

ARTS & CULTURE INTERVIEWS

Kristin Posehn: A Bridge Between Two Rooms

by ALEC DUDSON on Mar 23, 2012 · 1 Comment

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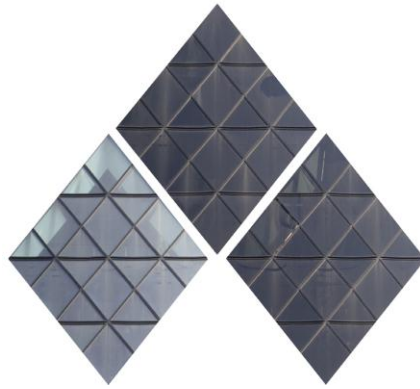
On a visit to Manchester's [CUBE Gallery](#) last month to peruse the eclectic selection of works displayed as part of the CUBEOpen programme, one piece of work in particular caught my eye. [Kristin Posehn's](#) meticulous and masterful 'A Bridge Between Two Rooms' consisted of a 360 photographs, 1420 translucent photo clips and a bike wheel, which together created a scale replica of the skyscraper at 30 St. Mary's Axe, London, or *The Gherkin* as it is more commonly known. This sculpture once lit from within acts as one of the most impressive 'lamp shades' I have ever clapped eyes on, despite currently being sent press releases for about 30 a day, but is far more than that. A process which saw Posehn individually photograph every window of the building from ground level, an act that saw her searched by police, has resulted in a stunning final work and one that it seemed only right to learn more about. I caught up with Kristin to discuss the piece and the myriad of obstacles seemingly standing in the way of its completion.

Kollektivnye: So, where did your inspiration for the project 'a bridge between two rooms' come from? Was it the building that sparked the idea for the project or was it more that it served as the ideal canvas for a concept you had already decided upon?

Kristin Posehn: *An idea develops over time, like a snowball. I lived in England while the Gherkin was built, and in the years just after it was finished. For much of that time I lived in East London, a twenty minute walk away. As I would move through the city, the building seemed like London's Mt Fuji, seen in a hundred views.*

Over that time, it was astonishing how quickly the Gherkin was adopted as a symbol of London, and in particular, as the contemporary, financial heart of London. In only a couple of years it was elevated to the iconic realm of very old monuments like Big Ben and Tower Bridge. Now it shows up everywhere, in commercials, on t-shirts and TV shows. Did you know its sale in 2008, at the height of the property bubble, was the largest real estate deal in the history of London?

I knew I wanted to make a work with it. Then, a friend gave me a present: a package of clear translucent photo-clips. The little gift crystallized my thoughts, and I saw what to do – that the structure could be a self-supporting shell of photographs using these clips, hung floor to ceiling, illuminated, a very strange lampshade, an architectural action and network of implications.



K: In terms of re-creating the Gherkin to scale, was it more of a challenge to re-produce the shape and proportions of the structure or to ensure that the images worked to give the sculpture a convincing element of reality?

KP: *Reproducing the shape and proportion of the Gherkin was technically tricky. I've made five of these eight foot sculptures – the first four were tests. There were a lot of production issues to work out to find the right curvature. For example, millimeter differences in trimming the individual window-prints magnify when the prints are clipped together, and throw off the curvature.*

The work was made as an operation or process, more than to produce a convincing reality.

The sculpture is constructed from photographs of the Gherkin's windows, but the windows are reflective. It is easy to identify the sculpture with the subject of the Gherkin, but by examining these reflective surfaces, the work actually becomes a peculiar portrait of London.

People who know of the Gherkin can recognize the sculpture as the Gherkin, but of course not everyone knows the building – and the work is so much more. The replica element is a layer. The physical sculpture invites many more readings and associations. I've heard people call it stained glass, it becomes a body, a rocket, a dress, a spaceship and potentially many other things as you react to it. Documentation of a work always reinforces the replica element, because it leaves out this aspect of physically experiencing the work.

K: I understand that you found yourself searched by the police on one occasion when photographing the windows of the building, was this the only time that you encountered this sort of obstacle in the image collecting process?

KP: *Yes, I was only stopped once, but I'm sure I was watched thoroughly every time I hovered around with my big camera, bulky bag and tripod. The officer who stopped me searched the images on my camera, but got bored quickly.*

I include the citation that I received with the documentation of the work for many reasons. Of course, the existence of the Gherkin itself is directly linked to terrorism – it was built on the site of the former Baltic Exchange, which was severely damaged by an IRA bomb in 1992. It was a controversial decision to destroy the remnants of the listed, historical Exchange building, and to redevelop the site with a contemporary, reflective glass skyscraper.

Also, I was searched under the UK Terrorism Act of 2006, one of several contentious legal structures that give police far reaching rights to search private property. It was a routine search, but this routine action of the state brought to light certain otherwise invisible structures. I think of the citation as another bridge. The effects of terrorism leave many imprints – on the city, building codes, patterns of behavior and many other structures; they produce surveillance.

For me, the act of creating the artwork was also one of sustained surveillance.

CITY OF LONDON POLICE STOP/SEARCH RECORD

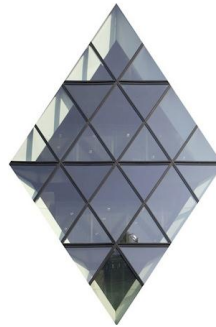
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Officer: 111111
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 Colour: 111111
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 Year: 111111
 Registration: 111111

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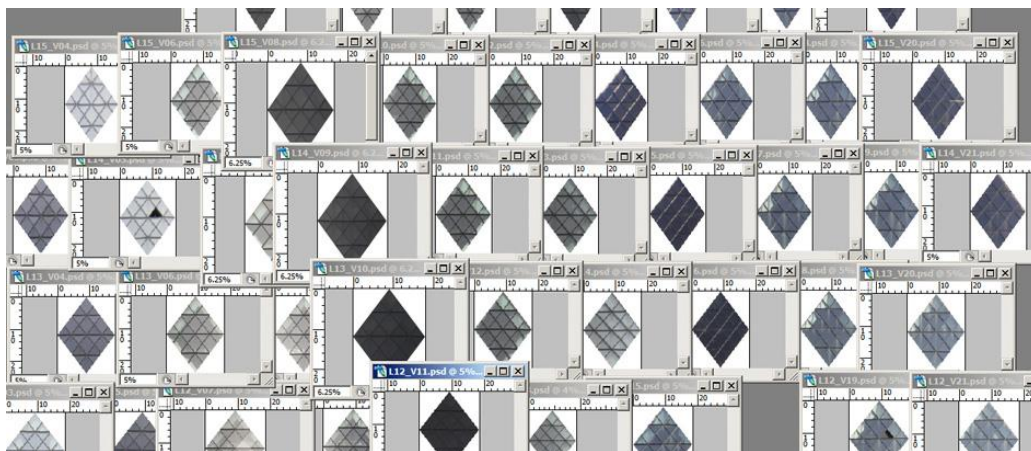
K: How did photographing each window from ground level present technical and practical difficulties?

KP: *With the images, I had to come up with a system for keeping track of which window was which, through the whole process. There is an element of archive, collection, system to the work. It is a strand of photography that I have great interest in – Muybridge, August Sander, Bernd and Hilla Becher.*

In terms of the physical process of photographing: I got a stiff neck, and I really explored and got to know the city as I searched for different views of the building.

K: Was the process of producing a final images of each window that was the correct perspective an incredibly painstaking one or did each window gradually become easier to process?

KP: *It was painful, but I got really good at a few tricks in Photoshop. You can see the process of correcting for perspective in the final window prints. The upper windows are fuzzier, slightly distorted, the lines are wavy. It provides an extra dimension and layer in the finished work. You can observe that certain sections were very difficult to find views of – the perspective distortion tells a story about the shape of the city.*



K: Did you work alone in constructing the final sculpture? If so, how much alteration to the images was necessary as the build progressed?

KP: *The Gherkin sculpture I made on my own. The room I had assistance with. That particular installation was supported by the Jan van Eyck Academie, and I worked with Ron Bernstein, Coordinator for Materials at the JVE, to fabricate the room from scratch. But the work is flexible and can be presented differently.*

The images were completed prior to it being assembled – actually all the work with the images occurred before the physical construction. I had photographed sections of the building more than one time, or sections overlapped, so there were many choices of images in the early stages.

K: What is the importance of creating a room specifically to house the sculpture, what does this element of the project say about the concept?

KP: *The room was a very particular sculptural environment. I've also installed it in an actual bedroom. Alternatively, the gherkin sculpture can be hung on its own.*

I like to present a work differently at different times, as I understand it differently, or to react to a different context. It takes time to learn about a work. The concepts aren't fixed.



K: Your work often exists as an artistic exploration of architecture, you studied art and sculpture at university, how did you come to incorporate architecture into your work, as either your canvas or subject?

KP: *This is a tough question. It seems inevitable looking back. I was attracted to architecture as a representation of systems we shape, and which shape us. Working with architecture enables me to engage themes of public and private space, frontiers, utopian fantasies, landscape and real estate, and so on, all as they relate to the logic and politics of contemporary cities and sprawl. I find it all encapsulated in the built environment. Sculpture is intimate and related to the body, and so I find the two forms well suited to each other.*

K: What projects are you working on at the moment and when can we expect to get a look at them?

KP: *There are several things in the pipes! At this moment I'm working on a very unconventional catalogue for the work Reclamation, which will be published in fall 2012.*

K: What does the title mean? What is the bridge?

KP: *"A bridge between two rooms" is a suggestion for a method of reading. The title has the open-endedness of a poem, but the words are infrastructure (bridge) and architectural space (room). The rooms could be in time, in space, you and I.*

I'd like to think that the work produces rooms and bridges, an unexpected between-ness.

To find out more about Kristin and her work check out her site [here](#).