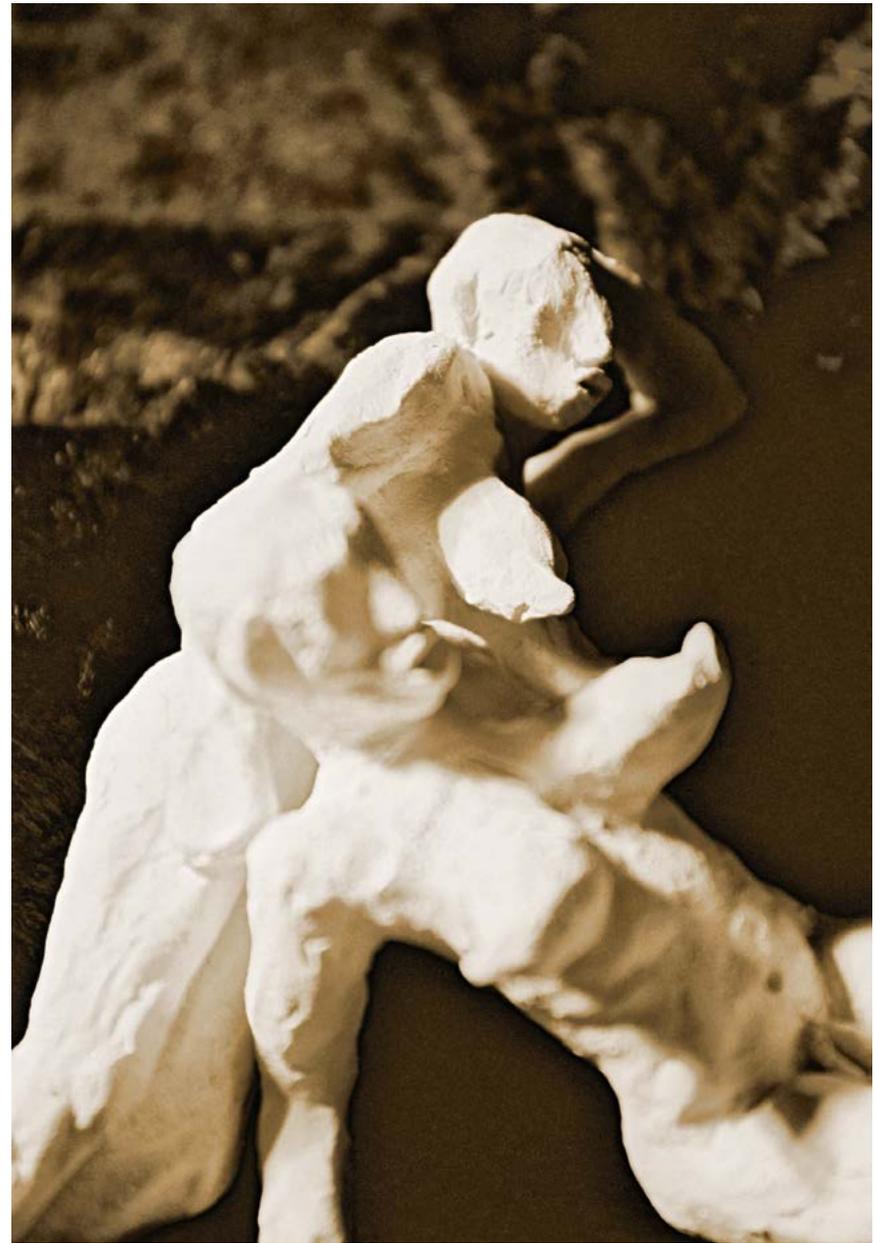


Modell, 1996
Keramik, Fell, Holz, Metall, Plexiglas, 109 × 62 × 144 cm
Ceramic, fur, wood, metal, acrylic glass, 42.91 × 24.40 × 56.69 in.



o. T., 1996
Pigmentdruck auf Papier, 86 × 58 cm
Pigment print on paper, 33.85 × 22.83 in.



Ansicht IV, 1996
Pigmentdruck auf Papier, 63 × 43 cm
Pigment print on paper, 24.80 × 16.92 in.

The Dionysian Order

Jonny Star's Early Installation Work *Weltstadt Berlin* Is a Model of an Artistic Utopia

Ralf Hanselle

“I say to you: one must still have chaos within, in order to give birth to a dancing star.”
Friedrich Nietzsche

At every beginning there is disarray. In this sense artistic careers like Jonny Star's are in no way different from conventional tales told about the creation of worlds. The biblical Genesis calls it the ‘Tohuwabohu’: “In the beginning God created heaven and earth. The earth was void and empty” (hebr. tohu vavohu). Who among us has not already experienced the fear of the ‘horror vacui’ and the chaos of origins? Before mythos can become Logos, it seems we must fight our way through a mountain of confusion, inconclusiveness and fear. Before every cosmos there lies paralysing chaos. Before every entity there is multiplicity.

As a rule, succeeding in building a world from desert disorder gives rise to a greater sense of jubilation. Control over these terrains—laboriously fenced off in creationist feats by means of structural solidifications and fortified forms—will only be relinquished reluctantly. Cultivation is a process that consists in suppression and separation; thus Friedrich Nietzsche already knew to warn against static orders in the world. In his early work he writes: “Apolline consciousness only hid this Dionysiac world from them like a veil”. The chaos therefore remains unimpeded behind the rigidity, the constructions and the encrustations. The cultivated world is never the world in toto. It can only ever be a world among many. In his book *Civilisation and its Discontents*, Sigmund Freud attempted to pin down the implications of this suppressed Dionysian whole by means of psychoanalytic pegs. According to Freud the source of the “present disquiet, unhappiness and anxiety” may be found in human beings' attempts at “controlling the forces of nature”.

‘Unborn stars’ in the Nietzschean sense continue to lurk beyond cultural models, beyond concrete forms and rigid theorisations; and, slumbering alongside them in the cosmos, a relentless fear of the ‘absolutism of reality’. Many generations of artists and critical thinkers have tried to open the rationalists' and the world contrivers' eyes to the realm beyond the bounds of models, images and rational theories. The philosopher Paul Feyerabend, perhaps one of the most vehement critics of a faith in order, wrote: “Show a critical rationalist an object that lies outside of his experience; he cannot make anything of it. He behaves like a dog that has seen its master in an unusual attire. It is unsure; should it bite him, run away or lick his face? This is also the reason why critical rationalists begin to grumble about the limits of science; with them they encounter the end of their faith, and all they can say is: ‘irrational nonsense’.”

Chaos and Structure

Jonny Star's spatial installation *Weltstadt Berlin* (Metropolis Berlin, 1996) constitutes just such an object outside of experience—'irrational nonsense' that however only reveals its 'absurdity' upon second glance. Taken at face value, *Weltstadt Berlin* also bears the mark of rationalism. Working at the time as Gabriele-Maria Scheda, the artist's name at birth, Jonny Star moulded a mixed media installation, made up of 26 clay sculptures, a table topped with a glass showcase and nine large-scale photo prints, into the conventional forms of logical world solidifications. The 109 by 62 centimetre showcase with black-fur lining, in which the artist exhibits her small anthropomorphic sculptures, calls to mind the model boxes used by architects and planners to present their urban visions. With this it becomes a prototype of order—a display case for reason and logic. Jonny Star chose this particular form for her first publicly exhibited work very consciously. Its underlying formal adaptation also impacts on procedure; instead of enlarging the model-based photographic works in an analogue darkroom, a detour was taken via scanning and plotting—a reference to procedures that were usual of architectural practice at the time. Star's first solo exhibition at the Kreuzberg gallery schrotter&engel occasioned her to write that, with *Weltstadt Berlin*, she had wished to set "new architectonic accents"—an antithetical model to the existing, a new order among the familiar.

Jonny Star must have already had the idea for this adaptation in the mid 1990s, when she was working for the Berlin Senate Department for Urban Development. A psychology student at the time, she had been given the task of assembling architectural models and miniatures for competitions, during a time in which Berlin, not long after its reunification, was pursuing its application to host the 2000 Olympic summer games—an application that eventually fell through. Twenty years after this brief interlude in the world of urban planning, Jonny Star recollects: "I was irritated by the stiffness with which the urban planning dossiers were presented".

It is precisely this stiffness that she wished to counteract through her first work. She formed the round shapes of feminine bodies that contrasted with the elongated lines of the technical drawings, opposing the symmetrical rows of houses with the polyphony of the social group. Star's model evidences her decision to avoid all axis-shaped shortcuts to the human; instead, the design for 'Weltstadt Berlin' sets humans themselves centre stage. "I wanted to change the weighting, and balance everything anew. In doing so, it was as if I could momentarily suck the air out of rationality".

Make a 'tabula rasa'—a clean table and an empty board! Back to chaos, to the world before the world! The direction of this almost titanic endeavour is dictated by the form

borrowed from architectonic language; for architecture—a compound made up of the greek words [arché] = beginning, the origin, the first and [techné] = art, craft—was already considered by ancient thinkers to be the very first art form. An art form by means of which a new world may be constructed. The capacity to forge order in the chaos. Could anything have lent itself more readily to Jonny Star's first steps in the art world than precisely this realm of thought?

Her architecture however did not aim to order anything. *Weltstadt Berlin* was an edifice made up of the 'building blocks of chaos' themselves. The artist makes use of the unfamiliar and the absurd, introducing familiar forms only in order to toy with them. This effects an ironic alienation; those who peer into the antics of the display case see a group of female figures, the individual members of which simply sit, without any recognisable order or hierarchy, embracing one another and becoming entwined in erotic games. At the time the artist wrote: "Here, they stretched out, teased, licked, laughed; here, they discussed, observed and guarded". Amid the black fur, the large-breasted, totem-like figures surrender to the course of their emotions, arousals and pleasures. Instead of cool, formal fulfilment, the voyeuristic observer is confronted with unexpected 'pockets of heat'; and it is precisely in this moment that he moves beyond the usual boundaries of thought, becoming the Feyerabendian 'irritated dog'. In a review of *Weltstadt Berlin* Jonny Star stated: "We need intimacy and soul. What we don't need are new buildings or city quarters".

We find the artist's demand reiterated in the large-scale photographs of freestanding figures and groups, created after the completion of the model. The images' indistinct depths drive a new dynamic into the sculptures, their brown, red and sepia tones allowing sensations and warmth to arise. It is almost as if the images could breathe true life and soul into the sculptures that, in reality, remain faceless—as if vitality could replace static stiffness.

I Want to Be Part of a Transformative Motion

Jonny Star's *Weltstadt Berlin* does not want to order chaos; it relies on the order in chaos itself. Her work aims not at structure, but at freedom and play. There are no reinforcements, simply trust in a confusing spectacle of simultaneity, in an almost archaic whole. This architectonic vision evokes a small sense of the chaotic, emancipatory impulses of the avant-gardes. Take Hugo Ball for instance, who, in 1927, wrote the following about the tangled forms in Wassily Kandinsky's paintings: "Every form that protrudes has a place, finds its place in the cosmos. Nothing is suppressed. Everything is allowed to flourish, hover, exist". Around the same time the expressionist poet Jakob

van Hoddis dreamt about an end to old symbols and the beginning of “our urban life as a sensuously transformed contingency”—the end of the world as its own beginning. So away with the veils of structure and symbolic overlays! Away with the nooks and niches! Long live the courage to embrace Dionysian actuality!

This demand has perhaps remained common to all of Jonny Star’s works to date. Over the past twenty years, Jonny Star has tried to fill *Weltstadt Berlin*, the model of a utopian and experimental community, with life. Whether as a curator of group exhibitions, an initiator of art projects such as *Sweet Home* and *Superuschi*, or as an artist: Jonny Star’s work is and always has been about collective experiments, fathoming out realms of experience, and about art that is allowed to emerge from moments and coincidences; for, like Joseph Beuys and her contemporary Jonathan Meese, Jonny Star believes that art possesses a transformative power that may be harnessed for the benefit of societal development. The utopia, brought into the world in 1996 by means of a small model, is therefore not considered to be a Dionysian conglomeration of dreams, or even an unworldly satyr play; the utopia is the very real, permanent deal that plays out in the unions of sculpture and social sculpture, the pictorial and the performance. It is no longer a model, but an environment—a realm in which chaos is in order. A domain opposed to the old officers of structure and the administrators of order. Provocative, mocking—like Paul Feyerabend, who has already been cited above, in his book *Erkenntnis für freie Menschen* (Science in a Free Society): “and we know how much officers and administrators fear upheaval and disorder”.