

Portrait of the Artist

Artist's 'Divider' draws viewers into realm of work

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Editor's note: Portrait of the Artist is a regular feature in Enjoy! that spotlights artists with exhibits in the Hudson Valley. If you are an artist in a current or upcoming exhibit and would like to be included in this feature, email bfarrell@poughkeepsiejournal.com. This week's Portrait of the Artist features Björn Meyer-Ebrecht, whose work is on display at Matteawan Gallery in Beacon through Nov. 5.

When did you first realize you wanted to be an artist?

I already wanted to be an artist when I was a teenager, but I also had competing interests. Early on I had also been a political activist working for a number of environmentalist groups and causes. This was the time of the end of the Cold War, the nuclear disaster of Chernobyl in 1986, and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. It was a very politicized time in Germany. For a long time I assumed I would go into politics or become a journalist.

Tell us about your art at Matteawan Gallery.

For my new show at Matteawan Gallery I created a group of ink drawings. These drawings are based on photographs, found in architecture books. They zoom in on architectural details of building facades, tiles and brick walls. When I start a new drawing I tape together multiple sheets of paper in different geometric shapes. When I paint on them, the transparent tape repels the ink and stays visible. Paper and tape create their own architecture in relation to the image. The viewer has to look through the tape and shapes to get to the image.

The gallery is split in half by a three-color wall as a sculptural intervention in the gallery. To see the whole show the viewer has to move through a passageway.

Do you stick to a certain theme in your work or like to explore new techniques and subjects?

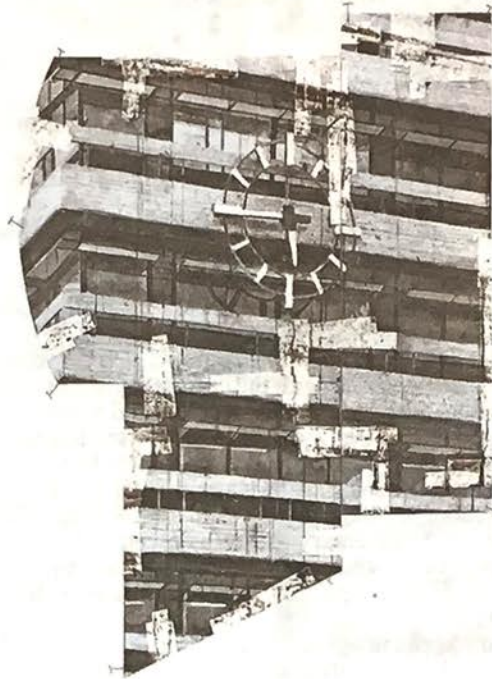
My work often is formally very different. I work simultaneously on separate groups of work: sculpture, drawing, collages, etc. For me, making artwork is akin to writing a novel, in which each individual work is a chapter, a paragraph or even a sentence. Each work exists for itself, but always relates to every other work.

Is it poignant that your exhibit includes "Divider"? Is it reflective of society today?

Yes, absolutely. My understanding of architecture is always both practical and political: First and foremost its title describes its primary function of a room divider. Yet the act of 'wall building' is deeply fraught with meaning at this moment in time. In this context my wall points to the divisive potential of architecture, but also offers a hopeful alternative by creating an open structure with a large passageway, allowing to freely move from one side to the other; and gaps in the wall, to visually connect to the other side. It is a membrane as much as it is a barrier.

What do you hope viewers come away with after seeing your work?

I hope that the viewer comes away with a physical experience, relating to my drawings and sculpture through his or her whole body. I hope the viewer will understand that an architectural space is never neutral, but full of political and cultural predeterminations. My hope is that the viewer comes away understanding him/herself as an active participant in



Ink and tape on paper by Björn Meyer-Ebrecht. CHARLES NORFLEET/COURTESY PHOTO

If you go

Björn Meyer-Ebrecht will give an artist talk at 3 p.m., Nov. 5 at Matteawan Gallery, 436 Main St., Beacon; 845-440-7901; <http://www.matteawan.com/>

my show and beyond in society.

If we were to get a peek inside your journal or sketchbook, what would we see?

I have never maintained a sketchbook. I sketch out most ideas for drawings and sculptures on loose sheets of paper. It is the easiest to discard an idea if it didn't work out. I really like the immediacy of colored pencil. For the final design of my sculptures I often stick with the original color choice from this initial sketch.

How does your background contribute to your process as an artist?

Having grown up in West Germany in the '70s and '80s, history plays a very important part in my upbringing, both as hyperconsciousness and disconnect. History in German postwar cities is strangely present and absent at the same time.

On a personal level, my father, a computer-engineer, always wished to have been an architect. At home he often built his own furniture, many of our toys, among many other things. I believe this must have been my first exposure to the idea of being an active participant in relation to one's own spatial environment.

What excites you about art — what keeps you interested?

To keep my work interesting, it is crucial for me to keep bringing the outside world into my work. This



Björn Meyer-Ebrecht
HRAG VARTANIAN/COURTESY PHOTO

happens by using found images and books. This also happens by allowing people to 'use' my sculptures. Observing my work being used gives me an incredible amount of satisfaction.

How has your artistic vision changed over the years?

For a long time my work has been dealing with architecture, but there was a decisive moment of change, when I decided I did not just want to make work about architecture, but

create sculpture as architecture myself. My first show at Matteawan Gallery was my first chance to try this out. This is why this show remains very special to me.

Björn Meyer-Ebrecht has exhibited his work throughout the U.S. and internationally. Born in Hamburg, Germany, the artist lives in New York City. Visit <http://meyer-ebrecht.com/>