

BRIGITTE KOWANZ
UNITED IN DIVERSITY

XIII. Cairo Biennale, June 2019.

A belief in new technology, a reflection of its impacts on contemporary society, its opportunities but also its dangers is at the centre of Brigitte Kowanz' installation for the 13th Cairo Biennale. Light is not only the foundation of life, it is also the basis of post-analogue communication.

Brigitte Kowanz has chosen light as her immaterial medium of sculpture. She uses mirrors to multiply the real space into a series of virtual spaces. In this way she reflects physically and metaphorically the notion of space in the age of telecommunication. Light as an expansion of image and space plays as much a role as language and codes, e.g. the Morse code, in all of her works. Therefore the physical space is turned into a data space in her immersive installations. Kowanz uses light as information. Light might be considered as a universal code. All we know, we know from light. (Christa Steinle)

Brigitte Kowanz developed her own artistic vocabulary of light over the course of more than three decades of artistic work. Vocabulary is meant literally here to the extent that Brigitte Kowanz deploys light as language, as code. She employs pure light as an autonomous media, just as in former times the painters worked with pure colour. One important aspect of her art is the use of language deriving from the experience of urban spaces and the ideography of Conceptual Art. This space is simultaneously expanded for the body into a virtual space by means of mirrors, two-way mirrors, artificial light and so forth. The words conduct the visitor in a conceptual space, in a fictional space, in a mental space. Kowanz models or references the Internet's global data space. With this light installation, an extension of her previous light boxes, Brigitte Kowanz not only offers a sensory experience but also addresses a technical development that radically altered human life: the Internet. Brigitte Kowanz thus made use of two statements about the Internet, which she translated into Morse Code. With the date 12.03.1989, she referenced the presentation of the Internet at CERN, Geneva, by Tim Berners-Lee. With the date 06.08.1991, she commemorated the moment when the first website went online, when the Internet became accessible for all. She models or references the Internet's global data space. What will a world after and beyond writing look like? How will we live in a world where real space and virtual space merge? How will we cope with the infinity of these data spaces? The encounter with herself in the mirror brings the viewer back to herself and her experience of the world. Numerous conceptual meta levels emerge. A human being perceives herself or himself as a nomad between codes. The information of the Internet based on codes is transported by light via electromagnetic waves. Brigitte Kowanz's central operating principle, light coding, anticipates the world of the Internet because coding is the foundation of digitalisation and therefore the Internet. (Peter Weibel)

Besides being a main source of everyday communication, the influence of the Internet and Social Media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube), goes to the extent of actually changing and shaping societies all over the world. New technology and Social Media are ambivalent dispositifs. On the one hand, the immersive screens of our smartphones contribute to the absorption from reality into a digital space. At the same time, these spaces are spaces of encounter, in which people from all over the globe are united in diversity. Within this installation, Brigitte Kowanz overlaps different mediums of light, mirrors and spaces to address two types of reality. While standing in real spaces, viewers will encounter their reflection within the extended virtual space of the mirror works. Traditionally, light is a source of cognition. Hence, the encounter the artist initiates, ignites a reality check, a reflection of current status, somewhere between virtual and real, space and time.