

nasty

"Turner Prize nominee, German born/London based artist Nicole Wermers in conversation with Maria Abramenko"

Interview by Maria Abramenko

December 10, 2020



Installation view, Infrastruktur, Herald St, London, 2015.

Courtesy the artist and Herald St, London. Photo by Andy Keate

Your research is often dedicated to an exploration of space, can you tell us more about it?

I would say I explore formal considerations around urban space and its social, economic and psychological aspects. How the design of space and objects is used to trigger emotions, influence behaviour and create profit, and the possibilities there are to subvert that. I am interested in the urban condition, in public space and the way we move around it, the way we negotiate it's materials, volumes and surfaces on an everyday basis, and how the imprint of our social interactions and rituals are inscribed within our designed surroundings. Architectural and material narratives and the hierarchies expressed through them are interesting to me. For instance, The Long Hello, 2018 is a walkable floor sculpture made of industrially manufactured materials used in

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508

entrance areas of commercial and public spaces. The shapes I designed are connected by a rear system of interlocking mats and steel clamps. Aluminium entrance matting systems alternate with mud flaps and coconut mats, extending the short moment of entering a building 20 meters into the room. When walking on this piece, visitors can sense the alternating haptic features of the floor surface and hear the different sounds their steps make. The audience enters into a figure-ground relationship when walking the 20 meters, thus becoming part of the work. The title *The Long Hello* refers to a simple greeting that marks the beginning of an interaction and simultaneously frames it. The work investigates how architectural and design-related conditions can influence our social togetherness. While the linguistic frame of the imagined conversation remains unaltered, the material context of the situation of entering and greeting changes each time one sets foot on a new ground surface.

How would you describe your practice as an artist?

I am a sculptor who also does collage and photography, urban walking and Ebay.

What is the concept behind your iconic 'The Untitled chairs' works?

The Untitled Chairs were part of an exhibition called *Infrastruktur* which addressed structures of ritualized social relations and the material manifestations through which they are communicated. They are assemblages consisting of chairs and vintage fur coats of different fashion decades, the backrests and seats were replaced, the coats were given new linings, matching the colour of the new seats. Each coat was effectively sewn around a chair, transforming two items into one object. The chairs themselves are originals as well as variations of Marcel Breuer's Cesca chair, a Bauhaus design classic. What is usually a temporary ritual—placing one's coat over the backrest in a café or restaurant to mark one's seat—becomes an integral part of the sculpture. The coded appropriation and occupation of public space is now a feature of the object.

Where do you live and work at the moment and what does that space mean to you?

I have lived in Hackney in London since 2005. Except for a few years I have been working in the same space as I live in. I rent extra space when I need it but the idea of a condensation of art and life has always attracted me. The places where I have lived and worked were always complemented by the surrounding urban centre. I spend a lot of time in public and semi-public places in the city, taking pictures and trespassing where necessary.

The city has been a focal point of my work for a long time and my inhabited studio is a kind of fusion of ante-chamber and post-production unit. Of course, artists working at home suffer the stigma of the amateur. In addition to that the home environment has a female connotation and suspiciously smells of cottage industry. However, the physical proximity to art production and its focused atmosphere, can recharge everyday practices such as getting dressed, washing clothes and cleaning in the inhabited studio. Especially now that public space is less accessible the repetitive daily domestic actions, processing oneself and one's surroundings can become almost performative, or are at least more intensely reflected. Conversely, improvisation, mis-appropriations and compromises, all of which are part of everyday life, often become the starting point for new works. A specific series, directly a result of my domestic work situation, are the Dishwashing Sculptures. These are precariously unstable, temporary piles of dishes, glass and kitchen ware, arranged in modified dishwasher baskets. The everyday, functional arrangement of dishes to dry after washing up evolved into a formal composition containing both antique porcelain and cheap

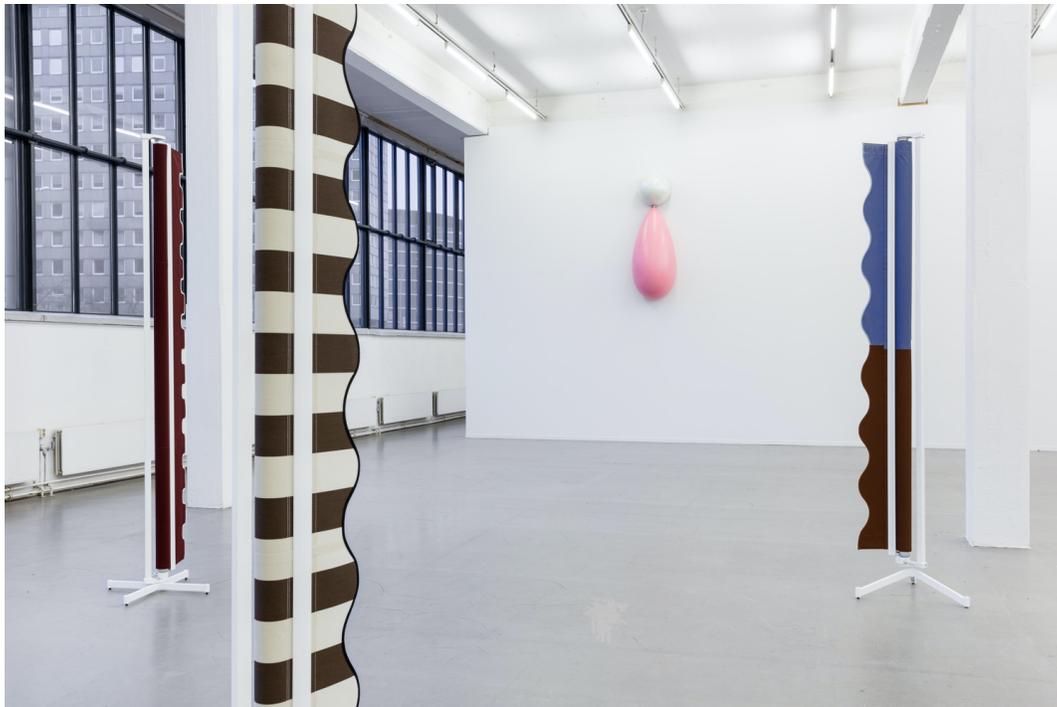
**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508

ceramics as well as eccentric kitchen utensils. The precarious structures are not fixed and must be re-stacked for each exhibition. A simple everyday activity becomes a sculptural act, positive and negative shapes are wedged, piled up, clamped together. The selection of elements follows static considerations, as well as aesthetic ones. The Dishwashing Sculptures combine masculine-connoted, architectural concepts with house work and the domestic sphere as materialized forms of female, reproductive labour.

What are you working on at the moment?

I am currently working on a show in a historic house museum in Moscow in 2021, the mansion of Muravyev-Apostol. The curators are a group of young women from the Garage Museum curating course and the invitation came during the first lockdown. It was so nice to be able to project upon such a special place during the confinement in another. The Muravyev-Apostol House Museum is a historical and architectural monument of the 18th and 19th centuries that sits like a giant praline in the centre of Moscow. House museums are peculiar spaces and have interested me for some time. In 2012 I took a series of photographs at the Musee Rodin in Paris which I subsequently showed in specially designed metal clip frames. House museums were usually designed as domestic interiors that were later turned into a public spaces, which is particular interesting now, as we face a future in which our homes are never again exclusively personal spaces but are also, via digital connectivity, our schools, our doctor's offices, our gyms, and, if determined by the state also our jails. Another project I am working on is a very large permanent public sculpture commission in the Ruhrgebiet, the former mining area of Germany. The artistic director of Urbane Künste Ruhr, Britta Peters is curating it as part of Emscher Kunst and after an extensive search for a site, that was made more difficult because of Covid, we have now settled on a site in Duisburg surrounded by industrial chimneys of different periods.



Installation view, *Women Between Buildings*, Kunstverein in Hamburg, 2018.

Courtesy the artist and Herald St, London. Photo by Fred Dott.

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508



Givers & Takers #1, #2, 2016.

Courtesy the artist and Produzentengalerie Hamburg. Photo by Jean Vong



DEU, Hamburg, Maerz 2018, Ausstellung im Kunstverein Hamburg: "Women Between Buildings" Nicole Wermers, Copyright photo: Fred Dott

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508



Untitled Bike-rack, 2018.

Courtesy the artist and Herald St, London. Photo by Fred Dott.



Installation view, Givers & Takers, Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York, 2016.

Courtesy the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York and Produzentengalerie Hamburg, Photo by Jean Vong

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508



Abwaschskulptur (Dishwashing Sculpture) #14, 2020.

Courtesy the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York. Photo by Peter Günzel



Installation view, Women Between Buildings, Kunstverein in Hamburg, 2018.

Courtesy the artist and Herald St, London. Photo by Fred Dott.

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508



Croissants & Architecture #11, 2016.

Courtesy the artist and Jessica Silverman Gallery, San Francisco Photo: John Wilson White

**JESSICA
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508