

Alexandra Schumacher at Vero Linzmeier Galerie

A spiral staircase, bolted between floor and ceiling, can be climbed by viewers. From there, they have an elevated view of the space. The staircase is the central motif of Alexandra Schumacher's exhibition at Vero Linzmeier Galerie in Berlin's Charlottenburg neighborhood. Seen through the front window, it beckons with an illusionistic, continuously ascending spiral motion. But those who follow this impulse and climb to the top, just beneath the ceiling, quickly experience the disillusionment of upward mobility. "What goes up must come down." This saying is played out again and again in the individual elements of the installation that fills the space, in the form of upward or helical motions. These appear in a sculpture's fanned-out scraps of wood, in a furniture-like object with spiral ends, in a photograph showing a spiral staircase in a local courthouse, and in a film.

This recurring motif can certainly be linked to a social phenomenon, the aspiration to great happiness. Maximum escalation—spiraling upward, rising above—is seen as an infallible guarantee on the quest for that happiness, for success and social affirmation. This pattern appears in architecture as well, and yet it is merely a social concept given form.

In Charlottenburg it is perfectly possible to read the maxim "What goes up must come down" ironically. Between fancy boutiques, Porsche Cayennes and the bourgeois establishment, the artist has placed an installation that presents social advancement as a form of adaptation to reality. Beside the freestanding staircase, pieces of furniture, photographs and electronic devices are piled up into an almost architectural installation that deliberately incorporates objects reminiscent of bourgeois domestic environments, such as a ceiling lamp from the 1950s or the custom-made furniture-like wooden object mentioned above.

In responding to the gallery's spatial circumstances and location, Alexandra Schumacher has skillfully blurred the hierarchies between the work of art and its architectural setting. With the space renovated into a sales floor, the objects within it can also be read as accessories from the real world we live in, presented here for purchase. Yet by building her unorthodox, grotesque tower, the artist places herself squarely at odds with convention. At the same time, the disconcerting presentation of the spiral staircase in front of the gallery window touches on the decorative, sales-oriented displays of the neighboring businesses. Schumacher can do display too, like with the photos neatly hung on the wall in their dark brown frames—but the installations they depict, variations on the one in the gallery, constitute a rejection of the establishment in all its forms.

Text: Anne Fäser