

Charlotte Posenenske

Work in Progress

Exhibition from 18 October 2019 to 8 March 2020



Charlotte Posenenske, unit of *Vierkantrohre Series D*, 1967. Courtesy of the Estate of Charlotte Posenenske, Mehdi Chouakri, Berlin, Peter Freeman, New York and Take Ninagawa, Tokyo. Photo: Jan Windszus, Berlin.

CHARLOTTE POSENENSKE: WORK IN PROGRESS traces the evolution of Posenenske's practice from her first drawings and paintings to her final sculptural projects. In doing so, it highlights the artist's critical contributions to the development of serial, site-specific and participatory practices. Posenenske exhibited widely during the years that she was active as an artist, alongside peers such as Carl Andre, Hanne Darboven, Donald Judd and Sol LeWitt, with whom she shared a concern for seriality as a formal and structural device. Her work is distinguished by its radically open-ended nature. Embracing reductive geometry, repetition and industrial fabrication, Posenenske developed a form of mass-produced Minimalism that pointedly addressed the pressing socioeconomic concerns of the decade by circumventing the art market and rejecting established formal and cultural hierarchies. She used permutation and contingency as playful conceptual devices to oppose compositional hierarchy and invite the collaborative engagement of the public in the continual reconfiguration of her variable sculptures.

Her commitment to exploring the conditions of the lived environment led to her decision to leave the visual arts, which she announced in the politically and socially tumultuous month of May 1968. Repositioning the concerns of her object-based practice, she went on to pursue a degree in sociology with a focus on industrial fabrication and labour. Nonetheless, at the end of her life, Posenenske authorised the continued fabrication of her serial art, thus ensuring the works' renewed availability.

ROOM 1

Early Works

Between 1956 and 1965, Posenenske developed techniques for applying colour and line to drawings and paintings on paper or fibreboard that increasingly articulated three-dimensional space while self-consciously recording the processes of their production. In doing so, she engaged with the spectrum of modernist techniques for pictorial illusionism, from Constructivism to Cubism to the informal gestures of postwar abstraction.

Posenenske's first works on paper *Rasterbilder* (Grid Pictures, 1956–57) present an important connection with her later sculptural works through the usage of repetition, seriality and variation on a precise grid. In the *Spachtelarbeiten* (Palette-Knife Works, 1956–65), paint is spread and scraped on and off the pictorial support, building a textured field of layered marks. The picture is created from a process of addition and subtraction that privileges the mark-making action over compositional resolution.

Stage Design and Architecture

In the early 1950s, Posenenske studied art in Stuttgart under the painter and stage designer Willi Baumeister (1889–1955). Through her studies with Baumeister, she developed an interest in shaping space, which she initially explored in volumetric costumes and layered sets. These works anticipate the perceptual depth of her drawings and sculptures. As the sketches presented show, her monochromatic costumes for a 1952 presentation of the Puccini opera *Turandot* give each character a cylindrical or polyhedral presence on the stage. Similarly, the overlaid screens that she made for the 1953 set of Paul Willems's *Peau d'ours* (Bearskin, 1950) resemble the gridded fields of her *Rasterbilder*.

Posenenske's interest in architecture not only informed her artwork, but also engaged her in specific projects in the beginning and towards the end of her career as an artist. Displayed here are sketches and photographs of a mural she created for a primary school designed by her husband, the architect Paul Posenenske, in Hainstadt, Germany, alongside sketches of unrealised design proposals for the Sindlingen Community Centre.

ROOM 2

Striped Pictures and Sprayed Pictures

For the *Streifenbilder* (Striped Pictures, 1965), Posenenske reduced her palette to black and primary colours and simplified her gestures to crisp linear marks. These works were made by pressing felt-tip marker or strips of adhesive tape to paper. She also experimented with illusionistic projections of space, using colour with a spray gun to create her *Spritzbilder* (Sprayed Pictures, 1964–65). Here gradations of mottled paint render bulbous forms and undulating waves.

Sculptural Pictures

Following a visit to New York City in spring 1965, Posenenske developed the *Plastische Bilder* (Sculptural Pictures, 1965–66), consisting of bent or creased paper or flexible metal, which lift from the wall in regular patterns. Several Sculptural Pictures are painted in a manner that recalls the Sprayed Pictures, creating a playful tension between the optical effects of colour and the physical folds of the underlying support.

Series A, B and C

Posenenske's interest in industrially produced objects led to her *Series A* (initiated in 1966), *B* and *C* (both begun in 1967). These monochromatic elements are variously hung on the wall or placed on the floor in groupings of two or more. Unlike the unique Sculptural Pictures, the reliefs break with prevailing expectations for a work of art. They are factory made, produced in unlimited quantities and arranged according to the whim of the consumer.

The internal welds that hold each relief together are deliberately visible, foregrounding both the artist's creative labour and the work associated with the production of the object. Many Minimal artists of the period shared Posenenske's interest in the terms of delegated fabrication. However, she was unparalleled in her resistance to the principle of rarity that is central to the art market. She used seriality – here conceived as an open structural system – to introduce indeterminacy into the presentation of her works and to radically delegate compositional agency to her consumers.

Series E

Consisting of sculptural forms that range from one to two metres in height, the works from *Drehflügel Serie E* (Revolving Vanes Series E, 1968) feature four to eight panels affixed to the vertical edges of a cubic or triangular frame, with hinges allowing the panels to rotate. Displayed in this room is a new production of a triangular *Revolving Vanes Series E*. The public is invited to continually and spontaneously manipulate this work to create spaces that are shuttered to the outside or porously open.

Monotony is Nice

Posenenske shot the super-8 film *Monotonie ist schön* (Monotony is Nice) in 1968 from the car window on a road trip in Holland with Paul Maenz and Peter Roehr. The film captures the constructed landscape of dams, bridges, lampposts and highway against the Dutch countryside, reflecting the artist's interest in industrial production and repetition.

ROOM 3

Series D and DW

Mass production and variability are at the heart of Posenenske's works. *Series D* (1967) consists of six shapes in galvanised sheet steel. While these elements resemble standard ventilation ducts, the tubes are nonetheless custom-made according to the artist's instructions and sketches. Over the nearly fifty years since production began, the techniques for galvanising have changed, resulting in the increasingly uniform metal surfaces evident when comparing the *Series D* prototypes with newer fabrications. Shortly after conceiving *Series D*, Posenenske created *Series DW* (1967), a variant with only four shapes produced from lightweight corrugated cardboard.

As with the reliefs, the *Series D* and *DW* modules can be combined at will by the consumer, thereby relinquishing part of the artist's authorship of the works. Although the individual elements of both *Series D* and *DW* are relatively small, they can reach gigantic proportions once assembled. The production of such large arrangements requires cooperation, and those involved in the configuration need to carefully coordinate their movements when combining the elements. This synchronised activity suggests an alternative model to the hierarchical structures of traditional decision-making, and reflect her later involvement in the sociological study of organised labour.

In keeping with the spirit of the artist's practice, the arrangement of *Series D* will be changed twice over the course of the exhibition.

ROOM 4

Series E

Posenenske's increasingly architectonic interests and ambitions are further outlined in diagrams for a body of *Series E* works that were conceived in 1967–68 but were never realised during her lifetime and are posthumously referred to as *Raumteiler*, or partitions in English. *Grosser Raumteiler Serie E* (Mobile Walls Series E) has been produced especially for this exhibition, consisting of two partitions hinged to walls at right angles to each other that can close to form a cube. Audiences are invited to interact with the partitions to reshape the room.

Documentation

Posenenske's sketches and blueprints for various arrangements of the works show the endless permutational possibilities and adaptability of her sculptural works. Typewritten notes categorising her works, as well as price lists, evidence the rigour and integrity behind her practice.

Two videos by Gerry Schum document the assembly of Posenenske's *Series D* and *DW*. In the first clip from *Konsumkunst-Kunstkonsum* (Consumption-Art, Art-Consumption, 1968), the artist is shown installing *Series D* on a traffic island in Offenbach, Germany. The second video shows a happening-like staging of the assembly process as part of an infamous event at the Galerie Dorothea Loehr known as *Dies alles Herzchen wird einmal Dir gehören* (All This Darling Will One Day Be Yours, 1967) where Posenenske directed the assembly and reassembly of *Series DW* throughout the evening.

Back-and-white photographs show the posthumous installations organised by Burkhard Brunn between 1986 and 1989: Hangar of Lufthansa at the Frankfurt Airport (1986 restaging of the 1967 installation), Grossmarkthalle Frankfurt (1988), Hauptbahnhof Frankfurt (1989) and Deutsche Bank (1989).

Charlotte Posenenske: Work in Progress is organised by Dia Art Foundation. The European tour of the exhibition is organised in collaboration with MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein Westfalen, Düsseldorf, and

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Project Curators

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Publication

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