

## Works in the exhibition Käthe-Kollwitz-Preis 2018. Adrian Piper

### Adrian Piper, *Mauer*, 2010

Video installation: television monitors, videos with randomly programmed images, fresh roses. Dimensions variable.  
Collection Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin. © APRA Foundation Berlin.

A geometrical, strictly structured wall comprising 25 equally sized cubical television monitors with moving and still images blocks the visitors' path leading to the inside of the exhibition halls. A gentle scent of roses fills the air. We are at Pariser Platz. It is here that the Palais Arnim was extended by Ernst von Ihne from 1905 to 1907 to become the seat of the "Königliche Akademie der Künste". It is also here that a total of 40 artists were expelled during the 1930s by the National Socialists from the then "Preußische Akademie", including Max Liebermann and Käthe Kollwitz, amongst others. Following the destruction of the Palais in 1945, the preserved exhibition building remained a place for art in the postwar years for the master students of the new "Deutsche Akademie der Künste zu Berlin" in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Later, the vestibule of the halls was reserved for the border guards of the GDR until 1989, who policed the Berlin Wall, while border violators were temporarily detained in the adjacent building. This is merely a brief overview of the eventful 111-year-old history of the site.

The rigorously structured video wall by Adrian Piper was created in 2010, five years after her relocation to Berlin, where she has since been living in the eastern part of the city and has intensively engaged herself with the history of the country and the city, which remained divided until 1989. Underlying this multimedia installation by the American artist is her fundamental understanding of liberty and self-determination of the human being in the Kantian sense, and its possibilities of improvement within selected social orders. During the founding years of the GDR, there prevailed an idealistic conception of the creation of a new social order and a new human being in a social and fair state. This was doomed to fail because the people who had created this state were not free from war-induced egoism and indifference. The consequences for the people are well-known. The failed "GDR experiment", as Adrian Piper specifically called it in 2014, can be assessed in brief summary as one of many global social setbacks with which the world's population is confronted. The causes for these setbacks are manifold.

Adrian Piper positions the viewer in front of a wall of random and manipulated image interferences and television test screens as well as red roses filmed in real time. All in black and white, except for the red roses, the symbol for love, beauty, death – the beauty of the flower counteracts the brutality of life. Moreover, the red rose, alongside its Christian connotation of the wounds and Passion of Christ, and together with the red carnation, is considered a symbol of social uprisings and emancipatory movements. Television was, especially along the inner-German border, a highly significant source for the informational flow of the GDR's population, offering perceived participation in world affairs. End of broadcast was tantamount to a cut-off population. Born in the United States, Adrian Piper works with her own memory. Here, she uses the test image of the New York television station WCBS-TV.

According to Helmut Draxler (2018), this type of installation in the oeuvre of Adrian Piper is about a conflation of a "receptive act". "The core of this receptive act would be to think about one's own involvements in different social conditions (...)".

## Adrian Piper, *Hier*, 2018

Site-specific installation comprising three engraved wall texts (in Hebrew, German, and Arabic) on adjacent walls. Dimensions variable. Collection Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin. © APRA Foundation Berlin.

Following an intensive engagement with works and texts by Sol LeWitt, Adrian Piper began to focus more strongly on language from the 1960s onwards, in the form of script, graphics, or spoken language, which has characterised her work up to the present day. Early series such as *Here and Now* (1968) or *Relocated Planes I and II* (1969) juxtaposed combinations of words, texts, and numbers with the factor of space and time. Her conceptual investigations, then and now, are accompanied by the experimental and performative exploration of her own body as well as questions about the political and social conditions for artists in general. The engagement with Minimal Art, the search for a new truthfulness, for a new system of coordinates for artistic practice, determined here by the word, led to transcending the use of multiple colours and to simple, non-pictorial structures in many of her works.

The site-specific installation *Hier* (2018), originally realised as the version *Here* (2008/2017) at the Lévy Gorvy Gallery in New York, achieves a sense of focus due to its reduction to white, floating letters on a white background, which resemble a light appearance. The colour white describes, up to the present day, maximum neutrality, attaining a point at which any associative elements can be done away with. In doing so, the writing is objectified from within itself and thus awakens the sensibility of the viewer. In terms of its content, it is a form of interpellation on issues of presence and absence. Using Latin, Hebrew, and Arabic letters, the artist states in three languages: “I was here – We were here – We are here”. The focus on a person, in addition to the conjugated form of the verb “to be”, is the most minimalist grammatical compound sentence which achieves completeness. By means of a new and unexpected spatial linguistic perspective, Adrian Piper changes the perceptual processes of the persons in the space. The viewers are confronted with an almost dematerialised ordering system they are familiar with from other contexts (such as memorials, gravestones, inscriptions with memorial character, etc.), and which contains social, religious, and cultural connotations as well as being connected to the culture of memory.

The arrangement of the writings, appearing verse-like, goes from Jewish to Christian and ends in Islamic. The leaps in the choice of the personal pronouns are deliberately selected – it’s about communication: the ego (the “I”) takes up the speaker’s role. The speaker can either be part of the we-based group or not; both options are possible. It is in the change from an individual to a group in the use of the personal pronouns, coupled with the change in tense between the past and the present, that social and civilisation-related processes are hinted at. Evolution, too, belongs in this category, from the tribal history-related development to the further development of the course of history, while encompassing three world religions here. Adrian Piper’s decades-long engagement with topics such as gender and race, xenophobia and the nature of the self, bring questions of the here and now closer to the viewer in a direct and immediately comprehensible manner. Effective action and social changes must and can be evoked by reactions to artistic strategies: “...the power of art is unlimited for social change...” (Adrian Piper).

**Adrian Piper, *Das Ding-an-sich bin ich*, 2018**

Eight mirrored Plexiglas cubes, each 180 cm high x 60 wide cm x 60 cm deep (70.86" x 23.62" x 23.62"), each housing concealed sound system; eight 8-minute audio files; floor-wide grid of minimum 60 cells each 60 cm x 60 cm (23.62" x 23.62"), room dimensions variable. Collection Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin. © APRA Foundation Berlin.

A uniform mesh of 60 x 60 cm-sized squares of white adhesive tape structures the entire floor of the exhibition hall; eight life-size mirror cubes stand in the space. The cubes, spaced at irregular distances from each other, enable the viewer to move freely in the space, while discerning numerous reflections.

The visual perception is extended by an auditory one: a total of eight spoken contributions in Somali, Arabic, Hebrew, Turkish, Hindi, Persian, Gaelic, and Icelandic buzz through the space, blending or concentrating at their source, a mirrored cube. Here, various kinds of ordering systems overlap, in which the viewer is confronted with other social and cultural conditions in a participatory manner, just as every emigrant would experience in a foreign place. An audiovisual perception, referring to one's own body, is evoked by active participation in this object space, raising many questions: What is real, what is the image and what the mirror image? Who is the subject here, and who is the object? The relationship between space, time, the artist, the viewer, the image, and the reflection is questioned. This intensive involvement with the concept of "reality" and the "real", with the dialectic of the body and media, is not least also conveyed by the work's title, *Das Ding-an-sich bin ich*.

One doesn't have to be Kantian to engage with questions about the perception of reality, reality-in-itself (*Wirklichkeit-an-sich*), and the primeval form of all objects. If one applies Immanuel Kant's thoughts to Piper's installation, it's about our imagination of reality and the reality of the other, and our perception of one's own body in space; reality itself may never be fathomed. The spoken contributions, mostly in non-European languages and spoken by men and women, may or may not go into the artist's catalogue of questions on day-to-day topics revolving around one's own person. What is essential is that they anonymously say in their own language whatever they want to say. With or without the relevant language skills, every listener individually perceives the emotional power of the spoken contributions.

This multimedia installation points to a return to experiences and artistic processes, which played a role in the oeuvre of Adrian Piper at the beginning of her career, with graphic-conceptual, sound-based works and in engaging with Minimal Art; but also later with specific objects in the 1980s and 1990s. In doing so, Adrian Piper's early spatial works are called to mind, such as *Infininitely Divisible Floor Construction* (1968), and serial works on paper, such as *Here and Now* (1968) or *Drawings about Paper and Writings about Words* (1967).

Text by Anke Hervol