

Stefanie Böttcher / Bist du da?

The question *Are you there?* calls for a multitude of answers - at a semantic level, and also at Stella Geppert's exhibition of the same title being held at the Künstlerhaus Bremen. The way the question is treated is as varied as the exhibition itself, and the possible reactions it will provoke, as it embraces not only a stated interest in physical, but also psychic, presences, and the two do not necessarily harmonise easily.

It is this very discrepancy that the visitor to *Bist du da?* can explore in all its multiplicity. One seldom has the opportunity to examine this question, and that of one's own condition, with all of its existential ramifications, as immediately as one does here. Because entering the exhibition space entails submitting to a dislocation of normal visual habit and a loss of a basic experience, namely that of one's own location in space.

Through various mirrored surfaces, and an extra ceiling construction of bars and mirrors joined together, the floor and ceiling are inverted, whilst two opposing glazed facades apparently open onto the same view. The visitor is exposed to a kaleidoscope of reflections in changing locations and emerges with altered appearance. At times he may be missing his stomach, or she her head, yet it may reappear in another location or meld with another, foreign, body - and thereby present visitors with a new form of acquaintanceship.

For the mirror surfaces are not employed in their usual form, but are transpierced, and, having holes of various dimensions, distance themselves from the original function of the mirror as a medium for accurate representation. This form of reflection is, furthermore, rarified by yet another level: the holes in the mirrors offer vistas. They not only circumscribe, they also reveal. They open their own windows, uncover already existent, hitherto hidden, structures, and call the spatial construct - in which we blithely locate ourselves - into question. The tension created is amplified by the fact that the walls too have been pierced. Some of these holes are blind and end in darkness; some offer new vistas and reveal previously closed-off windows; others illuminate the wall construction or create new visual axes.

The rhythmic change between concealing and revealing awakens a new sense of spatial awareness within us, conditioned by the apparent rescindment of gravity and the increasing inability to differentiate between reflection and reality. Attendant and increased bodily awareness accompanies this state. It may seem a painful decapitation to perceive one's isolated torso: though the body could also be perceived more uncertainly, as a new sphere that emerges from the view in the mirror seen through the hole, through the wall, through the window.

Navigating our way through the room aided by different-sized circular mirrors on the floor, we're assisted by the optical connection of circles and ceiling panels, advance through the wooden bar constructions arranged lengthways, but are then interrupted in our flow by vertically mounted bars that, as may be inferred from their curvature, are presumably supports required for the actual concrete ceiling. The apparently solid traverse wall seems to finally arrest our movements, but the force with which these wooden bars pierce the architecture pushes us, too, into a new spatial area - one which promises a moment's rest from the racing play of movements, the changes of direction: a break from all the confusion. But new axes of vision are instantaneously opened, this time due to the far more intensely perceptible holes in the walls. In this manner, new views, perspectives, and dynamic experiences are offered, bit by bit - although, finally, the room as a whole eludes conclusive stocktaking.

In *Bist du da?*, as in previous exhibitions, Stella Geppert works with pre-existing social and architectural spaces to create new environments by developing them further. This time the gallery-space itself was the starting point for an installation that both fills and penetrates the space: the foundation was formed from the floor plan, remnant material, and the function of the building complex - which was always used as a production plant. So the wooden

bars represent a working-material that gathers in storage, and which allows a spectrum of attached associations in its raw form. And the mirrors are at one and the same time part of the pictorial space, which, pierced as they are, create relativistic momentum. The mirror panels, which might be perceived as a synonym for the layered aspect of the room, remain, nonetheless, as illusive as space and movement itself.

The dynamic that the gallery space entails, in terms of function and form, is echoed in the dynamics of the relationship between man and spatial surroundings, and seems at first to retreat from tangible rendition. But the artistic interpretation which Stella Geppert chose as an approach, and which is a constitutive of her work, is progressive: it thematises movement, yet, what's more, it releases rather than rigidifies. For, on the basis of her raw material, Stella Geppert has a performance-based approach to her work that provokes a similar approach in its viewers. The artist, by means of her intervention in a given situation, merely gives the grounds to change the spatial structure, to reposition oneself, and to interpret the changes: much as a glance in the mirror, which, relieved of fulfilling a narcissistic purpose, can offer a perspective of space that opens it up dynamically and subtly extends its dimensions.