

Alex Polonskaja

Cellula I&II

February 20 - April 4

Aleks Polonskaja composes systems of order based on organic and social patterns. Cellula (Latin: chamber, small room, cell, hermitage), the title of her two-part exhibition presenting recent bodies of works, describes a (social) space and its underlying structures and individual positions. What the retreat into private space means has been clearly noticeable since the global pandemic. It promises protection, but also holds dangers that can have psychological and physical effects.

The division of the presentation into two parts is reflecting the duality of Polonskaja's artistic practice: Her drawings of grids and patterns are partly created from print-throughs of jute fabrics and nets of taut threads; the line is a recurring element. Those graphite works on paper, the artist's meditative daily exercise, are the starting point for her sculptures and are juxtaposed with each other in the first part of the exhibition at the gallery. In her patched-up weavings of blue-dyed jute threads (the weight of potato sack, 2019/20) the lines spatialize and interweave into wall hangings and objects hanging from the ceiling. As they intertwine and mat together to natural sponge-like structures they include chaos.

Polonskaja's latest series of works (washable at 30C, 2020) is introduced in the second part of the show: the quilts, made of industrial wrapping paper and intensely colored polyester blankets, remind of safety blankets that at the same time reveal their own vulnerability. The rough, partly automated processing of the fine paper with the sewing machine is an act of breaking through predetermined patterns and occasionally leads to cracks and damage to the surface. Resembling skin or, to remain in the terminology of cell biology, membrane, it wraps itself around the textile nucleus. Polonskaja's main use of organic materials (plaster, jute, cardboard, paper, graphite) is complemented and interrupted by the synthetic fabrics in orange, green, pink, and yellow flashing through the permeable paper coating. The equally colorful yarn is hanging down as loose ends from the side edges.

Packaging materials are also found in Polonskaja's plaster reliefs (wet powder, 2020): cardboard torn into strips is layered on top of each other like masonry, with plaster generously oozing out of its grooves, or paper structures are pressed into the thick layer of plaster being both a bonding and a modelling compound.

The choice and combination of materials indicate a strong focus on haptic aesthetics. While Polonskaja makes use of the gestural vocabulary of Abstract Expressionism as well as the systematic repetitions of Minimalism, she is not following any strict set of rules allowing for or even planning on coincidences, irritations, and gaps. The supposed mistakes turn out to be necessary and productive steps: “Of all the pitfalls in our paths and the tremendous delays and wanderings off the track, I want to say that they are not what they seem to be. I want to say that all that seems like fantastic mistakes are not mistakes, all that seems like error is not error; and it all has to be done. That which seems like a false step is the next step.” (Agnes Martin, *Writings*, 1991)

Text: Miriam Bettin