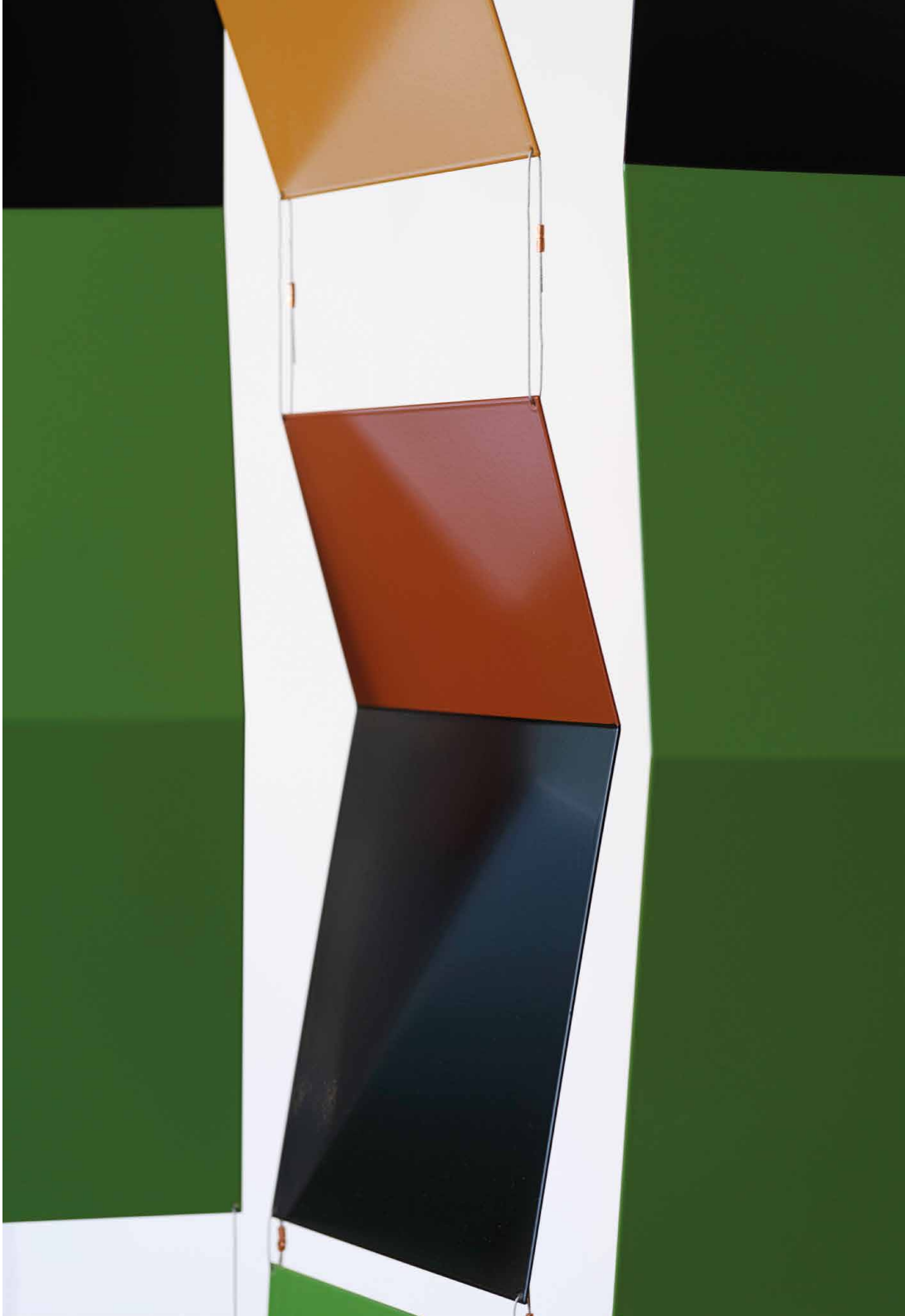


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213 Rosler's work has made visible what Marshall McLuhan noted in his 1970 essay "Culture Is Our Business": "World War III is a guerrilla information war with no division between military and civilian participation."

In many of the videos and photographic pieces on view, it is evident how representations of women and technology are strong themes. Rosler's collages and video artworks convey feminist ideas and counter the power of the myths spread by mass media with alternative representations of women and modern everyday life. Steyerl's works are based on computer animations and the aesthetics expressed by YouTube and other online platforms. Despite their different media, however, both artists are focused on denouncing the privatization of public space, the control of society 24/7, and oppressive authorities that transform the city into a war zone.

The pathway of the exhibition juxtaposes earlier with more recent works in a dialogical display conceived in collaboration with the two artists, who for the first time in their careers present an exhibition in Switzerland; the museum has devoted two floors to the presentation. The place, and the elaborate, high-tech multimedia installations, play an important role in transmitting the themes of the individual works, transforming the whole exhibition into a single, large environment that both fascinates the visitor and seems to feed one's paranoia of a constantly monitored digital condition. If hidden bugs

were the tools of old-fashioned espionage up through the Cold War, drones are the icons of our current condition of low-intensity war. Steyerl's *Extra Space Craft* (2016) is a docu-fiction video set in northern Iraq, where a national observatory is maneuvering drones over Iraqi Kurdistan. The control tower becomes the set of a space agency, which the artist skillfully adopts as her subject to evoke the virtual dimension superimposed on the realities of state-controlled territories and zones under anti-terrorist control. Rosler's *Theater of Drones* (2013) is a sort of visual essay also focused on these protagonists of our contemporary environment. "Welcome to the brave new world of round-the-clock surveillance and the death of privacy!" says one of the slides in the piece, its tone seemingly borrowed from advertising language, highlighting even more, if possible, the contrast between the illusive world of the media and the militarization of everyday life.

It is interesting to note how the works of both authors, whose art is notoriously serious and intellectually rigorous (as most clearly expressed in their theoretical writings) can take shapes and tones that infuse the topics with a surplus of optimism and fun. The multilayered constructions of their narratives reflect our perception of social reality as dominated by contradictory signs coexisting in the same space (and on the same digital platforms), but they also demonstrate their authors' careful study of narrative models and literal references that they have always used to give their operations an immediately recognizable style.

"Tomorrow's swashbuckler will not be in a plane, but at a screen": Martha Rosler borrows this sentence from Régis Debray as a prophecy regarding our new home environment dominated by touchscreen devices and laptops, and their anesthetizing effects, which are not that far from the effects of TV image-bombing, a phenomenon that Rosler has analyzed over the last past four decades in renowned collages such *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home* (1967-1972), in which pictures of "American dream" interiors from the glossy magazine *House Beautiful* collide with documentary shots from the Vietnam War. Manipulation and decontextualization are instruments Rosler frequently deploys to criticize power structures, represented in urban environments and public space by advertising campaigns as well by ideological symbols, as in her installation *Unsettling the Fragments* (2007). Steyerl contemplates both physical and virtual spaces in the essayist documentaries that she has produced as a filmmaker and author. In recent works such as *The Tower* (2015), the editing and images present a radical visual language capable of embodying digital information streams, pointing out how reality has been augmented by technologies and virtual processes. This central theme of the image, which runs through the whole exhibition in the dialogue between the two artists, represents an important moment of reflection on the feminine and feminist gaze, of which these two artists are certainly among the most important living representatives.

## Leonor Antunes: a thousand realities from an original mark

Text by Michele Robecchi

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Through July 20

At the core of Leonor Antunes's work there seems to be a desire to challenge two basic foundations of sculpture—the epic notion of the single object as an authoritarian entity capable of renegotiating the viewer's spatial perception by standing in the middle of the room, and the negation of the floor as the most logical place on which to stage this process. The latter point is possibly the most intriguing as it shifts the focus to the one surface of the six that conventionally make up the sides of an exhibition space on which one would be least inclined to seek out the presentation of a three-dimensional piece: the ceiling. This is particularly evident with the *Alternate Knots* series on view on the ground floor of the Marian Goodman on the occasion of Antunes's first outing with the London gallery.

The dangling brass tubes and bulbs elegantly filling the environment successfully create an explorative itinerary drawing on a relief by the late British artist Mary Martin, but a quick glance at the geometrical pattern of the ropes holding everything together—reminiscent of some of Anni Albers's works—is sufficient to make us realize that such arrangement goes way beyond its functional role and it is, in fact, an intrinsic part of the project. Even when we are faced with works standing on the ground, such as *Alternate Climbing*

solid partitions, giving an unexpected dynamism to what is already a sparse but organic composition. Shaped prior to their assembly, the screens in *Alternate Climbing Forms* introduce a more implicit common denominator in their reflecting the exact same size of the glass panels used by Alison Smithson and her husband Peter when they built the Upper Lawn Pavilion in Tisbury in the late 1950s: an example of "transparent architecture" and one of the early alternatives to the existing suburban model popular at the time that Antunes studied and researched extensively for this exhibition.

The presence of these three muses—Albers, Martin, and Smithson—is evidently not coincidental. Over the years, Antunes has often referred to female architects, artists and designers in her practice, both as a way to instigate a debate over gender issues as well as a reminder of how the present is often used as a smokescreen to cover up the mistakes of the past. Now universally acknowledged as leading figures in their respective fields, these women had in fact endured years of work in a state of almost total isolation. This is especially true for Albers, who was forced to attend a weaving workshop instead of a design class due a policy of gender discrimination in vigor at the time even in an allegedly open-minded school like Walter Gropius's Bauhaus. The fact that all three were also the better halves of equally creative partners (Josef Albers, Kenneth Martin, and Peter Smithson) is a further indicator of the necessity to attach themselves to their male counterparts in order to find more opportunities for their work to be made and viewed. The title of the exhibition,

in Antunes's work, namely the wide range of materials (brass, leather, and polycarbonate) she deploys and how she is an artist essentially enamored with her craft. Some modules and structures are repeated but never to the extent of coming across as impersonal or serialized. It is rather the idea expressed by Giulio Paolini in his *Mimesi* sculptures of duplication as a moment of temporary displacement and subsequent adjustment that comes into play, with the difference that while Paolini subscribes to the strategy of the *objet trouvé*, Antunes accomplishes this effect through the idea that construction and production are two sides of the same coin.

In an interview with Maria Lind in 2015, Antunes stated how her choice of materials is determined by the need to establish a presence within the space as well as their ability to put across contents and uses. "I tend to think about materials the same way I think about people, how they age and tarnish." This exercise in animism is what ultimately accounts for the extraordinary degree of intimacy Antunes's work emanates, not just when in solo-show mode but also in a group setting, as seen recently with her participation in the exhibition *Machines à penser* at the Fondazione Prada in Venice, where her sculptures provided a welcome moment of warmth and self-reflection.

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