

KLARA WALLNER

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Radical Chic

Knut Eckstein's third solo exhibition at the Klara Wallner Gallery bears the title "Ornamental Crime", a gloss on Adolf Loos's essay, titled "Ornament and Crime". The text is Loos's first radical plea for architectonic purism. "*Ornament is wasted labor... Today it also means wasted material, and both signify wasted capital... The modern man, the man of the modern nerves, has no need of ornament, he detests it*"¹.

Certainly, Eckstein's art is not unadorned, but despite its ornamentation the artist always focuses on the essential. From an ecological viewpoint, one could describe his process as a reuse of *waste* material. Found print media and packaging are Eckstein's preferred source materials, which with various adhesives and clotheslines, he works into three-dimensional, tectonic objects. On the one hand, Eckstein's works contradict Loos's approach. By applying used components as aesthetic means, Eckstein assembles objects that by Loosian standards would be considered decorative. On the other hand, on this point Eckstein and Loos also meet, almost as if they had arranged to have a chat.

Eckstein's embellishment of his found objects merely highlights a paradigm shift, which the artist employs in order to negotiate marginal aesthetic experiences. From this exploration, straight-line tectonic elements emerge from the fragments of old materials, previously products, whose former lives are allowed to shine through. The supposedly decorative relationship serves but to further highlight the origins of the found objects. In a way, new stories are written onto old materials thereby creating new works of art; works that can be thought of as an added value to society, since Eckstein uses objects and materials that otherwise would have been thrown away and forgotten. Through this transformation and the interplay of used packaging materials and advertising imagery, the artist asks us to reflect on our cultural present. Eckstein walks us through our own environment, in which we may discover many (new) things, if only we are ready and willing to perceive the visual language of the city.

His works are not pleasing, rather provocative and in their radicalism lies a critique in line with Adolf Loos's demand for a clear and straightforward architecture: "*The house must please everyone. As opposed to the work of art, which need not please anyone... The work of art wants to tear human beings out of their comfort. The house should serve to make us comfortable. The work of art is revolutionary, the house conservative*"².

(Klara Wallner)

1) Adolf Loos, Ornament und Verbrechen, in: Sämtliche Schriften, Wien, Verlag Herold, 1962.

2) Adolf Loos: Architektur, in: Der Sturm, 15. Dezember 1910, (Hg.): Herwarth Walden.