

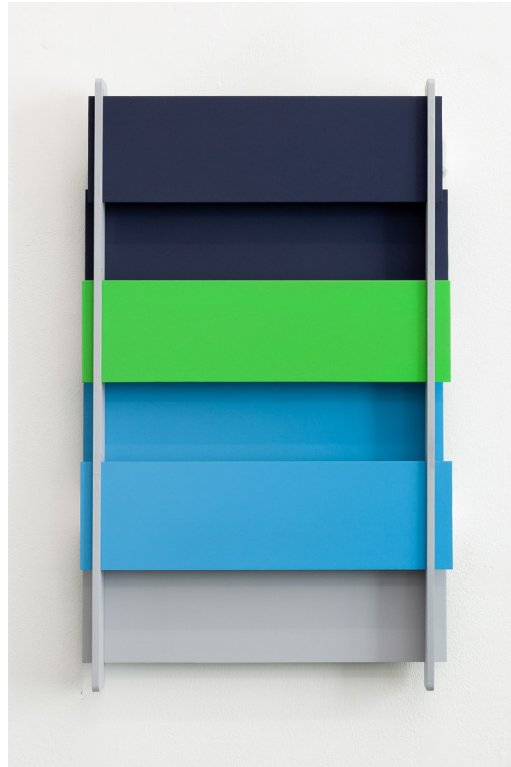
Derosia

Dominika Tylcz, BOMB, July 17, 2023

# ***BOMB***

Elizabeth Orr Interviewed by Dominika Tylcz

*Sculpture that investigates architecture and perception.*



Elizabeth Orr, Color Bars #5, 2023, acrylic, wood, aluminum, 19.5 × 11.75 × 2.25 inches. Photo by Flavio Palasciano. Courtesy of the artist and VIN VIN, Vienna.

Elizabeth Orr’s sculptures employ codes of built environments, often taking the shape of architectural elements like louvered shades, outlet plates, fences, and other barriers that obscure sight lines. Through a subtle yet determined reconfiguration of these elements, Orr turns them into what she terms “Architectural Attributes”: abstracted architectural forms that call attention to the ways in which they structure the space, movement, and meanings around them. By emphasizing objects that usually linger in our peripheral vision, Orr plays with the mechanisms of framing and exclusion, which makes me think that her medium is not necessarily sculpture but rather perception.

—Dominika Tylcz

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Dominika Tylcz

Your works often live on walls, and when approached frontally they can come across as painting impostors. Simultaneously, they enter into a parasitic relationship with the gallery's architecture. Why do you give your sculptures this ambiguous status?

Elizabeth Orr

I love the three-hundred-and-sixty-degree quality of sculpture. But I am also interested in playing with elements of directional engagement. I think of my wall-hanging sculptures in relation to perception as well as drawing an analogy with theater. In theater, there is a fourth wall that is the invisible wall between the performer and the audience. The fourth wall exists in opposition to the backstage. I look to engage with the space around the object that is hanging on the wall by drawing attention to the apparatus that allows it to hang.

This idea of "painting imposter" is funny to me. Perhaps this is something that we can celebrate? Honestly, I feel like few paintings aren't imposters of paintings. In a way, I'm hanging a prop of a window, or shutters, or a fence on a wall; so it changes the wall and could change our perception of the wall. Are we seeing from the inside out? The outside in? The in in? The out out? Does it highlight the commercial context of the gallery's white wall or a domestic space? I see these elements as the imposter that complicates "illusion" but not as an imposter of painting.



Installation view of Elizabeth Orr: Calibration, 2023, VIN VIN, Vienna. Photo by Flavio Palasciano. Courtesy of the artist and VIN VIN, Vienna.

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DT

You return to the same form many times, which is a gesture that conjures Minimalism's discrete objects and mass-produced goods. But your commitment to shutters specifically has lasted almost a decade. What sustains your interest in these things?

EO

My longstanding work with glass panes relates to the metaphor of a window, which has now turned explicitly into blinds and shutters. Glass is full of symbolism. It's an everyday interface, a screen, a window; it's a mediating surface with a substantial symbolic history of use in commerce, as in window shopping. Glass is delicate and desirable, and it has an inherent seduction that continues to appeal to me.

Minimalism is a deep root for me. I grew up in my father's studio in Venice Beach. He was the Light & Space artist Eric Orr (1953–1998) and was very committed to Minimalism in his work and incorporating it into his everyday life as it relates to Zen Buddhism. Because I was indirectly and directly introduced to these concepts as a kid, I have internalized Minimalism as an art movement and as a guiding principle and approach to life, to capitalism, and to everyday objects.

Minimalism has the reputation for being very hands-off. I see my work as being very hands-on. Although the works are iterative and refer to mass-produced objects, they are not entirely fabricated. I make them in my studio; there are sometimes fingerprints and inconsistencies.

DT

There's another conceptual outcome of the repetition which is that it's as if you are enacting a script for an object, testing the limits within which it still maintains its integrity. There's this unusual performative dimension to your sculptures. Do you consider it in relation to your sculptural work?

EO

Working through iterative forms is incredibly fruitful for me. I am invested in creating meaning through subtle changes and ruptures in repetition. Because my sculptural work is rooted in my practice as a video artist, it is hard to deny a performative dimension of the work. However, it is less about performativity and more about objects' potential to be activated and in what ways. I want the sculpture to be both inactive and refer to the potential for activation. So, as you can imagine, louvered blinds are a perfect symbol of inherent activation in that they are designed to have movement.

I am interested in how Kinetic and Optical art movements emerged when cinema was becoming mainstream and were in direct relationship with—and some would say in competition with—cinema. My intention is to give my sculptures an inherent presentation of motion. I have a fascination with lyricism in film/video and music—specifically, timing, movement, and spacing. These are echoed in my sculptural practice through slight shifts in repetitive forms; some of the works are even called Variations, like music.

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Elizabeth Orr, Quick Crate #1, 2023, acrylic, wood, aluminum, 8.5 × 7.75 × 1.5 inches. Photo by Flavio Palasciano. Courtesy of the artist and VIN VIN, Vienna.

DT

This performative potential also relates to the perceptual play in which you engage your viewers. It's magical to me how you manage to heighten the moment of seeing and ground my experience in the here and now. How do you prepare this perceptual scaffolding for your viewers?

EO

That phrase “prepare the perceptive scaffolding” resonates with me. I look to exteriors of buildings and how they vacillate between moments of visibility, design, and structural decisions. I use mostly one-eighth-inch- and quarter-inch-thick sheet metal and glass with the parts sliding together and constructed to be modular. The transparency or opacity of the surfaces in my practice are the scaffolding as they maneuver between visibility, opacity, transparency, and color in an attempt to create narratives. The different perceptual sequencing is linear and nonlinear, perhaps on top of one another, a tilt here or there, or something just visible enough.

DT

Your work also reveals omissions, shortcuts, and ellipses of perception. Are you drawn to these moments? Do you wish to make implicit presences visible again around your sculptures?

EO

Through visibility, invisibility, and more often than not against spectacle, I work toward



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contradicting methods of displaying presence. I see art-making as an opportunity for a close read. Subtlety is very important while at the same time creating an object that feels familiar, something anyone can project onto. The past couple of years I have framed my work as “Architectural Attributes” under the umbrella of what I call “Perceptual Scenarios.”

EO

Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *The Primacy of Perception* is a formative text for me. I relate it to how perception can operate in art. In the book, there is a passage where Merleau-Ponty writes: “Perception does not give me truths like geometry but presences. I grasp the unseen side as present, and I do not affirm that the back of the lamp exists in the same sense that I say the solution of a problem exists. The hidden side is present in its own way. It is in my vicinity.” I relate “the lamp” to wall-hanging sculpture; all the other visible parts of the object suggest the entire form of the object itself. Similar to the fourth wall in theater, wall-hanging is asking for a direction that rests on the imaginary. It is an unseen possibility, a potential.



Installation view of Elizabeth Orr: *Calibration*, 2023, VIN VIN, Vienna. Photo by Flavio Palasciano. Courtesy of the artist and VIN VIN, Vienna.

DT

The way you approach architecture is so uniquely analytical. Could you tell me how you think of architecture and what aspects of it are fundamental to your practice?

EO

My references to architecture are abstracted, pragmatic, and illustrative. When I use the term “Architectural Attributes” to describe my sculptures, it is not about purely structural concerns but also attributes which are design choices in architecture that perhaps result from building

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codes but that have a function that allows for a design component. “Architectural Attributes” mean elements, essences, and semblances of architecture. I’m trying to extract an essence of, and at the same time refer to, very concrete examples.

DT

In your show at Derosia earlier this year, the video *This Room* (2023) illustrated how your work indexes different protocols constituting a room and its uses. The first sentence of the script you wrote says, “This room knows I’m here.” It reminded me of Alvin Lucier’s *I am sitting in a room*, a musical piece in which he used a recording of his voice to amplify sonically the shape and presence of the architectural space. Could you tell me more about how you think about this reciprocal awareness between people and rooms?

EO

*This Room* begins with waxing poetic; it’s also a spell in a way: “This room knows I’m here.” We are in the room at the art show; things are placed with intention, but also this room is designed for us to inhabit it.

The second half of the video is an interview with New York–based architect Pierre de Brun. We discuss how building code builds the building. As an architect, you can’t always do everything you want, which we both think is a beautiful thing. He speaks to constraints in his work designing public housing and how those constraints lead to design decisions. It’s sculpture and building code, and the dynamics of rules and breaking those rules is what I’m interested in.

Elizabeth Orr: *Calibration* is on view at VIN VIN in Vienna until July 22.

Dominika Tylcz is a curator and writer based in Queens, New York. Their research revolves around spatial and embodied modes of meaning-making.