

FlashPlanet2005

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Mischa Kuball's work is primarily project and site-based, for galleries and public spaces. He engages aspects of architecture, the built environment and cultural memory, as memory informs 'knowing' and our need to manage and explore the unknowable. The interconnectedness is aptly demonstrated in a multipart project Bauhaus-Block, done at the Dessau Bauhaus in 1992. Kuball employed the simplest of means (slide projectors set up throughout the building and exterior) and the most transparent of 'outcomes' (projecting white light forms onto the architecture, as a doubling of structure and geometry). The intervention generated a meditation (a mediation) on the building as history, the architectural monument (to modernism), and its creative spirit and legacy in present time.

Kuball's vehement penetration of the structural and work processes of the contemporary Bauhaus ... in no way disturbed, but rather counteracted ... thereby achieving a productive provocation.—Rolf Kuhn 'Foreword' Bauhaus-Block 1992.

It is difficult to categorise such a work. The 'art' of it has formal elements, but it also acted within the daily programme of the Dessau Bauhaus —as noted by Kuhn —thereby engaging students and faculty without the imposition and insistence of 'teaching'. In other projects there are pedagogical aspects. Kuball's Urban Context, developed over a five-year period from 1995 to 2000, was an integral part of an inter-disciplinary and multi-collaborator undertaking, which involved students at the University of Luneburg and the community. The focus of the project was the excavation of a WW2 bunker, along with archival research, to examine not only what lay buried, literally, under the streets, but also a suppressed collective consciousness (memory). Kuball tied the various initiatives together in the summary publication, not as closure but offering the possibility for research to continue.

Memory is a fragile construct located somewhere between, at the one extreme, the dire necessity to forget and, at the other, the vital need to recall things and situations exactly as they were. Kuball's bunker project ... resists every attempt at memorialization [but] it operates neither as hands-on-archaeology nor as vague empathy. His intervention is aimed neither at mourning nor at spiritual uplift but quite literally at enlightenment as a disturbing appeal.—Manfred Schneckenburger 'Remembering In Luneburg And Elsewhere' Urban Context 2000.

Kuball's use of light sources rather than physical alteration-interventions underscores his statement: 'making things visible means making people aware of things. By shining a light on something I make it important ... out into the open for everyone to see'. In doing so, Kuball does more than bear witness: he provides us with the possibility of being 'eye/I' witnesses. History can become an open book once again, as can our immediate environments, that which we take for granted, or often block out because there is too much to take in. The artist's challenge, therefore, becomes how to 're-stimulate' the 'over-stimulated' senses without adding to the problem.

His 1998 Bienal de Sao Paulo project Private Light/Public Light responded to the bienal theme of antropofagia, a 'cultural cannibalism' proposed by Oswaldo de Andrade's manifesto of 1928. One hundred families in Sao Paulo were invited to exchange their living room lights with a standardised lamp developed by Kuball,

a cylinder-shaped fixture that could either be hung or mounted on a stand. The original domestic lights were assembled and shown en masse at the Bienal. One could mistake this for a lighting store display, or misunderstanding the intent as an 'artful' comment, a spectacle of the vulgarisation of commodities.

The areas of tension and conflict arising from this discursive interaction, between two seemingly separate contexts not only address[es] a sociological aspect (privacy of the individual) [and] public prestige, but also reflect[s] social utopias (individual and society/Bauhaus utopia). Kuball's work is neither a work nor an action ... rather, the project is like an attempt to create a new net and throw it out ... to plough up a reality in a new way ... capture its changeability and its complexity.—Karin Stempel Private Light/Public Light 1998.

Another approach to the overlay of public and private, utilising light, was Kuball's greenlight project in Uruguay (1999). He installed generic green glass bulkhead lights above doorways along Calle Democracia in the Reus barrio of Montevideo. It was the centre of the residential district for Jews who had fled persecution in Europe between the wars and in the aftermath of the Holocaust. The doorways Kuball selected were those of empty, unoccupied houses. Some doors still remained while others had been long bricked-up. Nothing had changed except for the addition of light that is consistent with urban renewal schemes. The absence of artfulness is as meaningful and powerful as silence can be in the (conscious) absence of words. As with the Luneburg bunker and the Sao Paulo work, project documentation, archival documents and social history were a critical component of the research and publication.

Mischa Kuball is presenting two new works at the IMA. One is a continuation of his City Through Glass series, a dual video projection filmed in Brisbane. Characteristically, the City Through Glass work is achieved through the simplest of means. Video footage of car rides through the city —the same route during the day and at night —is shot through the bottom of a drinking glass. The projected image is doubled. The monocular camera eye becomes binocular.

Kuball combines the filming of the metropolis ... with other optical strategies that break with ... illusionism ... and summon an independent pictoriality. The drinking glass slides like an optical filter in front of the camera lens and shifts the city into the distance. The cityscapes, substantially dissolved in light reflection ... position points of light within the nocturnal life of the city. The artist confronts views with 'his' gaze onto the city, which turns back to them as an 'eye-shaped', faceted, doubly-projected image.—Pia Muller-Tamm 'The City as Projection', for K20, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2003.

The siting of City Through Glass works can return to the context of the city. In Dusseldorf, the binocular projection was mounted in a transitional urban 'no-zone', a pedestrian passage between Grabbe-Platz and Paul-Klee-Platz. There is no reason to stop along the passageway, and nothing to indicate that 'this is art'. Although light boxes and projections are becoming part of the vocabulary used by designers 'as if art', Kuball keeps his information raw and in real time. It distances his work from mere civic boosterism.

The second work titled FlashPlanet is in a series of installations that feature slide-projected images and texts. Four globe-shaped paper lampshades are hung at knee-level. Each is lit and animated from the inside by a strobe light. Slides of Dusseldorf, Cologne, Brisbane, and Sydney, shot by Kuball on walking tours, are projected onto each lampshade. (In contrast, Kuball is the passenger and cameraperson in the production of the 'City through Glass' works.) The slides share the common feature of water, a river or harbour, and present a mix

of landmark buildings and commercial, industrial and residential areas. That is to say, each city is the same and different. Strobe light interrupts the reading of the slide sequence, and creates retinal effects through the contrapuntal light sources, as the slide images are themselves distorted on the surface of the lamp shades.

The works of Mischa Kuball usually take the form of events that unfold through time. Kuball employs light as a ... vehicle of meaning ... light allows familiar places to be restructured and forgotten places to return to consciousness. When projected, light can mould space as an immaterial membrane, while as illuminations, it can allow diaphanous images to appear temporarily.—Pia Muller-Tamm, *op.cit.*

The brief description of Kuball's work —the Luneburg bunker and greenlight projects in particular —suggests a solemnness; that it is human nature to keep painful history alive even as memory fades for those 'who were there'. The social-historical aspects are important, but Kuball does not apply a value judgement through rhetoric. He has stated, 'place-relatedness is a criterion [and yet] an abstract parameter'. The social eye can play against the perceptual I, and bounce back ('reflect') in unexpected ways.

The lighted interiors [of skyscrapers] come through it all with a sense of life and well-being. At night the city not only seems alive. It does live. But lives only as illusion lives.—Frank Lloyd Wright 'American Artists Paint The City' Venice Biennale 1956.