

BERLIN

Galerie Barbara Weiss

AYŞE ERKMEN

FINGERSPITZENGEFÜHL

In late 2015, to escape the gray, freezing weather, Berliners may have found themselves entering the minimalist universe of Ayşe Erkmen, housed at Galerie Barbara Weiss in the city's Kreuzberg district. The Turkish artist's exhibition, "Fingerspitzengefühl" (which roughly translates to "Sensitivity"), featured two parts: a bronze installation on the gallery floor, and a complementing neon-green video projected on a wall.

Easily overseen and literally overstepped, colorful bronze sculptures depicted a miniature landscape of mountain tops, dispersed randomly on the gallery floor. Only a close examination—requiring the viewer to kneel on the floor—revealed each object's unique shape and patina. Light reflections on their metallic, ridge-like seams provided insight into their otherwise imperceptible materiality.

The corresponding video, *Bronze Acid Green* (2014), showed a seemingly unrelated, looping scene of (in)action: a somewhat abstracted factory-like environment is reflected on the surface of an acid-filled basin. Removed from any context of space or time, the psychedelic, emerald-colored liquid sways back and forth to the background buzz of industrial machines. Reverberating throughout the exhibition, the video's soundtrack underscored the simultaneous presence in the installation of art and manufacture, touching on the abstract relationship between a work's material and its artistic value.

The exhibition's invitation card and the floor sculptures' cryptic titles provided fragmentary clues to Erkmen's metallic investigations. The invitation featured an image of abandoned shovels and a bucket placed next to a hole in the sand, suggesting a child's "work station" at the beach. Similar to the "labor" insinuated in the photograph, the artist used spatulas and sand to shape her bronze sculptures' models. Moreover, the titles of Erkmen's floor pieces, each labeled with its

descriptive color and the words "not the color it is," refer to the complex procedure involved in creating the metal works: they are first manually submerged in the emerald acid seen in the accompanying video, but their final coloring—via chemical reaction—is left to chance.

Erkmen's veneration for spatial relations regarding sites of production, and subsequently for exhibition design, has been shown throughout her rich oeuvre, which spans photography, installation and public intervention. Born in Istanbul in 1949, where she studied sculpture, she moved to Germany in 1993. Alongside professorial positions at the Städelschule in Frankfurt and other prestigious German schools, many large-scale interventions such as *Shipped Ships* (2001)—for which she had three ferry boats, from Japan, Turkey and Italy, respectively, shipped by freighter to Frankfurt—have marked Erkmen's career.

Her artistic investigations hit a milestone in 2011 with her exhibition for the Turkey Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. With the help of engineers, the artist built a water treatment facility in the exhibition space. Comprehensive in size and color, the jungle-gym-like contraption of intersecting pipes drew water from a nearby canal, purified it and released it back into the same waterway. The absurd, circular movement of water in this space illustrated Erkmen's idea of exhibition as a site of, at times useless, transformation.

The artist's sculptural practice is concerned with many issues. Can a sculpture be framed by its surrounding environment, or does the former provide a frame for the latter? How can an object and its (material) origins relate to an exhibition space? What does the concept of "authorship" entail for a technology-based sculpture?

Yet Erkmen's laborious *modus operandi* originates from simple ideas, providing an accessible point of departure to material explorations of her works. The playful hide-and-seek between the author and her process—in *Bronze Acid Green*, an unseen Erkmen is moving the acid basin herself—encourages one to look beyond a singular meaning for creative object and space. Furthermore, Erkmen's artistic gestures shift between different media, which provokes close-up viewing and thus requires engaged interaction with her installations.

As with the surreal experience of walking through her miniature mountains while engaging with repetitive video and sound, Erkmen offers works that play with size and environment in place of conventional viewing experiences. Within her artistic microcosm, Erkmen opens poetic spheres that engage the senses and reflect upon relationships between subject, exhibition space and the intangible emotional connection that looms between the two.

CLARA TANG

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Installation view of **AYŞE ERKMEN's** "Fingerspitzengefühl" at Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin, 2015–16. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Barbara Weiss.

