

ARTFORUM

Isa Melsheimer

GALERIE NÄCHST ST. STEPHAN
Grünangergasse 1/2
February 20–April 25

Architecture, sculpture, and painting were to be united in the ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* as conceptualized by Walter Gropius in 1919. Until 1920, members of the “Glass Chain” association, including Gropius, brothers Bruno and Max Taut, and Hans Scharoun, exchanged chain letters in which they sketched their ideas for utopian architecture. For her exhibition “*Land aus Glas*” (Land of Glass), Isa Melsheimer reprises their sketches of fantastic designs in her fabric and glass works. The glass sculptures are exhibited on an oversize platform that cuts through the gallery; strips of fabric, bearing quotes from Paul Scheerbart’s book *Glasarchitektur* (Glass Architecture, 1914), hang above the installation. What has become of yesterday’s utopias? That early twentieth-century group once dreamed of cathedral-like glass architecture. Now, those modernist desires for transparency and transcendence have been lost in the plethora of decorative glass pieces—evoked by Melsheimer’s miniatures—that explore form without addressing any possibility of social impact.

The second gallery space houses a network of intersecting strings: materialized vanishing lines constructed according to perspectival principles. The nonperpendicular edges of the platform in the first room derive from similar linear networks. Melsheimer has found a new way to represent the meeting of architecture, painting, and sculpture: not in transparent glass as a material symbol for the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, but rather in a barely visible framework of lines. The kitschy Tiffany-glass-like sculptures, then, serve not only as a means to explore the material but also as the physical instantiation of a geometric pattern—a doubling of the space, a miniature of the *mise-en-scène*, a model for a “Land of Glass.”

— Sabine B. Vogel



Isa Melsheimer, *Luckhardt 3*, 2009, glass, silicone, 12 x 42 1/2 x 31".

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