

Art Review:

Issue 37 £5

'Painter (man) struggling to make abstraction impressive wishes contact others similar interest' - small ads, 1

DECEMBER 2009

Special Anniversary Issue: 60 Years Young

it's called 'POP' ART -
LAWRENCE ALLOWAY

introduces the latest youth
craze: the SKYLON! -

REYNER-BANHAM
reports on Britain's new
technological wonder;

exclusive - MATISSE
remembers his youth;

DAVID SYLVESTER
introduces the brightest

young spark on the scene since
Dylan Thomas, and his name

is LUCIAN FREUD; bring
on the BETAMAX revolution

(and remember, you heard
it here first); NIKI DE SAINT PHALLE

- a madcap take on the fears and thrills of a
'young girl'; reach for your shades, Grandma,

it's OP ART - PETER FULLER on
BRIDGET RILEY; and hey, check

this out - some punk called JAY
JOPLING is setting up a 'temporary

project space'...



Roman Ondák

Johnen Galerie, Berlin
25 September – 16 November



Colour and Size, 1999, installation, shoebox, wood, open window, dimensions variable. Courtesy Johnen Galerie, Berlin

Berlin's art scene is, unsurprisingly, pretty much out of sync with nature. While animals and plants have a ball in summer and prepare to hibernate in autumn, the city's galleries pack, wrap and shuffle while nature is at its peak. Come September, though, everyone is happily settled and nested, with the art-fair season tending to find new galleries opening and existing galleries occupying new premises. Johnen Galerie was among this year's migratory galleries; and forget the loft, because the *piano nobile* has evidently become the place to be for Berlin dealers. Johnen's housewarming was hosted by Roman Ondák, who in his first solo show at the gallery delivered a project that perfectly fits the occasion – even though, or maybe because, it came across as a miniretrospective, combining older works from the mid-1990s onwards.

Space, not as social but architectural construct, is the topic of this exhibition. Ondák directs our attention to the parts of the environment that are, if not markers of wealth and prestige, purely functional: the floor, the windowpane, the door, the walls. The centrepiece is *Shared Floor* (1996): parquet flooring relocated to the gallery. Somewhat smaller than the gallery floor, it is surrounded by a number of sockets attached to metal rods, evoking the ghostly presence of surrounding walls. *Untitled (Wall)* (1997) and *Freed Doorway* (1998), meanwhile, are what their titles suggest: a piece of wall and a door leaning against the gallery wall.

While those pieces affirm the architectural status quo and may be mistaken for the remnants of

an unfinished renovation or exhibits from some nerdy socio-archaeological display, the smaller interventions subtly undermine the function of the building and its parts: *Untitled (Traffic)* (2001) – a red emergency hammer of the type installed in buses or trains – is placed right next to a window, suggesting both danger and an escape route. In the backroom, *Colour and Size* (1999), a shoebox with a cut-out circle, invites birds to make that part of the exhibition their home. The carton is hanging near an open window (and yes, the artist insists it must be open all the time), in front of a tree.

Thoughts of the artist's recent project for the Venice Biennale are never far away. The conceptual impetus remains the same, whether Ondák's gestures are big or small, whether he is blurring the boundaries between inside and outside at the Czech and Slovak national pavilion or perforating the structural integrity of his gallery: the intervention may be modest, but the effect can be remarkable. But beyond demonstrating the consistency of Ondák's work, this exhibition proves something else: the importance of time and place, the correlation between an exhibition and its *raison d'être*. This show draws most of its appeal from the fact that it is inaugurating a new space, which lends an aspect of reflexivity to this installation. In other words: its success is in large part the result of smart curatorial thinking, taking both conceptual and commercial concerns into account. *Astrid Mania*