

Realism and Architecture

Architecture constitutes both means and end for various projections and intentions. Political, social, religious or utopian projects attain their visible public correspondence in buildings, squares, monuments and urban planning. Modern city life organizes itself upon the lines of the built-up structure; the lifestyles of the inhabitants are frequently defined in terms of the possessing and furnishing of real estate, and social hierarchies are mirrored in the residential culture. It is almost impossible to imagine a life without construction and an architectural infrastructure, without a division into representative and everyday architecture. Non-representative aestheticized with a banal, functional character has a decisive influence on extensive aspects of life but scarcely enters into public consciousness, inasmuch as its presence is taken as a matter of course. To the extent that architecture is functionalized and aestheticized, none of its forms can be taken to be innocent or neutral. Again and again there may be found, on the part of both builders and owners, a specific intention which likewise comes to have specific consequences for the utilization of architecture. Those who make use of or reside in cities, business districts, houses or apartments have very little influence upon the appearance and functionality of this architecture. A vividly present magnitude of everyday life is thereby withdrawn from extensive public, and in many cases private control: living spaces simply exist as they are, and city districts arise in organic urban processes or are realized at short notice in accordance with the considerations of urban planning, then are handed over for individual use. Architectural projects dedicated to consumption, the economy or governmental agencies are awarded on the basis of limited competition and are frequently only subjected to public discussion after they have been completed.

It is out of these complex interrelationships that Anna Reinert derives the subjects of her painting. Most of the time she depicts sites which lack all traces of utilization and thereby have no apparent connection to any sort of story. The buildings, spaces and interiors evince a cool and clear appearance like the ideal images of an architectural idea: forms which are beholden only unto themselves, and whose functional aspects may be interpreted solely in formal and aesthetic terms. Reinert presents universal views of façades, apartments, highways or parks. These are places which have neither a national identity nor a relationship to the immediate locality, places of wealth but not necessarily of well-being. The people whom Reinert portrays in some of her pictures have few individual characteristics. They conform to the pattern of an almost interchangeable self-representation. At the same time, the figures

are placed with extreme correctness. Their supposed loneliness and alienation may also be read as self-understanding and deliberate assent. It is easily imaginable that, in other architectural and social situations, they would come into conflict with their environment much more readily than is the case with these pictures. The young and fashionable status of the figures certifies them to be self-aware protagonists within these specific spaces. Reinert depicts the formal severity of this new architecture of affluence, but she also points to the potential of experiencing it on a sensual level.

The pictures are supported much less by an analytical perspective than by a contradictory and subjective relationship to the objects. Hence these works are more fictional than realistic.

The serious confusion between realism and naturalism characterizes many aspects of recent art history. Realism knows too many different forms of expression for it now to be possible to make one simple return to the exclusive reality and hence to that which has long been familiar. Anna Reinert's painterly mode may be read in various ways. It makes reference to the precise and exaggerated representation of the American (photo-)realists such as Robert Bechtle or Richard Estes, who transformed everyday architectural forms into painting. Reinert's manner of painting also stands in contraction, however, to the limited interpretation of an ideology-laden concept of realism which sticks too closely to political or pedagogical guidelines. A picture which makes references to reality is neutral to the same limited extent as reality itself can be neutral. Formal decisions characterize the manner in which it is read, just as does the culture which has produced the represented object. Anna Reinert's painterly perspective presents the contradictory functionalization of modern architecture and of modernistic interiors. Both forms are based upon what are to some extent utopian concepts which, over time, have developed more and more into purely materialistic manifestations. In her paintings, Anna Reinert offers a precise snapshot of the contemporary relationships which exist between the function, form and perception of architecture.

Untitled (Prospect)

Acrylic on Board
55 x 67in/140 x 170 cm
2004