



Lena Henke

Lena Henke, (b. 1982, Warburg, Germany), is a New York-based artist who has developed a diverse body of sculptural works, often arranged in comprehensive spatial installations. Her interest in spaces is not limited to presentation or intervention in existing architecture; it is also revealed in a broader sense in the appropriation of objects, urban situations, and psychological spatial constellations. Recurring motifs include interventions into the classic working methods of sculpture, recourse to anthroposophical methods, often through a biographically motivated approach or the control of “architecture”. In her vocabulary of forms and materials, numerous references such as Minimalism or Land Art can be found, which she likes to combine with surrealist motifs. In a subtle way and with a humorous undertone, Henke enjoys infiltrating the patriarchal structures of art history. She explores the ideas of urban planners, landscape architects, and urban theorists such as Jane Jacobs, Roberto Burle Marx, and Robert Moses. She takes up themes like interpersonal relationships, sexuality, and fetishism. Using strategies of intervention, appropriation, and control, the artist also examines her relationship with herself and her family environment.

Lena Henke has exhibited at the Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen, Germany (2019); Whitney Museum of Art, New York, (2018); Bard Hessel Museum, New York, (2018); Kunstmuseum Luzern, Switzerland, (2018); Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt am Main, Germany, (2017); Sprengel Museum, Hannover, Germany (2017); Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit, USA, (2017); Timisoara Contemporary Art Biennale, Romania, (2017); S.A.L.T.S., Basel, Switzerland, (2016), Kunstverein Braunschweig, Braunschweig, Germany, (2016); Manifesta 11, Zurich, (2016); The 9th; Berlin Biennale, Berlin, Germany (2016); Le Biennale de MONTREAL, Montreal, Canada, (2016); Kunstverein Braunschweig, Braunschweig, Germany (2016); Triennale of Small Scale Sculpture, Fellbach, Germany (2016); The New Museums Triennial, New Museum, New York, (2015); Socrates Sculpture Park, New York, (2015); New Museum, New York (2015); Kunsthalle Bern, Bern, Switzerland (2014); White Flag Projects, St. Louis, USA, (2014); Sculpture Museum Glaskasten, Marl, Germany, (2014); Kuenstlerhaus Graz, Graz, Austria (2014); Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, USA, (2013); Kunstverein Aachen, Germany (2012), among other.

In 2019 Henke received the RUBENSFÖRDERPREIS der Stadt SIEGEN and the Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen held a survey exhibition of Lena Henke’s work, summarizing the past ten years of her practice. In the same year, Henke was awarded the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant.



TIRES / MOVE, 2024 (detail)



Exhibition view *Lena Henke: You and your vim*,
Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, USA, 2023 | Photo Daniel Pérez



Exhibition view *Lena Henke: You and your vim*,
Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, USA, 2023 | Photo Daniel Pérez



Exhibition view *Lena Henke: You and your vim*,
Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, USA, 2023 | Photo Daniel Pérez



Exhibition view *Lena Henke: Good Year* at
Marta Herford, Herford, Germany, 2023 | Photo Gunnar Meier www.pedrocera.com



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Every one of my buildings begins with an Italian journey (Kaffee), 2022

The mind is like an umbrella Its most useful when open (Saftpresse), 2022

Better be old iron than new tin (Mixer), 2022

Form Follows Feminine (Kueche), 2022

PU-foam, pigment, rubber | dimensions variable



Lena Henke is one of the successful international artists of her generation. She tests the conditions and possibilities of sculpture with technically innovative methods of production. At the same time, she expands the range of meaning of traditional sculpture by incorporating questions of femaleness and the production of power relations in urban space. The possibilities of plastic art and sculpture serve Henke as a basis for understanding the molding (and casting) of bodies as a changeable process of design. Thus, in groups of works like *Hoooves*, *Boobs*, and *Sand Bodies*, the process by which the work becomes a work finds representation; motifs of memesis link up with motifs of phantasmagoria; and it becomes apparent that the artist does not take her bearings from ideal conceptions but designs her sculptural figures to match her subjective mental images. In doing so, she not only engages the myth of masculinity; she also works with the strands of historical tradition—the questions of pedestal and space—to interrogate the logic of sculptural representation and representability.

She holds the reins with great self-assurance, controlling the representation of women's bodies and the symbolic power of horses and intervening in the mechanisms of urban architecture. It is Henke's far-reaching reflections on the capacity of the sculptural that enable her, conversely, to grasp urbanity as a historically evolved sculpture, whose social mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion can be altered and redefined by means of targeted interventions. Thus, Henke relocated the entrances to her solo exhibitions (at the Kunstverein Braunschweig and Dortmunder Kunstverein) and intervened, with her street signs, in the psychology of existing urban structures (most recently in Siegen). Operating this side of social and architectural power structures, Henke's works open up a highly pleasurable imaginative space in which the sculptural itself expands to encompass feminist and biographical perspectives and thus acquires a new topicality.

Installation view *Babysteps into Masochism* at LAYR, Vienna, 2020



Installation view *Babysteps into Masochism* at LAYR, Vienna, 2020



Installation view *Babysteps into Masochism* at LAYR, Vienna, 2020





Installation view *Ice to Gas* at Pedro Cera Gallery, Lisbon, 2020



Installation view *Ice to Gas*
at Pedro Cera Gallery, Lisbon, 2020

**Lena Henke Sculpts the Surreal From the Mundane
Frieze, 2020
Bárbara Borges de Campos**

At the heart of Lena Henke's solo exhibition, 'Ice to Gas', at Galeria Pedro Cera, is *The Holy Trinity or Three Points in Time* (all works 2020), a large installation mirroring a surreal family constellation. Comprised of a utility pole (her father), a yellow Hills Hoist outdoor drying rack (her mother) and a rust-hued sculpture of a toddler (Henke as a child), the three elements are interconnected by various elastic cords or what the artist refers to in an interview accompanying the show as 'lifelines'. The infant's right leg has been substituted by an inverted Chrysler Building, while her left arm has morphed into a horse's hoof.

These chimerical embodiments of the artist's autobiography and childhood memories have appeared in earlier works, such as *City Lights (Dead Horse Bay)* (2016) – a bronze cast of the Manhattan skyline in the shape of a horse's head. Here, however, with its allusion to Christian symbolism, *The Holy Trinity or Three Points in Time* mythologizes Henke's family as a collation of urban idols; reliquaries for the artist's reimagined memories.

In the second gallery, the equestrian motif resonates in a series of ceramic hooves displayed on orange plinths. Inspired by Lisbon's 18th-century Águas Livres Aqueduct, these supports anchor the installation to its location. Likewise, the sculptures' titles (e.g. *Water Doesn't Run and Water, a Luxury Object*) hint at the city's reliance on water, while the untitled series of blue-painted wall tiles references the Portuguese ceramic tradition of azulejo. Two mirrors placed at either end of the installation serve to magnify its length illusorily, creating a synonymous effect to Henke's credo in the show's accompanying text: 'Fuck with my perspective, transmogrify my nostalgia.' Informed by the artist's biography and her desire to reimagine the architecture of cities, 'Ice to Gas' casts the surreal in the mundane.



Installation view *Ice to Gas* at Pedro Cera Gallery, Lisbon, 2020



Installation view *Ice to Gas* at Pedro Cera Gallery, Lisbon, 2020



Installation view *Fate of a Cell* at Andreas Melas, Athens, 2020



2019, 2020
glazed ceramic
70 (d) × 5 cm



NOW, 2020
glazed ceramic
70 (d) × 5 cm



Installation view *Frieze Sculpture 2020* at Rockefeller Center, New York, 2020



Installation view *My Fetish Years* at Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Germany, 2019



Installation view *My Fetish Years* at Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Germany, 2019



Installation view *My Fetish Years*
at Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Germany, 2019



Installation view *My Fetish Years* at Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Germany, 2019



Installation view *My Fetish Years* at Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Germany, 2019



Installation view *My Fetish Years* at Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Germany, 2019



Installation view *My Fetish Years* at Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Germany, 2019

Installation view *My Fetish Years* at Museum für
Gegenwartskunst, Germany, 2019





Installation view *My Fetish Years* at Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Germany, 2019



UR Mutter, 2019
foam, plaster
132 × 213 × 140 cm



UR Tritt (forton), 2019

forton

28 x 20 x 20 cm



Installation view *Germanic Artifacts* at Bortolami, New York, 2019



Der Doppelgänger, 2019

forton, pigment

11 parts, each: 56 × 40,6 × 18 cm



Kerben, 2019
soldered leather
56 × 71 cm



Tochter, 2019

chainmail, twine, resin, pigment

95 × 188 × 152,5 cm

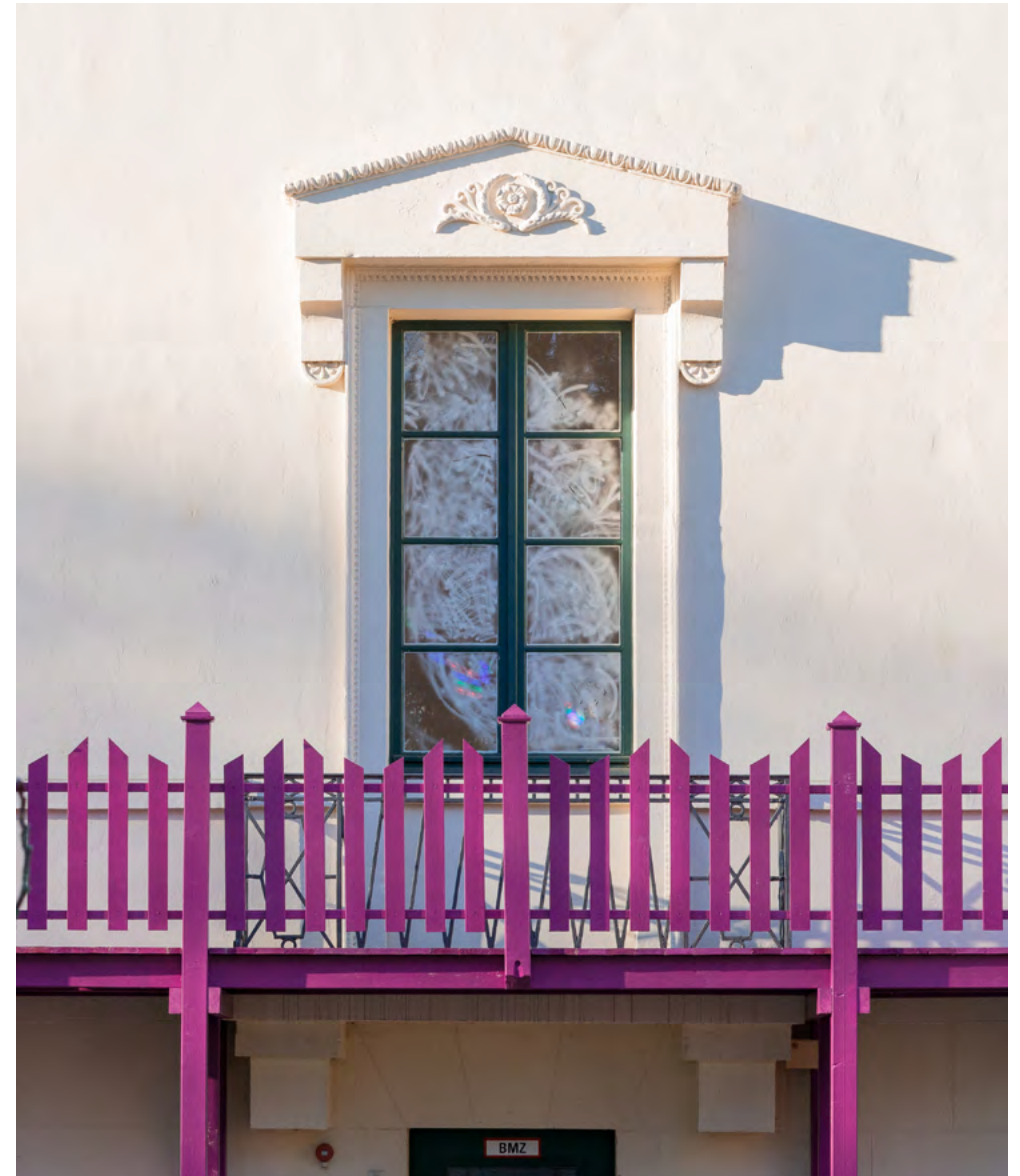
Casting Call: Lena Henke's Sculptures Propose New Manners of Dwelling and Co-Existence

Frieze, 2018

Laura McLean-Ferris

When a garment – let's say a shirt – seems to overpower a person, the insult goes: 'That shirt is wearing you.' This light put-down describes a struggle for presence between the wearer and the worn. But what other objects are wearing you, dominating you, casting you to work for them? The sculptures of New York-based German artist Lena Henke are typified by an apprehension of site and occupancy and the quiet tug-of-war between personality and control. Ranging from table-top models of cities and buildings through human-scale sculptures to larger architectural interventions in public space, Henke's work proposes a built environment that might suit her better.

The artist displays a particular fondness for outdoor sculpture, the history of urban planning and natural-artificial features such as the grotto. She wrangles with the materials, designs, palette and tools that construct our fabricated environment, employing them to suggest other possibilities. Why do we have to live in a world that looks and feels like this one? It's a question Henke has explored most directly in relation to the city of New York, where she relocated after completing her studies at the Städelschule in Frankfurt. Coincidentally, she arrived in the city at the same time as I did, in 2013. I've never perceived anywhere as completely fabricated as New York: whenever I walk near the intersection of Broadway and Lafayette Avenue, the landscape reminds me of a film set, an entirely constructed surface with shallow roots, populated by character actors.



Installation view *Available Light* at Kunstverein Braunschweig,
Braunschweig, Germany, 2016

In her recent works, Henke has taken on New York by placing her own body in direct relation to its urban structures, playing with the relative scales of bodies and buildings and evincing psychological turf wars between the city and the self. In a series of sculptures titled 'Female Fatigue' (2015), pared-down metal models representing landmark Manhattan buildings – such as the Chelsea Hotel (*Your Chelsea Hotel*) and the New Museum (*Their New Museum*) – are occupied by moulded-sand sculptures of reclining, statuesque women, outsized in relation to their environments so that they take up around half the floor-space. Though this is certainly a kind of battle for occupation, the large bodies are not positioned aggressively, as in the sci-fi film *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (1958), but in restful belonging. Titles such as *My Crane Collapse on 57th Street* (2015) also humorously hint at the way New Yorkers colloquially claim sites through naturalizing language: my deli, my UPS guy, my subway stop. Elsewhere, Henke has entirely redrawn the city as an unstable psychogeography, re-organizing its landmarks around her own memories, fantasies and propositional works. The map *Dead Horse Bay* (2015) reconfigures New York as a horse's head, in which the 'Female Fatigue' buildings loom larger than life on the landscape. The screaming head of *Orcus* (Ogre, c.1550), a cave-like stone sculpture by Simone Moschino from the Pirro Ligorio-designed Gardens of Bomarzo in Italy, has been transplanted to Harlem, as an open hellmouth into the city. Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970) is, in Henke's vision, installed close to the Chelsea Piers. For the artist's 2016 solo exhibition at Kunstverein Braunschweig, she showed the related bronze sculpture, *City Lights* (*Dead Horse Bay*) (2016), transforming the map into an architectural model. Miniature versions of earlier works appear in the piece, including one of the full-sized water tower that she created for her 2016 exhibition at SALTS, Birsfelden: 'My History of Flow'.

The surrealist and mannerist histories in Henke's sculptures suggest a psychological treatment of architecture and space. Yet, if the bodies in this work are the repressed returning, they come back with a gently subversive attitude – for example, in the form of a lone female breast. Soft hills of sculpted-sand breasts were installed around a private garden in Basel in 2017 for Henke's contribution to the art Basel Parcours programme, together with industrial sandbags from which the moulded shapes of female body parts – legs, breasts and buttocks – emerged. There is an undercurrent of violence in these sculptures of female bodies in bags. But breasts summon softness, warmth and nourishment, too: the generous shape can seem gently witty, especially in isolation (*Boob*, 2017), or highly sexualized. The sand breasts, delicate as sandcastles, are often exhibited with their moulds, such as in the 'Milkdrunk' series (2017), in which various





Split, 2016

glazed clay

46 × 43 × 20 cm

coloured casts are hung on the wall, bound with rubber bands, conferring a sadomasochistic quality. While the moulds suggest a potentially endless supply of breasts – a production line of female body parts – this interpretation is complicated by its associations with the intimacies of childbirth and feeding.

For a competition to propose a large sculpture for the High Line in new York last year, Henke submitted a design for a towering, sculpted-sand breast that, vulnerable to the weather, would require constant remaking and maintenance. The High Line, a former train line turned park, was originally designed by Robert Moses, the legendary new York City planner immortalized in Robert Caro's biography *The Power Broker* (1974). Moses took a radical approach, carving up the city, as he himself put it, with a 'meat axe', in order to build his bridges, tunnels and parks. The Brooklyn-Queens expressway (BQE), close to Henke's studio, is also the work of Moses: an aggressive line sliced out of the city that upsets the logic of the pedestrian neighbourhood beneath in order to allow cars to speed overhead. Moses acts as a simultaneous icon and nemesis for the artist: in some ways, Henke's ambitions for sculpture aspire to the work of the radical planner; yet, her practice also critiques his brutal approach. New York was shaped by men like Moses, and the construction of roads, bridges and big buildings – which influence movement, behaviour and consciousness – has, so far, been mostly the work of men. Henke's breast sculptures appear as objects of desublimation: the return of soft, protective forms that have been suppressed in the building of the city.

For a 2016 exhibition at Real Fine Arts in New York, 'Heartbreak Highway', Henke dedicated small sculptural doll houses in the shape of horses' hooves to the former inhabitants of the area who had been displaced by the BQE.

Henke placed these works on Lazy Susans, which were treated like dining tables. The installation map for the exhibition showed a different person's name every 90 degrees: an imagined family from a former world sitting down to dinner. The horse-hoof houses, another surrealist part-object, make reference to Dead Horse Bay, an area of South Brooklyn where the bones of dead carriage horses would be ground and boiled down to make glue. Today, the beach is known for the mid-century trash that still washes up there, leaking from Moses's sand and rubbish landfill to connect a small landmass, named Barren Island, to the rest of Brooklyn. Henke collected some of the old glass jars and bottles that had washed up on the shore of Dead Horse Bay and built houses out of cardboard for those, too. as the clinking of antique glass jars can be heard on the seashore, the dead return as bodies, hooves, breasts and effluvia.

More recently, the artist's reconstitution of objects as bodies within her own narrative universe can be thought of in relation to the work of Giorgio de Chirico, echoing his approach to living in the world 'as in an immense museum of strange things'. De Chirico often painted human bodies as though they were assembled from architectural elements, wearing parts of the city like garments: in *The Painter's Family* (1926), for example, a neoclassical arch supports the heart while skyscrapers burst forth from the solar plexus. Henke drives such formal concerns through an attentiveness to late modern sculpture, which she playfully appropriates. Like De Chirico, Henke has created abstracted portraits of her family and others using sculptural objects and architectural elements. In 'Yes, I'm Pregnant' – an exhibition and comic-book publication, shown at Skulpturenmuseum Glaskasten Marl in 2014 – Henke shot a teen 'photo love story' using outdoor sculptures by artists including Hans Arp, Paul Derkes and Marino Marini. The plot

featured a young girl (a sculpture of a woman by Marini) who falls in love with Paul (a bronze horse by Derkes) and becomes pregnant. Removed from their pedestals, these sculptures by noted male artists are dragged into the sphere of teenage romance. The comic strip was accompanied by a selection of smaller sculptures from the museum's collection, including works by Ewald Mataré and Eduardo Paolozzi, chosen to represent members of the artist's family. These were installed according to the psycho-spatial principles of German psychotherapist Bert Hellinger's family constellations therapeutic method. In both these works, Henke asserts her authority to act as a casting agent. The term 'casting' has its origins in sculpture, referring to the creation of a form using a mould. Henke's work in casting and recasting is to reform through character.



Aldo Rossi's Sleeping Elephant, 2018

steel, fiberglass, rubber, paint

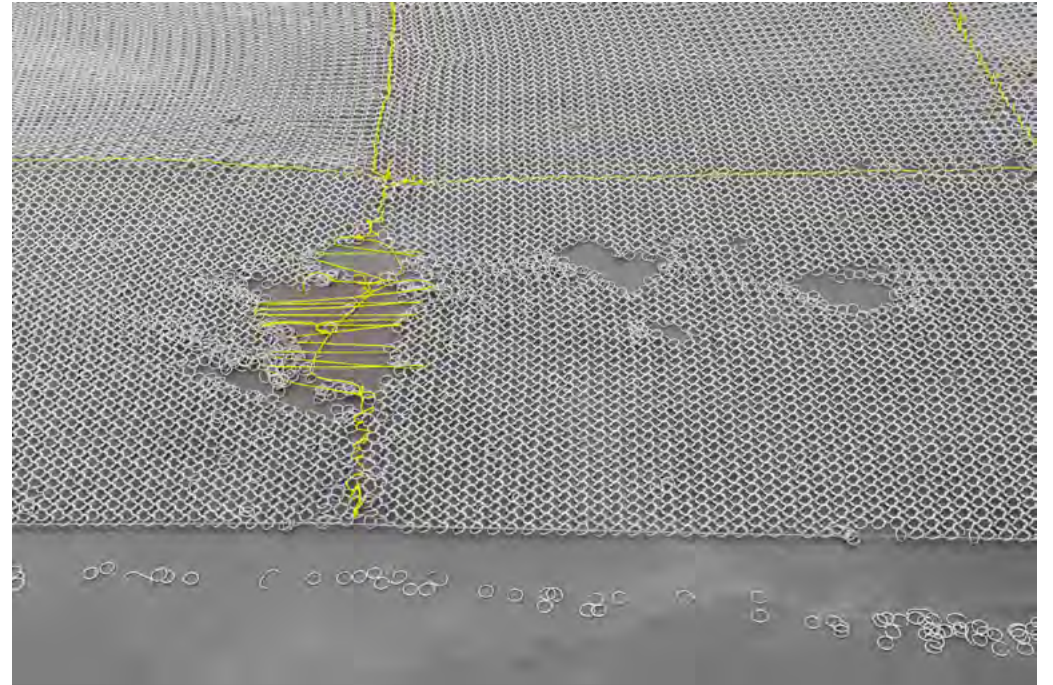
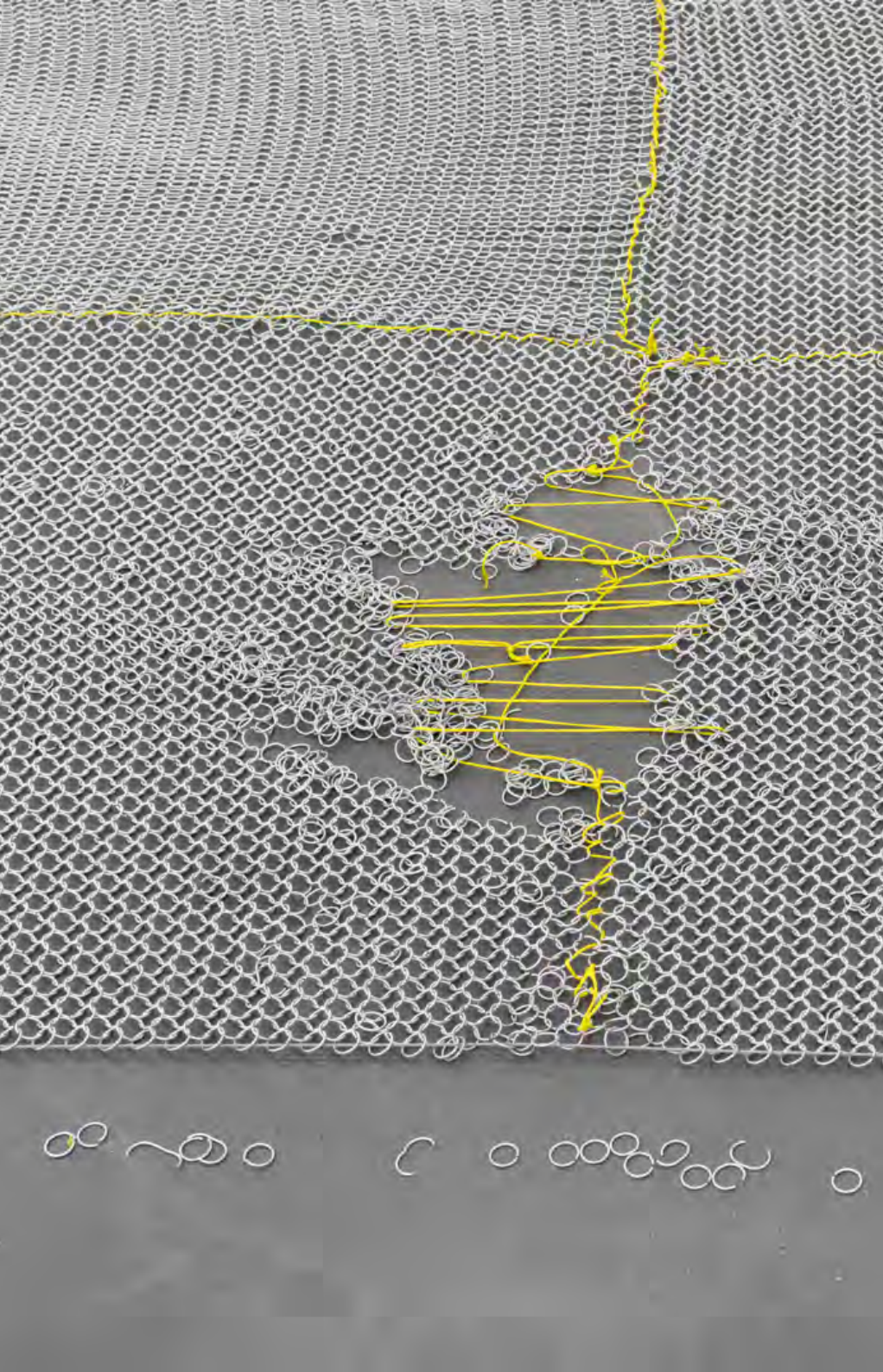
220 × 220 × 70 cm



For the artist's current solo show at Kunsthalle Zürich, purple silicone copies of the family sculptures originally exhibited at the Sprengel Museum Hannover (*The Coming*, 2017) were left out in the sunlight to bleach. In Zürich, these faded icons occupy indoor shelves designed to suggest architectural bodies in the style of De Chirico. The biggest work on display is a kinetic sculpture that, replicating the movements of heavy construction machinery, sets in motion a number of large fibreglass sculptures. These are amalgams of Henke's own sculptural forms as well as those of architects, urban designers and artists including Moses, Robert Morris and Aldo Rossi. A horse's hoof, a sleeping elephant and an 'endless knee' – echoing the shape of a woman's crossed legs – are covered in the kind of rubber granulates used to surface tennis courts. Henke, considering the Kunsthalle as a total machine, has installed a mechanized pulley system in the walls of the exhibition space, which drags chainmail over the sculptures. Abrasive and damaging, the movement causes some of the works to be pulled across the floor, while a second shelf of doubles, or 'extras', awaits its turn. Reappropriating the title of Blinky Palermo's 1976 series, 'To the People of New York City', Henke's exhibition, 'An Idea of Late German Sculpture: To the People of New York', adroitly unites the artist's reconstitution of the European sculpture garden with her interest in the psycho-surreal damage wrought on individuals in her adopted city, where the armour of character acts as an everyday costume. As if transporting the shapes of the city's subconscious from subterranean to the everyday, the show aims to desubliminate fantasies, cruelties and delirium, and observe them at ground level.



Installation view *An Idea of Late German Sculpture; To the People of New York, 2018* at Kunsthalle Zürich, Switzerland, 2018



Vulnerable in the Moment of Control, 2018

chainmail, cord, stel, wire, motor

600 × 1200 cm



Installation view *An Idea of Late German Sculpture; To the People of New York*, 2018 at Kunsthalle Zürich, Switzerland, 2018



Robert Moses Mother Drives Through Wallis, 2018

plaster, fiberglass, rubber, paint

200 × 170 × 180 cm (each)





Installation view *An Idea of Late German Sculpture; To the People of New York*, 2018 at Kunsthalle Zürich, Switzerland, 2018



**Lena Henke: Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt
ARTFORUM, June 2017
Vivien Trommer**

Lena Henke has made a walk-in artwork out of the rotunda, a space neither interior nor exterior, illuminated by the light from an approximately sixty-five-foot-tall glass dome. A sculptor by heart, Henke works with the architecture to make the crowds passing through—often to reach the cathedral from old town—aware of the typically overlooked space, interrupting their flow and diverting their attention.

Two oval-shaped glossy aluminum boxes, in the tradition of Donald Judd's specific objects, stand in the pathways, blocking the two opposing entrances. From the mezzanine one story above, grains of dry sand trickle through the rolling grilles that have replaced four floor-to-ceiling windows and down to lower floors, landing on the sculptures or on the heads of passersby. Looking up, visitors find men walking on piles of the sand, constantly pushing heaps through the grids' holes. Like Carl Andre's *Grave*, 1967, for which he poured a bag of sand down a stairwell, Henke's work speaks about gravity, evanescence, and the devolution of sculpture. A material fundamental to bronze casting, sand, as it functions in Henke's work, shape-shifts while forming the artwork. Seen from the mezzanines above, the two aluminum boxes on the ground floor become stand-ins for eyes and the architecture's columns form a skeleton, and it becomes apparent that Henke has transformed the rotunda into a giant sculpture of a head.

In homage to architect Luis Barragán, magnificent pink, blue, and yellow hues mark the rotunda's walls and columns. Throughout the day, these delicate tones take on beautiful shades in a compelling public intervention that engages light, form, and color.



Installation view *Schrei mich nicht an, Krieger!* at Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, Germany, 2017



Installation view *Schrei mich nicht an, Krieger!* at Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, Germany, 2017



Installation view *Available Light* at Kunstverein Braunschweig, Germany, 2016



City Lights (Dead Horse Bay), 2016

bronze, painted wood

105 × 125 × 65 cm

A Sculptor Grapples With Robert Moses' Brutal Urbanism
Bloomberg CityLab, December 2016
Laura Bliss

In 1936, Robert Moses gave a 30-day eviction notice to the people of Brooklyn's Barren Island: A bridge would be built where their homes stood. Protests did not prevail. Over the years, the remains of their bulldozed homes, and of other New York "slums" cleared by the controversial parks-commissioner-turned-chief-of-all-construction, were deposited into a shoreline landfill called Dead Horse Bay.

Moses planned to turn that landfill into green space. But in the 1950s, its flimsy topsoil cap burst, baring to the sea the detritus of all those condemned New Yorkers: roller skates, tooth brushes, newspapers, doll houses, thousands of bottles. To this day, Dead Horse Bay is lined with that ephemera. In the shadow of Marine Park Bridge, it's become a place of urban lore, and a magnet for collectors and artists.

Lena Henke, a German sculptor and painter based part-time in New York City, regularly picks the sands of Dead Horse Bay. The ghostly, ocean-worn toys and containers fascinate her—as does the brutal, visionary force that put them there. "[Moses] was so radical," Henke says in a new short documentary produced by the Swiss Institute, a contemporary art museum in New York. "He wasn't really interested in people. He was more interested in movement."

Henke's art—exhibited at recent biennials and triennials in Berlin, Montreal, and New York—explores Dead Horse Bay and Moses' urbanist legacy by inflecting individual-scale objects with infrastructure-scale ideas. A series of ceramic horse hooves evoke modes of architecture and transportation: In one show, called "Heartbreak Highway," hooves are shaped around plastic jugs cut with tiny, dollhouse-like windows; in another, mangled hooves become the wheels of a 1950s sedan. An installation in Basel, Switzerland featured walls dripping with water from an custom-built rooftop water tower, flooding miniature ceramic

buildings and newsprint slumped on the floor. Henke has also made maps that transpose bulging human veins and animal body parts into New York's urban outline.

Moses's radical, top-down plans often seemed to ignore the human costs. He rescaled the city's infrastructure with a "meat ax" (his words), to the detriment of many poor New Yorkers—and to the great benefit of others. His legacy is still greatly felt in New York City's roads, bridges, parks, and public housing, and it still performs a complicated dance. "People loved him and hated him. I love and hate him," Henke says in the film. "He created this blueprint for New York, and I think this is what I'm so interested in."



City Lights (Dead Horse Bay), 2016
detail



Installation view *My History of Flow* at SALTS, Basel, Switzerland 2016



A Sculptor Grapples With Robert Moses' Brutal Urbanism
Bloomberg CityLab, December 2016
Laura Bliss

Lena Henke has developed a diverse body of sculptural works, often arranged in comprehensive spatial installations. Henke's work references urban planning, Land Art, human relationships, sexuality and fetishism, consistently infiltrating the patriarchal structure of art history with a very smart and humorous tone. Her formal language and use of materials often alludes to Minimal Art combined vividly with Surrealist imagery.

For her first solo-show in Switzerland the artist has created a completely new body of work inspired by research into two separate systems of architecture and utility. The first, a catalogue of utopic outdoor sites since the 16th century—some of which still exist, others forgotten or never realized. The second, an extensive look into New York's water shed system and the flow of water from the Catskills to the five boroughs. Henke has crafted her vision of their combination and reproduced New York's famous skyline symbol, the water tank as well as various smaller ceramic sculptures.

The research into these systems was conducted during vast field trips across Europe and the US. Henke and curator Anna Goetz followed the tracks of artists pursuing radical approaches to garden and landscape planning far off from urban structures as reference.

Water is the central element of the show, changing the interior and exterior architecture of SALTS' exhibition space into a comprehensive immersive sculpture. An actual-size wooden water tank sits on top of a massive plinth-like cube between urban courtyard and wild garden.

Installation view *My History of Flow* at SALTS,
Basel, Switzerland 2016

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With a simple, but consequent spatial intervention Henke tilted the inside of the space as well as the water tank at an angle of four-degrees. The sloped floor and the tilted back wall force the water to flow through the space, puddling at the low points until a threshold is reached and the water can return outside. Formally, Henke has consciously altered the inside space to be in direct contrast with the lush garden. The result is an extremely artificial aesthetic where white ceiling, walls and floor seemingly merge into the mist.

The water used in the show is a direct reference to the historic water supply system of the Basel (which manifests throughout the city with majestic fountains). Henke connected the water tank to the nearby river Birs. The water is lead from the river up through the garden, into the water tank and from there, downwards into the exhibition space. Inside, colourful ceramic lily pads are loosely arranged on the wet floor and walls. The mulberry glazed ceramic object is a miniature of Pier Francesco Orsini, *Leaning House*, 1552. Although it may not be clear at first, Henke's *Mulberry House after Orsini* is the only thing in the show that stands straight.

Orsini's sculptural garden projects didn't use urban architecture as reference. In Henke's constructed system, space is just as confusing. The monumental and the miniature are mixed up. Henke's *Mulberry House after Orsini* seems to be the focal point for this confusion. Each LilyPad after Roberto Burle Marx enormous when compared with the miniaturized *Leaning House*. In turn, the perception of space changes from small to large when the *Mulberry House after Orsini* is in view. SALTS' outside venue is a small exhibition space but a large plinth from the New York water tower.



Mulberry House after Orsini, 2016

glazed ceramic
48 × 37 × 77 cm



Installation view *My History of Flow* at SALTS, Basel, Switzerland 2016



Installation view *My History of Flow* at SALTS, Basel, Switzerland 2016



Installation view *My History of Flow* at SALTS, Basel, Switzerland 2016



Lena Henke
Art in America, April 2016
Sam Korman

During his long tenure, New York urban planner Robert Moses built 658 parks and playgrounds; 416 miles of roads, parkways, and expressways; and thirteen bridges. He brokered construction deals for the United Nations. He cleared slums and built new ones in their place. He is the reason the public can access Long Island's shoreline, and the reason that its residential areas were systematically segregated. As Robert Caro argues in his biography *The Power Broker*, Moses was to New York what Mussolini was to Milan, except the former wielded a dictatorial authority within a democratic society. Lena Henke's exhibition "Heartbreak Highway" took its name from a common epithet for Moses's infamous Cross Bronx Expressway, which he constructed—like he built the rest of contemporary New York—by devastating tens of thousands of its citizens' homes.

Arranged throughout the gallery were sculptures that each combine one or more ceramic horse hooves with forms related, however loosely, to daily urban commutes or city life in general. *Split* (all works 2016) features a pair of lifelike hooves, the hollow interior cavities of which house plastic milk jugs. Henke cut a handle or a window from what appears to be the remnant of animal bone extending from the right hoof and made a matching opening in the plastic bottle. Quizzically eliciting both pastoral and urban associations, the pieces resemble elegant birdhouses, tiny skyscrapers, and even Charles Simonds's micro-ruins of the 1970s. The realistic hooves also grotesquely conjure the animals from which they appear to have been excised.

Other works more directly incorporate architectural elements or references to transportation. *New Colossus* encases a milk jug, again cut with a "window," within a hoof encrusted with lumpy miniature bricks.



Henke built a wall at the front of the gallery to display most of the ceramics, which sat in alcoves atop lazy Susans. Giving these devices a spin added some physical humor to the experience. Yet, like the surreal sculptures themselves, the installation included a macabre and ironic castration joke: the horse's libidinal, locomotive energy was tamed, channeled into a clumsy spinning machine.

Two works featuring steel gates similar to those found at horse ranches

accompanied the hooves. Where the streets have two names spanned the gallery's back wall. The right side of this gate is ornamented with a crude horse head rendered in fiberglass-saturated rope. The left side is decorated with an abstract knot in the same material. Positioned immediately next to the gallery's door, Gridlock Sam and his partner is a single bright-red swinging gate entwined with more fiberglass rope. These structures clung unnaturally to the walls (from what do they bar entry?) creating an awkward and unbalanced empty space in the gallery.

As a map that accompanied the exhibition revealed, Henke devised her own idiosyncratic curatorial system. The map showed a vector line labeled "Ruth" connecting Where the streets have two names to dooms day rooms (the hoof-and-stoplight sculpture). Other lines connecting the gates to various sculptures on the map had different names suggesting a bygone America—"Doris," "Eugene," "Liberty," and "Ada." It required a significant mental leap to truly inhabit Henke's personalized spatial system. At the very least, the map invoked some logic—like Moses's macho slice-and-dice of various communities—applied absurdly to the familiar white cube.

The gallery is adjacent to another Moses project, the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, and Henke's wall was installed in a way that blocked the view of the highway through the gallery's window. If the show's connection to city life was more oblique than literal, the whirl of cars audible inside the space conveyed one way that the gallery is affected by the city planner's automotive byways. In New York, there's no hiding from Moses's influence, but Henke orchestrates a psychic space in which the urban planner served as a kind of repressive ego. In her comic, surreal, sadistic, and perverse sculptures, she revives portions of the city's communal id.



Installation view *Heartbreak Highway* at Real Fine Arts, New York, 2016



Installation view *Heartbreak Highway* at Real Fine Arts, New York, 2016



Lena Henke: Abstraction turned impossibly concrete
Frieze, May 2013
Pablo Larios

‘Mass-produced products that are cheaper and better than those manufactured by hand’ declared Walter Gropius in his 1925 manifesto *Grundsätze der Bauhausproduktion (Principles of Bauhaus Production, 1926)*. Today, that phrase would not be out of place in an IKEA business report. History has not always been kind to the aesthetic programmes of the last century, falling victim as they did to dogma or commodification or cliché. It’s in the latter spirit that those very ‘isms’ – Minimalism in particular – find form in Lena Henke’s sculptures: as material artifacts alive to social and historical associations, mostly dead to their origins,

tarnished (or liberated) by the fact of their passing through actual history. Her sculptures are the product of what occurs between the original manifesto and the design brochure.

Disjunctions between idea and realization are often points of departure for the German-born artist’s works. Her austere plinth-like objects and plywood panels – with circular segments removed – in *Core, Cut, Care* (2012), shown at Kunstverein Oldenburg last year, evinced stiff Minimalist trademarks: rigid, silent tombstone-like objects, placed throughout a room or leaning against a wall and covered in tar, epoxy, or roofing felt. But hung on these were framed, upside-down photographs, mostly jittery one-offs, of man-made objects in outdoor settings colliding with urbanized nature: scaffolding bent around a tree, a candy-cane shaped bush hanging off a pink embankment at Christmas time.

Henke is no purist, juxtaposing iconography that is self-consciously ‘natural’ and ‘man-made’. Her sculptures seem to gleefully riff on and undermine textbook art historical categories, a fact perhaps most clear in her show *She Said Something Like Don’t Let Me Walk the Stairs Again I Said But You Live There*, featuring a row of eight translucent plastic rectangular prisms, printed with hazy, primeval-looking figures and mounted at urinal-divider height along the wall of Brooklyn’s Real Fine Arts in 2012. The figures – seemingly dancing in a circle as if on a classical Greek urn – were actually sourced by Henke from photographs of sculptures by the Norwegian artist Gustav Vigeland (1869–1943). The chunky, innocent brawn of Vigeland’s forms – here, green and tarnished – was counterbalanced by the gelatinous clarity of the plastic encasements that – folds exposed – looked conspicuously like the clear plastic on cigarette cartons (further proof: a matchbook graced the exhibition invite).



Installation view *One step away from further Hell* at Vilma Gold, London, 2015



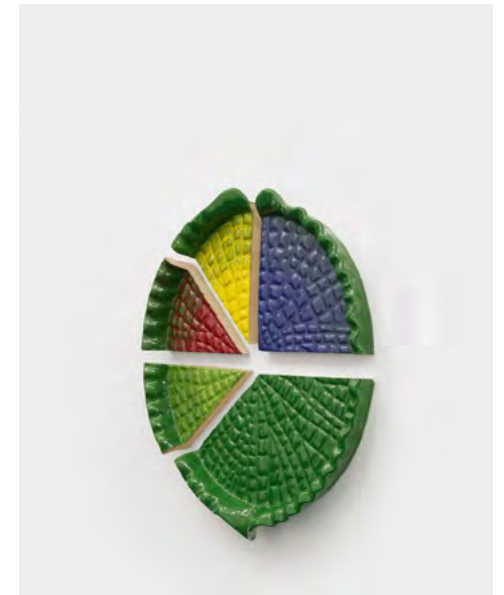
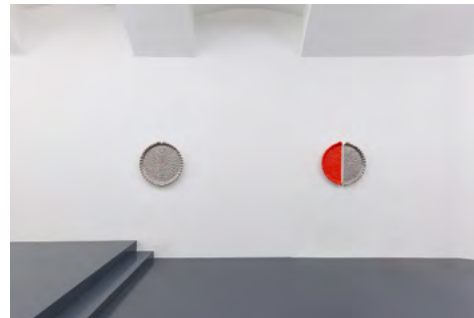
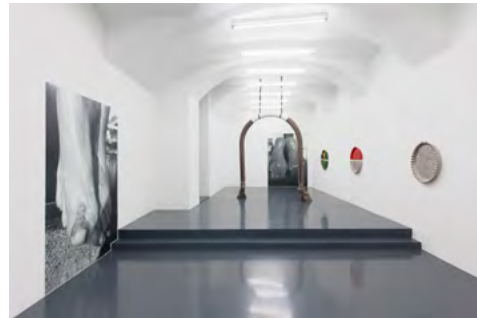
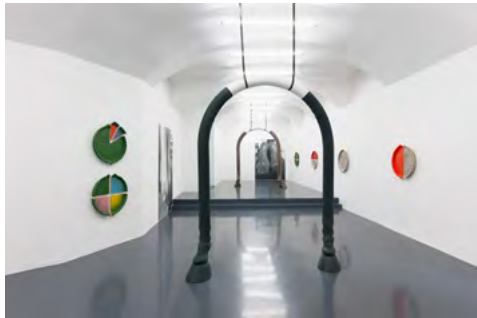
One might call this a reified timeline – art history refracted by its material housing. But to express this would be to ignore the refreshing interplay between fluid, faceless forms pitted against the near-transparent, cut-and-dry formats of everyday, serialized experience (boxes, cigarettes, urinals).

It's no wonder that Henke lives between New York and Frankfurt (where she studied under Michael Krebber at the Städelschule), given that both cities, though at different 'Mascales, contain radical extremes of everyday grit and moneyed posturing. Looking at her works is like looking at a MoMA poster on a bus shelter: vivid and once-earnest, but by now key-scratched and defaced. Likewise, the

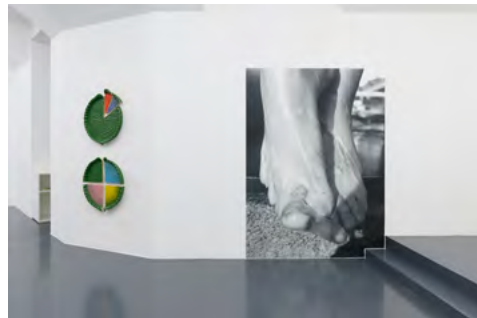
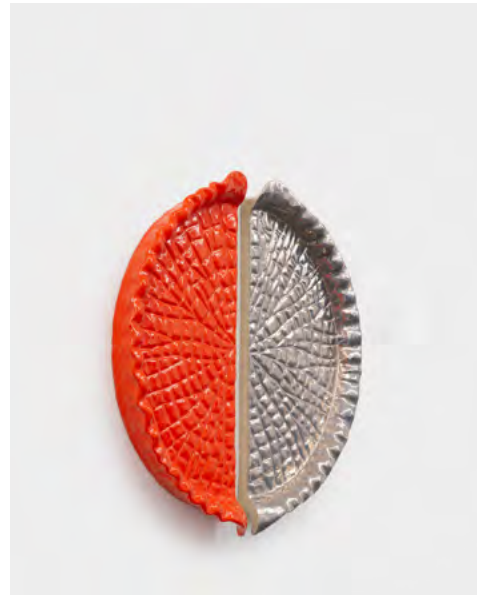
works' most immediate effect is their heavy antagonistic force: scenes of blocked passageways or covered-up signage, like the blank, sparse planes from *Core, Cut, Care*. These opposing impulses (heaviness and levity, colour and whitewash, abstraction and reference) are often pitted against each other in the same piece: take the saddle-like blobs in *Schlangen im Stahl* (Snakes in the Stable), shown at 2011 at Galerie Parisa Kind in Frankfurt. Abstract, molded fiberglass forms, looking somewhat like plastic bags or tarpaulin, recalling horse saddles frozen in motion, though improbably balancing on consumer goods like men's deodorant and tobacco tins.

In Henke's first institutional solo show, *Hang Harder*, at the Neuer Aachener Kunstverein in 2012, a series of wooden panels, layered over with tar and epoxy resin, rested atop basic folding steel chairs which were turned against the wall. Tar is used in industrial settings both to solidify and to cover up a surface – to naturalize it and neutralize it, in a way. But, as Henke mentions in a conversation with Judith Hopf, recently published in *Mousse*, tar was an indirect way of channeling Richard Serra. Indeed, it's hard, when looking at these works, given the duplicity between absolute black and tar's uneasy sheen, to see past the reference to the intractable figure's almost tyrannical brand of Minimalism – channeled in Henke's pieces comically placed atop chairs used for their ease of removal.

Henke's works are often about confusing the literal and figurative senses of a phrase, taking a principle to its contradictory limit point: abstraction turned impossibly concrete, and Minimalism pushed to its maximal extreme. Of course, it takes a deliberate cynicism to see this – a cynicism not foreign to Henke's deliberately stiff, hardened objects. It's the quandary shared by logicians and the insane that the most mapped-out arguments, like artistic movements, when taken rigidly, often collapse into contradiction.



Yes, I'm pregnant!, 2014
artist magazine, 9 pages
published by Kunststiftung NRW



Yes, I'm pregnant!, 2014
artist magazine, 9 pages
published by Kunststiftung NRW



Loukanikos; Kanellos; Thodoris; 2014

MegaFineArt-Print on Hahnemühle PhotoRag Baryta
90 × 120 cm (each)



Middle part, 2014 and Relief V, 2014

one tone of sand, chainmail,
variable dimensions



Installation view *Love of Technology* at MOCA | Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, USA, 2013

Lena Henke
Born in Warburg, Germany, 1982
Lives and works in New York

Education

2010 Academy of Fine Arts, Städelschule, Frankfurt am Main
Meisterschülerin of Michael Krebber
2004-10 Academy of Fine Arts, Städelschule, Frankfurt am Main
Contemporary Art, class of Prof. Michael Krebber
2008-09 Master of Fine Art Multidisciplinary, Glasgow School of Art
Scotland, as an Erasmus scholarship holder

Solo Exhibitions and Two Person Exhibition (selection)

2026 Saltus Sinafisi Artist Residency, Saltus, Italy
2025 *Inverted Roofs*, Pedro Cera, Lisbon
Exploding Plastic Inevitable, ARCH, Athens
The City Transformed, 55 Walker (Bortolami), New York
Horizontale & Vertikale Skulptur, Galerie Thomas Schulte, Berlin,
Germany
2024 *Dark Glasses*, Layr, Vienna
2023 *Lena Henke: You and your vim*, Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, USA
Lena Henke: Good Year, Marta Herford Museum for Art, Herford,
Germany
Nature wills it, The Ranch, Montauk, New York
2022 *Auf dem Asphalt botanisieren gehen*, Klosterfelde Edition, Berlin
Aldo Rossi's Sleeping Elephant, Carlone Contemporary, Belvedere
Museum, Vienna
2020 *Babysteps into Masochism*, Galerie Emanuel Layr, Vienna

Ice to Gas, Pedro Cera, Lisbon
2019 *My Fetish Years*, Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen, Germany
Germanic Artifacts, Bortolami, New York
2018 *THEMOVE*, Galerie Emanuel Layr, Vienna
Embrassade, Galerie Fons Welters, Amsterdam
An Idea of Late German Sculpture; To the People of New York, 2018,
Kunsthalle Zürich, Switzerland
2017 *Schrei mich nicht an, Krieger!*, Kunsthalle Schirn, Frankfurt am Main,
Germany
2016 *Available Light*, Kunstverein Braunschweig, Germany
My History of Flow, S.A.L.T.S., Basel, Switzerland
Heartbreak Highway, Real Fine Arts, New York
2015 *Hellweg*, Dortmunder Kunstverein, Germany
One step away from further hell – Lena Henke / Marie Karlberg, Vilma
Gold, London
Looking at you, (revised) again – Lena Henke / Max Brand, Off Vendome,
New York
2014 *Die*, Galerie Parisa Kind, Frankfurt am Main, Germany
Yes, I'm pregnant, Skulpturenmuseum Glaskasten Marl, Germany
GEBURT UND FAMILIE, White Flag Projects, St. Louis, USA
2013 *From one artist to another*, Nassauischer Kunstverein Wiesbaden,
Germany
2012 *SHE SAID SOMETHING LIKE ...*, Real Fine Arts, New York
Core, Cut, Care, Kunstverein Oldenburg, Germany
Hang Harder, Neuer Aachener Kunstverein, Germany
H.H. Bennett, Lena Henke and Cars – Lena Henke / H.H. Bennett, 1857,
Olso
2011 *Schlangen im Stall*, Galerie Parisa Kind, Frankfurt am Main, Germany
2010 *WIR ÜBER UNS!*, Neue Alte Brücke, Frankfurt am Main, Germany
Scandinavian Blonde, Galerie Station Mousonturm, Frankfurt am Main,
Germany

2009	<i>FIRE, WATER, ICE</i> , Opelvillen, Zentrum für Kunst, Rüsselsheim, Germany <i>you have four eyes</i> , V8 Platform, Karlsruhe, Germany	2023	Group Show curated by Sandra Teitge, Gallery Weekend Festival, Studio Mondial, Germany
	Group Exhibitions (selection)	2022	<i>Apple Red Cranberry House</i> , Bortolami Gallery, New York, NY <i>hyper (hyper)</i> , Callirrhoë, Athen <i>OPEN</i> , Heidi Horten Collection, Vienna <i>Zusammen Zeichnen - 201 Cadavres Exquis</i> , Museum im Bellpark, Kriens, Switzerland <i>Identity not proven</i> , Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn, Germany <i>Looking Through the Threshold</i> , Carlier Gebauer, Berlin <i>Standing</i> , Carlier Gebauer, Berlin <i>Seed Disturbances</i> , Klosterfelde Edition, Berlin
2026	<i>25 Years, 25 Works, The collections of the MGKSiegen</i> , Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen, Siegen, Germany <i>CARE MATTERS</i> , Albertina Museum, Vienna <i>Animalia. On Animals and Humans</i> , Heidi Horten Museum, Vienna	2021	<i>Homesick</i> , Shivers Only, Paris <i>Kernophoroi - The Bearers</i> , ARCH, Athens <i>Lichtenfels Sculpture</i> , Friedersbach, Austria <i>I Think I Look More like the Chrysler Building</i> , Vleeshal Center for Contemporary Art, Middleburg, Netherlands <i>Friend of a Friend</i> , Wschód, Warsaw, Poland
2025	<i>Rotation</i> , Galerie Thomas Schulte, Berlin, Germany <i>Cette Mer qui nous entoure</i> , Passerelle Centre d'art contemporain, Brest, France <i>New and Old Friends - Acquisitions and Donations to the Marta Collection</i> , Museum MARTa Herford, Herford, Germany <i>Outdoors</i> , Kunstverein Wiesen, Wiesen, Germany <i>It's Just a Matter of Time</i> , Deutsche Bank Collection in Dialogue, Palais Populaire, Berlin	2020	<i>Frieze Sculpture</i> , Rockefeller Center, New York Andreas Melas & Helena Papadopoulos Gallery, Athens
2024	<i>All about the Vessel</i> , Kunstquartier, Gmunden, Austria <i>Our Porcelain Thoughts</i> , Drei, Cologne, Germany <i>Skulptur Projekte Stockholm</i> , Beau Travail, Stockholm <i>Light Sound Senses</i> , Heidi Horten Collection, Vienna <i>Deep Distance Tender Touch</i> , Kunst- und Kulturstiftung Opelvillen Rüsselsheim, Rüsselsheim, Germany <i>Surrogates</i> , with Alexandra Bircken & Richard Avedon, Philipp Pflug Contemporary, Frankfurt, Germany <i>Dreams of an Owl, Who the Bær and the Wounded Planet</i> , Kunsthalle Bielefeld, Germany <i>Everything but the Kitchen Sink</i> , Galerie Thomas Schulte, Berlin <i>The Way We Are</i> , Weserburg Museum für moderne Kunst, Bremen, Germany	2019	<i>L'homme qui marche</i> , Kunsthalle Bielefeld, Germany <i>Diplomacy</i> , Yeh Art Gallery, St. John's University, Queens, USA <i>Tiny Hands</i> , Sommer Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv <i>Delirious</i> , Lustwarande '19, Fundament Foundation, Tillburg, Netherlands <i>Abstract, Representational, and so forth</i> , Gladstone Gallery, New York
		2018	<i>The Invitational</i> , 346 Spadina Ave, Toronto, Canada <i>Positioner</i> , Matthew Marks Gallery, Los Angeles <i>Ab Auf Die Insel!</i> , Kunstmuseum Luzern, Switzerland <i>In and Out of Place</i> , Bard Hessel Museum of Art, New York <i>Between the Waters</i> , Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
		2017	<i>Galocher</i> , Bortolami, New York

	<i>Art Basel Parcours</i> , Basel, Switzerland		<i>One After One</i> , Vilma Gold, London
	<i>Scamming</i> , Palazzo Lancia, Turin, Italy		<i>On Thomas Baryle</i> , The Artist's Institute, New York
	<i>No Eyes Dry</i> , One and J Gallery, Seoul, Korea	2012	<i>If I had eight hours ...</i> , Kunst Raum Riehen, Basel, Switzerland
	<i>Art Encounters Biennale</i> , Timișoara, Romania	2011	<i>KW69 #3</i> , curated by Judith Hopf, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin
	<i>in awe</i> , Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna		Kunststudentinnen und Kunststudenten stellen aus, Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn, Germany
	<i>Made in Germany III</i> , Sprengel Museum, Hannover, Germany		<i>Another Romance</i> , The 2010 New Wight Biennial, UCLA, Los Angeles, USA
	<i>99 Cents or Less</i> , Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, Detroit, USA	2010	<i>Geschmacksverstärker</i> , Absolventenausstellung 2010 der Städelschule, MMK Zollamt, Frankfurt am Main, Germany
2016	<i>Hütti</i> , MINI/Goethe-Institut Curatorial Residencies Ludlow 38, New York		<i>Placed in the Heat of the Night</i> , Förderpreis 2010, Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster, Germany
	<i>Le Grand Balcon</i> , La Biennale de Montréal, Canada	2009	<i>Übermorgenkünstler</i> , Kunstverein Heidelberg, Heidelberg, Germany
	<i>WHAT PEOPLE DO FOR MONEY: SOME JOINT VENTURES</i> , Manifesta 11, Zurich, Switzerland		Peeping Tom, CCA, Glasgow
	<i>Kaufman Repetto</i> , Milan, Italy	2008	<i>frankfurt good wood</i> , HOLD & FREIGHT Gallery, London
	<i>Garden Show</i> , Regards, Chicago, USA		<i>Hotel Marienbad 002: Sammlung Rausch</i> , KW Institute for Contemporary Art Berlin, Berlin
	<i>9th Berlin Biennale</i> , Berlin		
	<i>FOOD – Ecologies of the Everyday</i> , 13th Fellbach Small Sculpture Triennial, Stuttgart, Germany		Publication and Catalogues
2015	National Gallery II, Empire, Chewdays, London		
	<i>Emerging Artist Fellowship Exhibition</i> , Socrates Sculpture Park, Queens, USA		
	<i>Triennial: Surround Audience</i> , New Museum, New York		
	<i>The problem today is not the other but the self</i> , Ludlow 38, New York		
	<i>Please Respond</i> , M/L Artspace, Venice, Italy		
2014	<i>...Revelry</i> , Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland	2023	<i>Lena Henke: P7340LH. Owner's Manual Model '82/2023</i> , Spector Books, Leipzig, Germany, 2023
	<i>Skulptur, Reflexion</i> , Kuenstlerhaus Graz, Austria	2022	<i>I Don't Love Berlin, Crazy City</i> , Buchhandlung Walter König, Cologne Germany, 2022
	<i>Bloomington</i> , Bortolami Gallery, New York	2020	<i>Lena Henke: My Fetish Years</i> , Spector Books, Leipzig, Germany, 2020
	<i>Warm Math</i> , Balice Hertling Gallery, New York	2017	<i>Lena Henke: Schrei mich nicht an, Krieger!</i> , VfmK Verlag für moderne Kunst, Vienna, 2017
	<i>DAS GESAMTSEXWERK</i> , M/L Artspace, New York	2015	<i>Lena Henke 2010-2015</i> , Verlag Kettler, Dortmund, Germany, 2015
2013	<i>Love of Technology</i> , MOCA, North Miami, USA		
	<i>Freak Out</i> , Greene Naftali Gallery, New York		
	<i>Köln Skulptur #7</i> , Skulpturenpark Köln, Köln, Germany		

2012 *First Faces*, Mousse Publishing, Milan, Italy, 2012
Yes, I'm Pregnant!, Kunststiftung NRW, Düsseldorf, Germany, 2012

Public Collections

Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland
Kunsthalle Bielefeld, Germany
MAMCO Museum, Geneva, Switzerland
Sammlung Verbund, Wien, Austria
Socrates Sculpture Park, Long Island City, USA
Skulpturen Park, Köln, Germany
Skulpturenmuseum Glaskasten Marl, Germany
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA
Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, USA
Heidi Horten collection Vienna
Kunstsammlung des Bundes Bonn, Germany
Belvedere Museum, Vienna