

Museums

Steering commentary

Artist Bettina Pousttchi studies American car culture and puts the pedal to the metal for her exhibit at the Nasher in Dallas

By Gaile Robinson
grobinson@star-telegram.com

When the German-Iranian artist Bettina Pousttchi first visited the Nasher Sculpture Center in 2012, she was scouting the museum and Dallas for her first American exhibit. The Nasher had invited the Berlin native to create an installation for its Sightings series, and she was in town to feel the pulse of the city and the dynamics of the institution.

She noticed the prevailing car culture immediately. She then turned her attention to the history of the Nasher's location. "Very often my work starts with the location," she says. "I found what was here before was a parking lot, and the street [Ross Avenue] had been known as Automobile Row. It had car dealerships and auto repair shops, so this is how the idea began."

She looked at the building and what it could provide. She liked the large windows and how close they were to the narrow street. She thought she could accentuate that.

"The museum is especially good for sculpture, so I wanted to transform this building into the sculpture. After all the research and finding drive-through pharmacies, drive-through funeral homes and libraries, I thought it was time for the first drive-through museum."

To create her installation, *Drive Thru Museum*, the central gallery has been enclosed in what looks like security gates on each window wall blocking the view of the street, and the floor has been blacktopped in a rubber coating and painted with traffic lanes. Scattered throughout the gallery are sculptures from the Nasher's permanent collection.

Zaar, by John Chamberlain, was a natural fit, since his works look as if they came from the auto wrecking yard, and there are also some of the Nasher's crowd-pleasing favorites: *The Kiss*, by Constantin Brancusi; Patsy and Ray Nasher's first sculpture purchase, *Torso With Buds*, by Jean Arp; and *Night*, by Aristide Maillol.

Pousttchi inserted her own tower of white mangled

More on POUSTTCHI . 7E

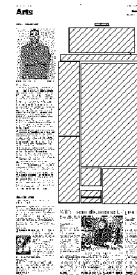
Sightings: Bettina Pousttchi

- Through July 13
- Nasher Sculpture Center, 2001 Flora St., Dallas
- \$5-\$10
- 214-242-5100; www.nasher-sculpturecenter.org

police barricades in the mix.

Many of Pousttchi's sculptures are made from crowd-control devices. Her series of street bollards, vertical black stanchions that have been bent and grouped, lean into each other for support. *Walter* is two bollards; *Oskar* consists of seven. They were named for streets in Berlin and seem to be a frozen snapshot of a Keystone Cops caper.

The white crowd-control barriers that she bends and stacks vertically have a monumental quality that reference minimalist artist Dan Flavin and constructivist architect Vladimir Tatlin, especially since she named one of her pieces



Double Monuments for Flavin and Tatlin. There is a huge mashup of art history here: her spiraling white barriers for Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*, 1920, and the her white neon tube that runs through the middle in homage to Flavin's fluorescent tubed "*monument*" 1 for V. Tatlin, 1964.

The artist, who will turn 43 this year, has had numerous international exhibitions in solo and group shows, including the Venice Biennale in 2003 and 2009, and the Kunsthalle Basel in 2011.

Most of Pousttchi's commissions are for large public works, and she approaches them as she did the Nasher installation – with research and history to guide her hand. Four years ago, she completed the transformation of the Temporäre Kunsthalle in Berlin. This temporary building for exhibiting contemporary art was a placeholder on a piece of land that was so rich in

history that the civic debate over what should be there was loud and fractious.

In 1443, it was the site of the former Stadtschloss (City Palace) built by the Kings of Prussia, and damaged during World War II. It was torn down in 1950 by East Germany. From the ashes of the palace rose the

the Palast der Republik (Palace of the Republic) to house the parliament of the GDR.

There were factions that wanted both structures rebuilt. The Stadtschlossians won, and while plans were being drafted, Pousttchi covered the side of the temporary building in 970 paper posters so that the exterior almost mimicked the original Palast der Republik. In place of the GDR's national emblem, she inserted a large clock. The photo images on the posters were grainy and streaked with horizontal stripes, like security videos or primitive television reception. It gave the facade

re-creation a ghostly quality of fading memory, but it appeased the faction that had wanted that building resurrected.

When faced with installation sites rich with a built history, Pousttchi questions which chapter has greater weight. "Which of the many epochs that make up the architectural layers of the city ... do we want to remember? Which history are we rebuilding, and whose history undergoes public representation?"

With the Nasher, there was only the former Automobile Row. But it reflected the strong autocratic nature of the city. "So why not for the museum?" Pousttchi asks.

"Very often my work starts with the location."

Bettina Pousttchi, artist, explaining how she was inspired by Ross Avenue's history as Automobile Row



Bettina Pousttchi, the creator of "Drive Thru Museum," is a German-Iranian artist.

Special to the Star-Telegram/Brandon Wade



Pieces from the Nasher's permanent collection are part of Pousttchi's exhibit.

Special to the Star-Telegram/Brandon Wade



Pousttchi's sculptures are named for streets in Berlin.

Special to the Star-Telegram/Brandon Wade



Bettina Pousttchi installs a neon tube into one of the sculptures in the exhibit, *Double Monuments for Flavin and Tatlin*, which is made from powder-coated crowd barriers and neon.

Special to the Star-Telegram/Brandon Wade