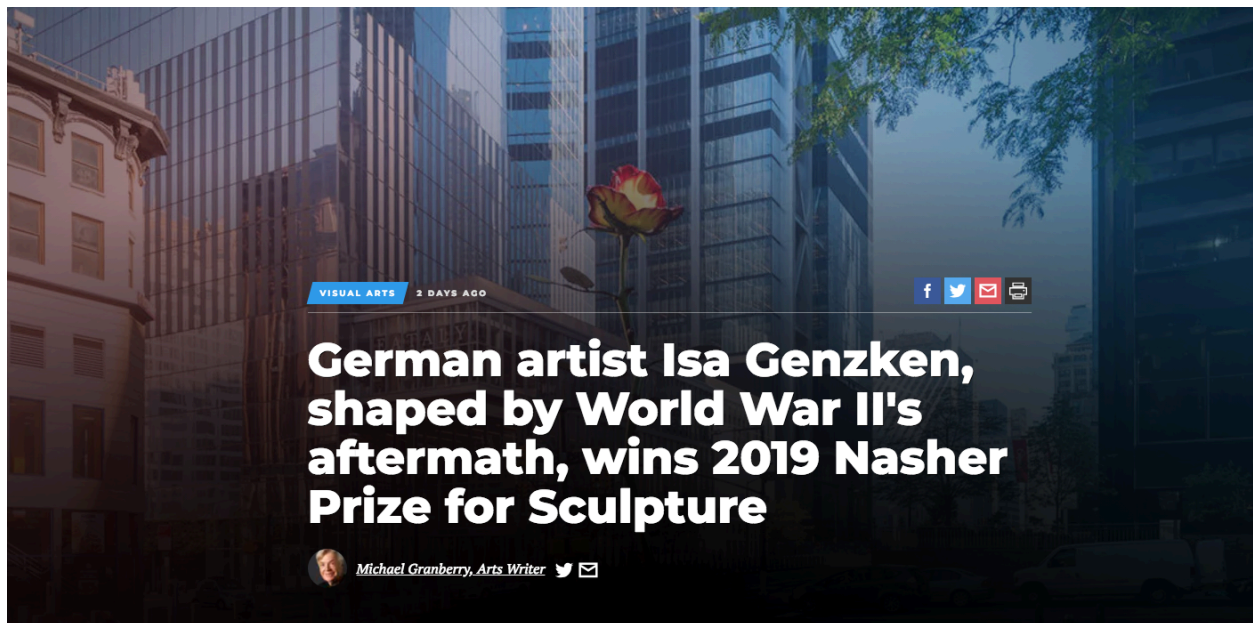


September 26, 2018

## German artist Isa Genzken, shaped by World War II's aftermath, wins 2019 Nasher Prize for Sculpture

<https://www.dallasnews.com/arts/visual-arts/2018/09/25/german-artist-isa-genzken-shaped-world-war-iis-aftermath-wins-2019-nasher-prize-sculpture>

By Michael Granberry



Now in its fourth year, the \$100,000 Nasher Prize for Sculpture was awarded Tuesday night to 69-year-old Isa Genzken, whose art has been defined by having been born in Germany in 1948, in the devastating shadow of World War II.

Jeremy Strick, the director of the Nasher Sculpture Center, made the announcement at the Rachofsky Warehouse. Genzken will receive the monetary award and be formally honored at the official ceremony in Dallas in April.

Genzken is the second woman to receive the honor, following Colombian Doris Salcedo in 2016. Frenchman Pierre Huyghe won in 2017 and Theaster Gates in 2018. The Chicago-born Gates was the first American and the first African-American to win the prize. (Belo Media Group is a presenting media sponsor of the Nasher Prize.)

Strick noted, however, that Genzken's being a woman "did not enter into the jury's discussion." The nine-member international panel made its decision during meetings in London earlier this year.

"Never once in the discussion was that debated, nor, if you will, were the politics or the equity of that. Men as well as women were considered," Strick said.

Even so, he said the scope of Genzken's work — and the prize considers an artist's entire career — "underscores the extraordinary work being made by so many women artists." The Nasher has recently accepted donations from the Kaleta A. Doolin Acquisitions Fund for Women Artists, which seeks to increase the number of works by women artists showcased in museums.

The art world, he said, "is no different from any other domain in that there are still significant obstacles to the full participation and recognition of women. There is still a tremendous amount of work to be done in including women in commercial systems, in galleries, museum collections and exhibitions." The fact that the jury has "now twice selected a woman as the Nasher Prize laureate" makes its own statement, Strick said.



*Portrait of Isa Genzken, winner of the 2019 Nasher Prize, which honors a living artist who elevates the understanding of sculpture and its possibilities (Courtesy of Galerie Buchholz)*

Barely three years after World War II had ended, Genzken was born into a country ravaged by Adolf Hitler and the horrors he'd inflicted.

In late 2013 and early 2014, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, also known as MoMA, showcased Genzken's work with a landmark retrospective, which drew considerable attention. The Dallas Museum of Art, the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art and MoMA organized the show, which came to Dallas in 2014.

Critic Judith Thurman, writing in The New Yorker, described Genzken as "an art star in her native country" and "an important figure in Europe." Thurman noted that "urban architecture — its beauty and desolation — is a central theme of Genzken's work. ... She has always courted danger, with predictable results — the life force and the death wish are at odds in her. The desire to please is not part of her character. She suffers from alcoholism and from bipolar disease ... She is a major female artist who doesn't do women's work."

She grew up comfortably enough, Thurman writes, "but during a period of national soul-searching, Cold War tension, and epic reconstruction that transformed a country in ruins. That cleansing — of Germany's rubble and of its guilt — was the unstable scaffolding of her childhood."

Genzken is, however, an artist who apparently prefers to let her work speak for itself. She has openly acknowledged her disdain for interviews. She made an exception in 2013 during the MoMA show when she described to The New York Times the moment her art career began.

"It was very, very early, if I remember correctly, when I was still in the body of my mother," Genzken said. Her work, she admitted, "is very difficult to understand. Sometimes people do and sometimes they don't. I can't do much about that."

It is obvious, as the German magazine *Der Spiegel* once wrote, that Genzken "bears the scars of German history."



"OIL XV / OIL XVI" is a 2007 installation wall piece, consisting of aluminum, metal foil, adhesive tape, metal and printed paper. It also includes two mannequins, two plastic cases, one glass bowl, metal foil, plastic and fabric. Genzken is the recipient of the 2019 Nasher Prize, which honors a living artist who elevates the understanding of sculpture and its possibilities. (Isa Genzken/Courtesy of Galerie Buchholz)

In a profile of Genzken during her MoMA show in 2013, *The New Yorker* included a description of the artist's paternal grandfather, Karl Genzken: "A doctor and a committed Nazi, he was the head of the medical office of the SS and oversaw experiments on concentration camp inmates; he was convicted of crimes against humanity at Nuremberg, and died in 1957, three years after being released from prison."

Laura Hoptman, one of the curators of the MoMA retrospective and the daughter of a Holocaust survivor, addressed Genzken's lineage in a 2013 email to the Jewish website Tabletmag.com.

"Like many German artists, including Sigmar Polke, Gerhard Richter [Genzken's former husband] and Anselm Kiefer among others, Genzken's family past is tangled with at least one connection to the Nazis. But we don't see a connection between Genzken's work and her grandfather's life, and no art historian, critic, or Genzken herself, does either."

Strick concurred, placing Genzken among "a number of German artists who have addressed Germany's history."

Genzken does so by employing a wide range of materials, including wood, plaster, concrete, textiles and detritus to articulate her own vivid commentaries on the ruination of war.



"Spielautomat," a piece by Isa Genzken, consists of a slot machine, paper, chromogenic color prints, tape and plastic foil. The Nasher Sculpture Center has chosen Genzken as the recipient of the 2019 Nasher Prize. (Courtesy of Galerie Buchholz)

Ruins, of course, dotted the landscape during Genzken's postwar childhood. But she also uses sculpture to make a statement about the architecture of reconstruction.

"Her work is always double-edged, if not having more edges," said Strick, who admires her for addressing "the presence of the past and the possibilities of the future."

As much as any artist who has won the prize, Strick contends that Renzken has expanded the boundaries of sculpture and done so dramatically. Sculpture is no longer relegated solely to statues in a square in Florence, Italy. It consists of all sorts of materials.

The dictionary defines assemblage as "a work of art made by grouping found or unrelated objects," no shortage of which exists in the Genzken repertoire.

"She raises questions. She suggests possibilities. She indicates contradictions," Strick said. "Her work opens up our engagement with any number of contemporary, political and social issues but again always within the field of sculpture. We think she's a terrific choice as our 2019 Nasher laureate."