

GEOMETRY OF OPPRESSION

Opening Reception: Friday, March 16, 2018, 6:00-7:00pm at SPACE

Artist talk: 7:00pm - 8:00pm at SPACE

Show runs from March 16 - May 12, 2018

SPACE, 538 Congress St, Portland, ME 04101

Sandra Erbacher's most recent works explore the parallels between bureaucracy and fascism via the appropriation and juxtaposition of images and text from archives of office furniture, fascist architecture and fashion, and the history of Nazi Germany.

Shared formal characteristics between juxtaposed sets of images, such as the grid, are emphasised, in order to allude to detached efficiency, rational compartmentalisation, rigid rules, and a formal hierarchical structure, while their origin, and meaning is purposefully obscured. As a result of their juxtaposition, fluid associations between disparate narratives are created, while others are cast into doubt. This, in turn, generates a situation of ontological uncertainty that aims to ask questions about the existence of an absolute truth.

On the large wall facing the viewer upon entering the gallery is the diagram *IBM and the Holocaust*, which charts the business connections between IBM and the Nazi regime. According to research by investigative journalist Edwin Black, IBM and its subsidiaries helped create technology that facilitated the Nazi genocide – from identification and cataloguing programs of the 1930s to the selections and extermination campaigns of the 1940s. Condensed and abstracted, the information in Erbacher's chart presents an effort to understand and come to terms with not only the atrocities perpetrated, but also with the active complicity of one of America's most powerful corporations. In the sense that the archives Erbacher draws on can only ever be partial and incomplete, *IBM and the Holocaust* also refers to the limits of representation and the inadequacy of language and image to tell us the complete story.

The three large-format photographs *Osiris*, *Parallels of Artistic and Industrial Ensembles*, and *Principles of Power* each juxtapose an image from office design catalogues with an architectural drawing by Albert Speer. Albert Speer was Adolf Hitler's chief architect and a prominent member of the Nazi party. His buildings and architectural designs, including his comprehensive vision for a grand Berlin under Hitler, are characterized by classicism, monumentalism, efficiency and a dislike for ornament that reflects the Nazi's assumed superiority, racial purity, and power. By comparing these seemingly disparate images, Erbacher prompts the viewer to ask questions about the organising principles, hierarchies and power relationships behind corporate bureaucracy and oppressive regimes such as fascism.

Vent is an aluminium grate mounted to the wall at about knee height, mimicking a working vent. Only at closer inspection will the viewer notice that this is no ordinary grate, but that a geometric pattern has been laser-cut into the metal sheet. The pattern mirrors the layout of Auschwitz concentration camp in a chilling echo of one of the large architectural prints on the opposite wall of the gallery. It also hints at the ways in which the physical and political everyday structures supporting unequal power relations and oppressive regimes are often disguised and validated by mechanisms of bureaucracy.

Secluded from the main gallery, which is divided by a wooden screen and planters giving it the appearance of a reception area, is a small darkened screening room. On a carpeted floor sits an outdated overhead projector, which casts a black and white diptych onto the wall. *Posterior Torso Study* is composed of an image from an archive on fascist fashion in Italy in the 1940s. It details a metal cage that envelops a female body and translates the results into a grouping of projections and rations. It was developed in an effort to create a "system of mechanical measurement of a totalitarian nature". This image is juxtaposed with a study of a sitting posture to aid the development of an ergonomic office chair, suggesting, not only the measuring, recording, classification, surveillance, and disciplining of the body, but also the potential consequences for non-compliance with these procedures the body is subjected to.

Cool, anxiety provoking and dystopian in tone, *Geometry of Oppression* aims to ask uncomfortable questions, on the nature of our relationship to social and bureaucratic systems and governing bodies, the claims to neutrality, objectivity and truth purported by the archive, and the status of history as personal, fragmented and contingent.