

ASTA GRÖTING



Fassade (2019)
Installation in Wax
85 x 70 x 5 cm

The Archaeological Metaphor

I am working on the assumption that our psychical mechanism has come into being by a process of stratification: the material present in the form of memory traces being subject from time to time to a re-arrangement in accordance with fresh circumstances – to a re-transcription. Thus what is essentially new about my theory is the thesis that memory is present not once but several times over.

[Sigmund Freud Letter to Wilhelm Fliess, December 6 1896]

Moving on from her long association with ventriloquism in which the hollow doll became an instrument to explore the awkward, perhaps shameful feelings we cannot easily voice to each other, Gröting now gives her attention to the inner voice of the holes, scars and histories transcribed on the architectural surfaces of buildings in her city.

How do these memory traces speak to us and how do we speak to them? It is certain that my conversation will be very different from your conversation.

The uncanny installations that make up BERLIN FACADES resemble a sculptural, slow- exposure photograph, pushing through the 20th century into the 21st in one simultaneous moment.

Where were we then; where are we now?

In a bold conceptual strike, Gröting embodies /embalms both trauma and time in a ghostly silicone skin. It is a forensic procedure. Peeling off these memory traces resembles the taking of fingerprints after a crime has been committed. My eyes stare in to the bullet and canon holes and the holes stare right back in to my own psychic holes. In Gröting's words: "I want to look from inside these destroyed walls and facades into the world – as if I could see my own face staring back at me."

Gröting's ongoing sculptural conversation between interiors and exteriors across a number of media, her absolute preoccupation with the ways in which the invisible can technically be rendered visible – (a task usually pursued by poets) – makes her uniquely placed to land inside these cracked, pierced, damaged walls.

As I stand before these facades, re-transcribed by Gröting in silicone, how am I being invited to read their expression and repression? I am reminded that the function of skin is to protect my body from damage. Furthermore, if skin can access my mood and physical state, it can also bring to the surface any number of turbulent emotions –the historical and personal represented in visible marks and traces. This is why most of us give a great deal of attention to concealing our own facades. Let me tell you that every time I type the word- facade – (also meaning a deceptive outward appearance), my spell- check changes this word to *face* – a blunt, literal robo -correction, but it is not incorrect. A facade is the face of a building.

There is in English the phrase to be *stony faced* (literally, to have the face of a stone) – meaning to reveal nothing of our inner thoughts, to show no emotion. Yet, as we know, our facades do eventually crumble, and when that happens, we are unmasked to reveal our concealed histories.

To return to Freud's archeological metaphor, in which with great care and patience, the buried "objects" of the past are gradually uncovered and brought to the surface,

it would seem that Gröting, in re-transcribing these historical and architectural memory traces (blurring, smudging, smearing still intact) has excavated both past and present, conserving and reconstructing our relations to them.

[Deborah Levy (2016)]

BIO

Asta Gröting (born in Herford, Germany, in 1961) is a contemporary artist. She works in a variety of media like sculpture, performance, and video. Her work has been shown in solo exhibitions at KINDL - Centre for Contemporary Art Berlin, the Kunstraum Dornbirn, the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, the LENTOS Art Museum in Linz, and the Henry Moore Sculpture Institute, among others. She has also participated in international group exhibitions at venues including the Maas Museum in Sydney, the German Hygiene Museum in Dresden, the Hartware Medienkunstverein Dortmund, and the 22nd Bienal de São Paulo. Gröting's works often present ordinary, familiar elements, where the viewer's attention is drawn towards their material transformation, caused by the exaggeration of the familiar. In Gröting's work there is a focus on what is not visible, like the inner voice, the space between lovers having sex, the digestive system, or the inside of holes made by bullets, and the ways in which the invisible can be brought to the surface. She is currently a professor at the Braunschweig University of Art.