media sponsorship provided by 90.9 WBUR.

Additional funding for *Alicja Kwade: In Between Glances* is provided by VIA Art Fund and Deutschlandjahr USA | Year of German-American Friendship. Year of German-American Friendship is funded by the German Federal Foreign Office, implemented by the Goethe-Institut, and supported by the Federation of German Industries (BDI). Additional support for the exhibition is generously provided by Fotene Demoulas & Tom Coté; 303 Gallery, New York; König Galerie, Berlin and London; and the Polish Cultural Institute New York.

General operating support is provided by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; the Council for the Arts at MIT; Philip S. Khoury, Associate Provost at MIT; the MIT School of Architecture + Planning; the Mass Cultural Council; and many generous individual donors. The Advisory Committee Members of the List Visual Arts Center are gratefully acknowledged.

