

# Art Review:

October 2010

The German sculptor Charlotte Posenenske (1930–85) was dogmatic in enunciating the social and political aims of her work. ‘The objects should have the objective character of industrial products’, she wrote in a 1968 manifesto, and in pursuit of a proletarian ideal of the equal value of labour, she designed her sculptures in modular units to be mass-produced and sold at cost to purchasers she called ‘activists’. These latter were free to arrange the objects at will, becoming equal partners in the creative process. Thus, while her forms resembling galvanised steel ductwork and folded plastic document covers reflect her exposure to Minimalism, they are, more cogently, products of her interest in mass production and her desire to subvert class-based criteria like authorship and authenticity. Value, for Posenenske, lay in the process, not the object; her intent was to democratise the aesthetic.

These sociopolitical convictions, and Posenenske’s distrust of the power dynamics behind traditional art exhibitions – despairing of art’s ability to effect meaningful social change, she threw it over in 1968 to study assembly-line labour – make it very tricky to present her work in ways which avoid fetishising its authorship and conceptual thrust. Presentation becomes even more difficult in a venue like Artists Space, a sleek downtown loft which channels a high-end design aesthetic based on an industrial past – a kind of visual taste which might be the unanticipated consequence of work like Posenenske’s. (These difficulties stand apart from the contradictions inherent to art meant to render itself superfluous, or the conceptual conundrum posed by the role of individual aesthetic choice in the consumption of pieces intended to engender equality.)

The venue’s solution was to invite three artists, Ei Arakawa, Rirkrit Tiravanija and a third billed as TBA, who turned out to be the institution’s staff, to reinstall the exhibition at two-week intervals. The first two artists work in ways which share, in a superficial manner, Posenenske’s social and participatory ethos, and choosing them appears obvious for that very reason. Indeed, the very idea of a ‘curatorial selection’ of ‘artists’ asked to reinstall work designed to subvert the traditional value relationships implied by those very words seems insensitive, if not antithetical, to Posenenske’s philosophy.

Tiravanija’s intervention was symptomatic. By installing her units on dollies equipped with brightly coloured pads, he struck a rather decorative note. And in laying out lines of bright tape to suggest traffic patterns along which visitors might push the works – that is, by providing ‘directions’ for public engagement, ones more aesthetically keyed than industrially determined – he further compromised Posenenske’s belief in viewer-activated work.

The staff’s classically spare arrangement, which highlighted discrete objects, also seemed driven by aesthetic considerations and so divorced the work from any hint of its industrial origins, despite the occasional surface scuff or fingerprint. Perhaps it’s inevitable that Posenenske’s attempts at radical engagement have become historic artefacts, but the transformation seems to bespeak an inability of those who are touted as innovative thinkers to actually think radically while engaging with it.

*Joshua Mack*

## Charlotte Posenenske

Artists Space, New York

23 June – 15 August



*Series D Vierkantrohre (Square Tubes), 1967, configured by Stefan Kalmár, 23 June - 5 July (installation view). Photo: Daniel Pérez*

# Art Review:

Issue 44 £5.00

'The piece truly kicks in when audiences accept the absurd premise that I am a local Ghanaian' - Doug Fishbone

October 2010

Lars Laumann:  
Clairvoyant  
pop stars,  
love affairs  
with the  
Berlin Wall  
and other  
marginalia

Santiago:  
We go off  
in search of  
Chile's art  
and meet  
'El Che  
Guevara Gay'

Dance, Dance,  
Dance:  
Why are our  
art galleries  
showing so  
much of it?

Moving into  
Movies:  
Is it because  
artists now  
prefer to make  
feature films?



the **LONDON** issue