



Now You *See It*

With boulders
and tree trunks
as her subjects
and mirrors
as her tool,
ALICJA KWADE
manipulates our
perception of
time and space.

Words
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Mark Blower, courtesy of Alicja Kwade and Hayward Gallery

BORN IN KATOWICE, Poland, in 1979 and now living and working in Berlin, artist Alicja Kwade speaks of her muse as the 'blank space, the not-knowing and not-understanding'. In an effort to acknowledge 'nothingness as real', she offers us 'sculptural attempts at understanding'.

Cerebral and curious, Kwade makes art that grows out of incessant questioning and research, activities that serve as a trampoline-like point of departure. Her pieces require observation from diverse vantage points and ask viewers to shift gears as they navigate around or through a spatial framework within which materials seem to transform before their eyes. Indeed, Kwade is something of a poetic manipulator and a sceptical magician. An example is her juxtaposition of an ordinary boulder and its silvery opposite in a philosopher's stone arrangement that employs mirrors as an alchemic device.

Kwade's highly acclaimed installation, *WeltenLinie*, featured in last year's Venice Biennale and is on show until 6 January 2019 as part of the Hayward Gallery's Space Shifters exhibition.

Your installation, *WeltenLinie*, greeted visitors to 303 Gallery's stand at the FIAC in Paris last October. In this perception-shifting work, certain elements appear or disappear as our viewpoint changes. What does the title mean, and what were you exploring? ALICJA KWADE: The title refers to the movement of an object in a certain space at a certain time by means of a certain power it's been given. It's about what an object can do. All my work is about the information and transformation of an object

ALICJA



OPPOSITE Kwade always endeavours to create site-specific works. According to the artist, *WeltenLinie* (2017) became 'even more confusing and unreal' due to the absence of spatial references when shown at Hayward Gallery.

BELOW 'Revealing the simple transformation of the information expressed in a natural product', *Trans-For-Men 8 (Fibonacci)* (2018) comprises eight variations of a 3D-scanned rock.

in time. I'm trying to figure out what we believe reality is, who's saying what reality is, how our senses are limiting us, and how a different viewpoint can shift what we think objective reality is. Objective reality is not really objective, because it's always down to the viewer's subjective interpretation.

This particular piece is about a transition between industrial, man-made objects and natural objects, and about how seeing a tree from different viewpoints can create an illusion of industrial columns. I'm questioning what a tree is and what sort of information we have about it; I know its material and shape, but what do I know about the border between the object and the space around it? The objects seem to bleed into one another as you move around the installation. The marble ball echoes the pattern of the wood before your eyes shift to the concrete cast and then to the aluminium cylinder. The piece displaces your perception of and knowledge about an object, such as how copper transforms into the green tree, which relates to the oxidization process. Each element has an informative

partner. The piece is like a picture, but when you change your physical viewpoint, the whole picture changes.

How would you describe the function of the mirrors? I'm not using mirrors as mirrors in and of themselves. Mirrors are an overly displayed element in modern art, but here they're a tool. The objects are doing what the mirrors do, as they are reflected copies of each other. The mirrors are recurring objects that double the reflections and disappear again. They're set very precisely in the space and divide it into parts. When people move around *WeltenLinie*, it's as if the mirrors appear and disappear, which is quite disorientating.

How does the architecture of a space affect how you conceive a piece? I'm still thinking of *WeltenLinie*, which was included in last year's Venice Biennale and is currently part of the Hayward Gallery's Space Shifters exhibition. I always try to develop something for the specific architecture of the space. In Venice, people had to walk through »



Photographed in her Berlin studio, Kwade creates installations that demand to be viewed from various vantage points.





‘You don’t have to go to outer space to imagine the unimaginable’

the piece; they couldn’t go around it. I was quite surprised when I saw it at the Hayward Gallery, because it reads like another piece. In London it becomes even more confusing and unreal, because you have no spatial references, whereas in Venice you had windows and columns.

What is your motivation when playing with perception and perspectives? It’s about imagining the unimaginable. You don’t have to go to outer space to do that. It’s absurd enough to imagine that right now we’re sitting on a rotating sphere. I’ve always been interested in trying to understand things that I don’t have the tools to understand. In my art, I try to explain and describe such ideas to myself and to illustrate what I’m *not* understanding. My research takes different

directions as I look into the agreements among experts – the people who decide whether something has value or meaning – before I go forward to create art. I do a lot of reading about how philosophers deal with certain issues. Right now I’m reading *The Invisible Gorilla: How Our Intuitions Deceive Us* by Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons, but I’m mainly interested in the parts that are relevant to me. I feel that all my work is a learning process; I’m learning from one piece to another.

For your exhibition at the Espoo Museum of Modern Art in Finland, you were commissioned to make a piece titled *Trans-for-Men*. What can you tell us about it?

I wanted to show how things are built through natural processes. I found a rock



Kwade made *TunnelTeller* (2018) for Castle Hill on the Crane Estate in Ipswich, Massachusetts. The work is only display through April 2019.



'Like most of my works,' says Kwade, 'TunnelTeller invites observers to shift their points of view.' The installation focuses on 'scaling down dimensions into little vignettes'.

that I had 3D-scanned and made eight variations of it, keeping the original volume and positioning the eight objects in a row. I gradually reduced my treatment of the rocks, beginning with a perfect sphere that becomes increasingly faceted as the eye moves from left to right. The final rock is an octahedron. The work reveals the simple transformation of the information expressed in a natural product.

Another recent piece, 88 Seconds, is also about transformation. How did you make it? I spun a silver ring on a mapped floor space and filmed the spinning ring with four cameras for 88 seconds, capturing the entirety of its rotational movements. Using a computer, I could see exactly where the ring had been in the space at any given moment. Then I made 3D models and physical models, which culminated in a tangle of circles that represent the object's movement. It reminds me of Eadweard Muybridge's motion photography.

TunnelTeller, a site-specific installation in the form of a maze, features concrete walls, stainless-steel tubes and spheres made of azul macaubas quartzite. How

did you engage with the environment you encountered in Ipswich, Massachusetts? My design for this very beautiful and impressive forested site allows visitors to see sky, grass and trees, but never the whole picture. It blocks the overall view while guiding the eye to glimpses of what can be perceived as everyday reality. *TunnelTeller* is about scaling down dimensions into little vignettes. Kids wriggle through the tubes and crawl into holes in the concrete. Looking through the installation, you're rewarded with a different slice of the site – or even the impression of being in a different universe. Like most of my works, *TunnelTeller* invites observers to shift their points of view. ●

Out of Ousia, Kwade's first solo exhibition in Denmark, is on show at the Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, until 17 February 2019
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