

Michael Jackson cuckoo clocks and mayhem: Tobias Rehberger's art

With migraine-inducing blizzards of dots, rooms full of booby-traps and a Jacko soundtrack, the ever-provocative Tobias Rehberger's new installation in Frankfurt feels like modernism gone wonky



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Blurred lines ... Tobias Rehberger's Home and Away and Outside installation. Photograph: Norbert Miguletz/Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt

I have a blinding migraine, the result of spending too much time lost in a blizzard of dots. I can't tell if they're printed on the mirror on the wall before me, or on the shiny metal sculpture on the plinth in front of that. The dots swarm like a flock of starlings, along with my reflection. It's like a 60s movie of an acid trip in here.

Tobias Rehberger
Home and Away and
Outside

Schirn Kunsthalle,
Frankfurt

Until 11 May 2014

[Venue website](#)

All the mirrors on the walls seem to be cracked. The floor, walls and even benches in the first room of Tobias Rehberger's Home and Away and Outside, at the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt, are seasick with razzle-dazzle patterns, derived from first world war nautical camouflage. Jagged black-and-white splinters, stripes and optical distortions make looking difficult. You can't isolate

one work from another. The sculptures in this first, mad-house room of Rehberger's show hide in plain sight.

Maybe all this visual confusion is a metaphor. It certainly sharpens the eyesight and keeps you on your toes. Occasional bursts of orange and green claw at my retinas. One vaguely Picassoid form has smoke spilling from something like a nose. It has a kind of nonchalant insouciance. Here comes a great green fist, belonging to another sculpture that leans at a belligerent angle. The speech bubble above its head is empty of everything except a kind of cartoon violence. The visual noise in the room makes you want to shout to be heard. The paintings that double as cuckoo clocks don't help. It's like walking into the wrong bar on a bad night.

Tobias Rehberger is a sort of sculptor. In 2009, he gave the cafe in the former Italian pavilion at the Venice Biennale an aggressively op-art makeover, which won him a Golden Lion award. During the last Frieze art fair in New York he installed a fully functioning replica of his favourite Frankfurt watering-hole, Bar Oppenheimer, in the HotelAmericano. One might call this sort of thing social art. Personally, I prefer the anti-social kind.



Tobias Rehberger

... the artist installs himself in his own installation. Photograph: Gaby Gerster/Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt

I ended up with Rehberger in the original Oppenheimer bar, in Frankfurt, after his opening last week. It was like being stuck in a crowded ashtray. Recently, Rehberger wanted to buy the bar itself, rather than the usual round of drinks, but the owner declined. He also got enmeshed in a controversy and legal suit over his appropriation of Bridget Riley's 1961 Movement in Squares, for a work he installed at Berlin's national library. Rehberger could have saved himself a lot of bother and cash if he had acknowledged Riley in the title of his work. Maybe he should have bought her a drink. Or a bar.

Just like people, most of Rehberger's works have something wrong with them. There's always a mistake or small sign of damage. One sculpture is slightly incontinent, while another includes a little strip-light that keeps going on the blink. Even when there isn't anything discernably amiss with his sculptures, their wonky, vaguely cubist forms frequently feel like modernism gone wrong.

In 1994, Rehberger travelled to Cameroon, where he sketched, entirely from memory, a number of classic modernist pieces of furniture – chairs and stools by Donald Judd, Marcel Breuer, Alvar Aalto and Gerrit Rietveld. He had local carpenters remake the chairs from his drawings. This was modern design as Chinese whisper, and the approximations of these design classics not just were a comment on his own faulty memory, but also an exercise in translation. The same might be said of the Bridget Riley piece he copied. In any case, Rehberger told me, he has found lots of other examples of arrangements of squares similar to Riley's, some even pre-dating her own.

Art often develops by way of wilful misinterpretation and wild thinking, borrowing and theft. It is vanity to imagine any painting or sculpture that remains immune to the passing of fashion and the vagaries of time. Flies shit on them. They get old, they decay. They get beaten up, stabbed and shot. Those that manage to get through OK can still be deeply annoying, including the audio speaker here that functions as a Michael Jackson cuckoo clock. Every 15 minutes the bass-speaker membrane protrudes to the sound of a Jackson "ooh", a thud and one of those nasal yelps he did.



Perilous ... a room in

Tobias Rehberger's Home and Away and Outside exhibition. Photograph: Norbert Miguletz/Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt

And now for some quiet. Vases of flowers line the shelves. There are portraits of Rehberger's artist friends, who were asked to bring along their favourite blooms (without being told why), and which Rehberger then arranged in vases he'd already selected. Wolfgang Tillmans bought pink roses; Jorge Pardo, tiger-lily orchids; Ólafur Elíasson, white and violet lupins. For his self-portrait, Rehberger chose red, fluorescent orange and pink gardenias along with a blue crystal vase. I kept thinking of Gertrude Stein's line: "Before the flowers of friendship faded, friendship faded." Fashions and tastes also fade, come back in new guises or are forgotten

The bouquets lull one into a false sense of security. The last, disconcertingly white rooms of Rehberger's show are full of traps, with sunken seating areas to fall into, steps to trip on, ramps to stumble up. This is a perilous place, even though the works here – a children's room in which the movie Kramer vs Kramer plays, bookshelves and seating arrangements and items of furniture remade from memory of the artist's own childhood – speak of a disturbed domestic calm. Even the tangles of Velcro ribbon that double as lampshades are called Infections. His art seems to thrive on flaws and

misrememberings.

Outside hangs a sculpture of neon and metal that looks like a mangled American flag. It's all shiny metal tubes and stripes and light bulbs, only some of which work. The sculpture casts a shadow on to a low circular disc on the ground. The shadow spells the word Regret. Regret what? It's too late now anyway. I think I need a bar.



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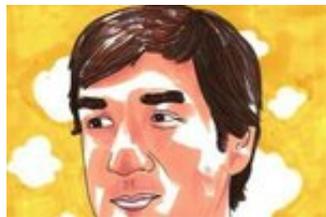
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