

frieze

CONTEMPORARY ART AND CULTURE

NO. 179 JULY 2014

GOSHKA MACUGA

Disobedient Curiosity

SOPHIA AL-MARIA

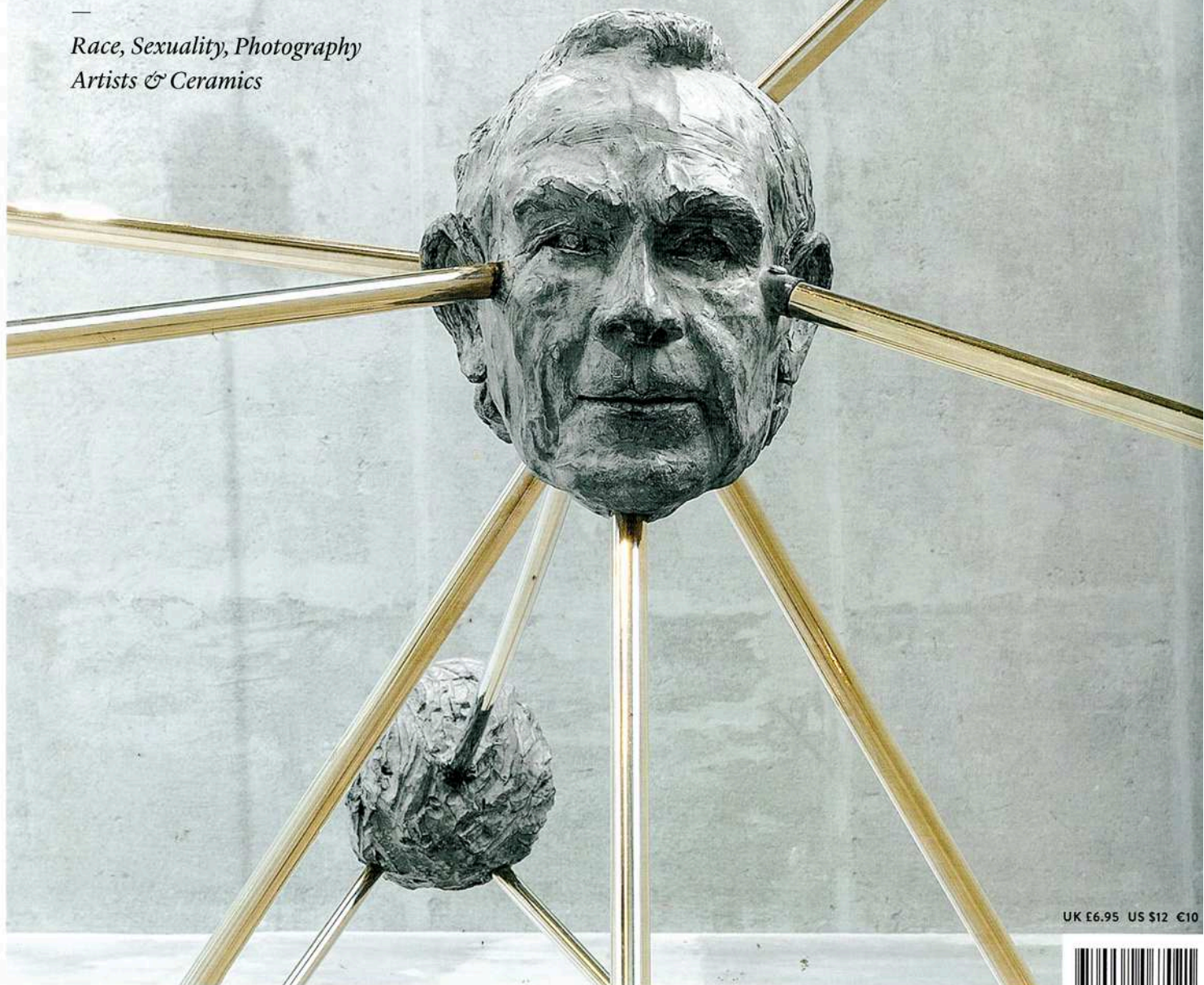
'The present is less than dust.'

CATHERINE OPIE *Artist Project*

TRACEY ROSE *Chaos Queen*

—
Race, Sexuality, Photography

Artists & Ceramics



UK £6.95 US \$12 €10



97 70962 067021

In Formation

SEXAUER, BERLIN

The group exhibition 'In Formation' takes as its focus the aesthetic influence of one of the most celebrated figures of late-20th-century Italian design: the eclectic architect and industrial designer, Ettore Sottsass. An installation of works by 15 contemporary artists shows how Sottsass, who founded the 1980s design collective Memphis, left a lasting legacy on the visual arts through his brightly coloured, workily angled objects finished with surfaces of laminated plastic, stripes, polka-dots or faux animal-skin.

Sottsass's iconic, free-standing shelving unit *Casablanca Sideboard* (1981) stands in the gallery as a centrepiece of audacious colour, pattern and shape. Remarkable in its sheer gaudiness – bright red, yellow and white mottled surfaces upon a multi-armed totem – this was one of his 'useful sculptures', a phrase the designer used to describe art injected with a functional value. (With its inverse-angled shelves, however, this sideboard's functionality is debatable).

Perhaps most distinguishable for its surface patterns – small, undulating, tightly packed lines, akin to live bacteria in a Petri dish – Sottsass's work has clearly been an influence on that of Amélie Grözinger (who conceived and co-curated this show based on her own interest in the Italian's legacy). Her three wall-mounted triangles – *I.F. I*, *II* and *III* (all 2016) – are complex woven paper surfaces secured with copious drawing pins to form a repeating pattern – white gloves heavily outlined in black, pointing finger outstretched, imitating the digital 'hand' icon. Rolf-Gunter Dienst's series of eight 'Kauffenheim' pencil drawings (all 2015) of intricate squiggles, dots and lines engulfing the entire page, demonstrates a similar tendency toward obsessive repetition.

In artist duo Janine Eggert & Philipp Ricklefs's *The Limits of Control 9eck, 6eck and 3eck* (all 2013), nonagon, hexagon and triangular forms are hand-carved with radiating designs recalling computer circuit boards. Though made of MDF, their surfaces appear shiny and plastic, evenly covered with glossy paint in true blue, slate grey and milky orange. The colours refer to the four inks of CMYK printing, the grey being a combination of them all. The pieces elegantly recall Sottsass's own combination of shape and pattern, offset here by uniform expanses of colour.

American artist Slater Bradley's buzzing neon work of scarlet red, sapphire blue and iris purple filaments, *Saturn Trine Neptune* (2014), emits hazy auras



of light from shapes representing the signs of the zodiac, indicating the planet of Saturn transiting Neptune and giving the ability (allegedly) to turn dreams into a reality. Re-interpreted in a Sottsass-esque mode of bold lines, Bradley's zodiac predicts the future in vintage fashion.

Less effective are works that merely suggest a connection with the mood or manner of the 1980s. Iris Touliatou's *'Listen here, if you don't know who Dionysos is, out the door with you!'* (2016) comprises four copper vessels containing blue liqueurs – creamy variations of blue curaçao – and while compelling in their colour combinations and compositional uniformity, they seem removed from any real influence of Sottsass. Similarly, Daniel Newman's video *Babyland General* (2015) – a surreal narrative in which Cabbage Patch Kids (a favourite toy of the era) are born from plants and fed with green liquid from teat-like bottles – feels somewhat shoehorned into the show.

Arguably, 'In Formation' is an exhibition about the aesthetics of an era of accelerated post-modernity, when linearity and autonomy were discarded in favour of compressed time, space and form. As suggested by the word play of the show's title, this was a moment at which one reference flowed continuously into the next, all of them flattened on the same plane. That mood is perhaps best summed up in the exhibition's final work, Flaka Haliti's

Untitled (2016), a porcelain emoji blowing a heart-shaped kiss to the viewer, crowned with an Elizabethan-style ruff and mounted high on a peach coloured plinth: an image of playfully progressive, popular forms modelled in the finest of materials.

LOUISA ELDERTON

3
'In Formation', 2016,
exhibition view