

Painting Between Space and Spatiality

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Retrospective and snapshot, cultural history and present day come together in Moni K. Huber's works, tracing the arc of her artistic work. The starting point for her design considerations is always the material. Her long-standing interest in architecture, rooted in her travels and photographic documentation of architecture acts as the foundation for her artistic analyses.

At its foundation, Huber's work refers to various manifestations and interpretations of space: how it is occupied, reduced, expanded, perceived, experienced, and lived. What purpose, benefit, and intention does an architectural construction have, and what role do the parameters of impermanence and time play?

Moni K. Huber gradually reveals the multiple layers of meaning, isolating individual elements with deliberation. This, in turn, brings up new questions of how painting and content relate to volume and area. The creative restructuring seen in Huber's works creates tension, reflection, and space for interpretation.

Her series of kiosks, for example, brings together historical, architectural, and sociological aspects. This simple construction, which originated in the thirteenth

century in Persia, India, and the Ottoman Empire, once provided a place for discussion and music. It was not until the eighteenth century that the structural form found its way to Europe, where it was initially implemented in parks as a symbol of the exotic and cosmopolitan, before later becoming an element of cityscapes, a fast provisioner of an array of goods. Whether newspapers, cigarettes, or cold drinks, the small open-sided setting not only supplied everyday necessities, it also acted as a meeting place and hub for information. A breath of this genesis is still present in Huber's works. The artist sensitively and successfully gives kiosks—some of which, like the K67,¹ have become cult objects over the years—the tribute they deserve, capturing their aura. She paints the simple modules, which are found in almost every residential area and neighborhood, unpretentiously and with few allusions. Her references to place and time are minimal, only appearing in the titles of the paintings *Kiosk Sarajevo, WM'78*,² and *K67*. This naturally opens up new possibilities for the interpretation of these attributions. For Moni K. Huber, however, the focus is purely artistic, with painterly decisions going hand in hand with the respective motif.

In her 2019 work titled *K67*, the object per se, its texture, colored fiberglass, and design are translated into painterly form. The focus is on composition, color choice, lines, and the effects of light, shadow, and reflection. The location is irrelevant. The simplicity and functionality of

the kiosk is celebrated here in an artistic way. Huber also emphasizes the independence of the structure, always presenting it freestanding and thus occupying a specific place. Permeable yet also compact, the kiosk is both visible and accessible from all directions.

The delicate, graceful depiction in the piece titled *Kioskdach WM 78*, on the other hand, blends into the hot and hazy atmosphere, appearing like a giant shapely plant. Using contrast only sparingly and in a reduced color palette, a kind of inversion and color reflection is created, with the generous shade cast upon the bright, dry earth showing up several shades darker than the sky. The kiosk roof takes up the colors of nature and the surrounding area, blending harmoniously into the landscape. Through these artistic decisions, Huber succeeds in capturing the essentials with just a handful of components, bringing the actual structure to the forefront.

In addition, Huber's Kiosk series holds dense layers of nostalgia, design history, and the fragmented aesthetic of former Yugoslavia and Argentina. The artist implements this fragmentation as a creative tool, her self-chosen reduction leading to a deeper understanding of the subject matter. The constriction proves far-reaching. The possibilities and representability of every detail are taken into consideration, artistically explored and dissected along with their functional relevance for her art.

And thus she takes the awning detail from the kiosks, a component that is movable, elastic, adaptable. While this provider of shade and deflector of rain can be folded up or extended out to offer protection and shelter, it is nonetheless quite fragile. The fabric has limited elasticity and resilience. The shape-changing textile becomes an architectural experience, its skeleton—the frame that holds it together—turning it into a corpus, a shell, skin, or even more, into a room. Moni K. Huber artistically forms and transforms the bending and movement radius of the function, with it distorting perspectives and varying the color compositions.

This hails the motif of the parasol into Moni K. Huber's paintings. Symbolic of site-specific space, the sun umbrella is an object that can change a space anywhere it is placed, for example on the balcony, in the garden, on the beach, basically anywhere, set up temporarily, yet tied to the space.

The span of the spread-out umbrella determines how much area it occupies; how much area is occupied by its shadow. This area is, however, flexible, with the movement of the sun shifting the shade, and the people in it usually behaving accordingly. In her works, Moni K. Huber liberates the parasol from its human coexistence, allowing it to stand alone or in a collective, sometimes densely, even overlapping, sometimes more minimally, floating on its carrier material. Similar to the awning, the umbrella is decoupled from its surroundings, thus shifting the everyday object into the focus of her artistic interest.

The parasol motif takes Huber's thoughts a step further, moving on to caravans and tents. These objects suggest unrestricted mobility, embodying an era that ushers in a new feeling of life, leisure culture, and freedom. You may live in the confined space of a tent or caravan, but you are able to experience the world at the same time. Moni K. Huber explores the plasticity of these mobile dwellings, meticulously examining their textures, exploring the surfaces, folds, creases, and weight of the tent fabrics and their permeability to light. She uses different material combinations in her works, thus prompting the meeting and interaction of fabrics, camping chairs, tables, and patterns.

In contrast to the awnings and umbrellas, this is not about the tension, stretchability, and elasticity of the fabric and its corpus, but rather about the slackness, lightness, mass, coverage, and intimacy created by the dense crowding together of the tents. She uses the fabric as an all-encompassing, patterned background surface, situating the caravans upon it. This psychedelic imagery combines figuration and abstraction, borrowing from film sequences to suggest or create breaks in Huber's compositions that highlight the significance of the fabric, its segmentation, patterns, and perception thereof. Immediacy, among other things, is needed in order to fully grasp the material in all its changeable form. By selecting, draping, experimenting, and composing, Moni K. Huber explores symbolism, legibility, haptics,

temporality, and function, transforming the insights she makes into painting. Once she grasps the essence of a material, she begins to create illusions on a surface, wholly devoting herself to the process of painting.

¹ K67 is a kiosk with modules that can be connected together designed by Slovenian architect Saša Mächtig in 1967. It has been inscribed in the annals of design history.

² An artifact of the 1978 FIFA World Cup in Argentina, created by German-Chilean designer Guillermo Bonsiepe.