

"Meet the Turner Prize shortlist, from the musician to the mind-reader"

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Nicole Wermers

When I first see the fur-coated chairs of Nicole Wermers's *Infrastruktur*, it's hard not to imagine that a model hasn't just left the set of a high-fashion shoot to have her lipstick touched up off camera. Such is my fashion-addled brain that I start to narrativise the scene – who is the model? She must be fierce; I wouldn't dare move that fur coat; is it Anna Wintour's?

But for the German-born, London-based artist this is all wrong, and she tells me as much quite firmly. The installation is not about fashion. Rather it's about appropriating space in an urban environment. "I wanted to take a fleeting observation that anyone can make every day in a restaurant – people put their jacket on the back of a chair in order to claim them, to turn public property into their own private space."

In fact the coat could never be moved even had I dared. It's sewn on to the chair so that it becomes a part of it. "I wanted to make this temporary occurrence a permanent feature of the chair," Wermers explains. So the point isn't just to mimic the gesture but to turn it into something else. This idea is echoed elsewhere in *Infrastruktur*. She has made ceramics based on the temporary signs put up on lampposts for

In *Untitled Chairs* the lining of each fur coat (sourced from eBay) is removed and replaced with a silk that tones beautifully with the newly upholstered seat on versions of Marcel Breuer's Cesca chair. The artist shows me two that are mid-construction. The hemline is hanging a little too near to the floor on one (a proportion issue I can relate to) but it will be fixed when the backrest is raised.

In fashion, fur symbolises status. But the 44-year-old artist is clear that her work isn't about power and class. "Fur isn't always associated with luxury. You haven't looked properly: a couple of them cost the staggering amount of £40!" What fur signifies for Wermers is a strong physical presence ("It's a dead animal at the end of the day") which in turn gives off an invisible forcefield – an idea the artist has long been interested in.

The play between the fur and the tubular steel feels very glossy interiors magazine to me. Wermers describes the fabric combination as a "well-rehearsed conversation" in modernist design, citing Eileen Gray's E-1027 house. So I'm not totally wrong there. But I am well off the mark to picture models slinging furs around. Wermers's work isn't concerned with relationships between people who have left the scene. Hence the chairs are placed at an unnatural 90-degree angle to each other, more furniture shop than cafe. "For a second the chairs were almost named after Fassbinder actresses, but that would have emphasised narrative. And I really wanted to emphasise infrastructure."