

# ISA GENZKEN: WE ARE HERE IN DRESDEN

ZWINGER MUSEUM, DRESDEN  
26 SEPTEMBER - 13 JANUARY



Wasserspeier and Angels, 2004 (installation view), mixed media, dimensions variable. Photo: Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. Private collection, Switzerland. Courtesy Hauser & Wirth, London

Behind Isa Genzken's latest show lies one of the knottier problems of art: how do you avenge the murder of a city? If that isn't taxing enough, the exhibition throws another question at you: where do you seek redress for the enslavement of a culture? How do you balance the books?

In Genzken's case, the answer to both is in an installation called *Wir sind hier in Dresden* (*We Are Here in Dresden*), the sculpture wing of that city's Zwinger Museum being the setting for her show. The Zwinger, notoriously, was destroyed by Allied bombing in February 1945, weeks before the end of a war already won. With it went the rest of Dresden and tens of thousands of lives, in the needless incineration of a pointless target. Whichever way you cut it, you can't see the rebuilt view from the Skulpturensammlung's windows without taking it as context; without reading Genzken's show as a writing of history.

Surprising, then, that the linked installations in that show – works called *Wasserspeier and Angels* and *Der amerikanische Raum* (*The American Room*) (both works 2004) – were made for Venice rather than for Dresden, and that the etiolated cones of the first refer not to Dresden's cathedral but Köln's. Genzken, too, has been doing a spot of rebuilding, constructing a history that is less local than worldly. Which is to say American, her post-Dresden world being a US imperium.

To find your way around Genzken's psychogeography, you're given an American roadmap. There's US high culture – *Wasserspeier and Angels's* metal-tiled floor is a Carl Andre, the paint splatters linking its plinths and towers little Jackson Pollocks – and, seamlessly, there is US low culture: stuffed crocodiles, plastic wrap, slot machines, an outsize wineglass. The junky disposability of Genzken's art, its ability to roll on castors, is what it's about. It's how we are today, and frankly, it's not very nice.

Lest Genzken's politics elude you, *The American Room*, smelling strongly of Gary Hill, features Donald Duck's Uncle Scrooge conducting an auction in which he vigorously sells off the ruins of America: golden eagles reduced to Franklin Mint kitsch, nuclear umbrellas in tatters, a post-Katrina, post-9/11 populace shooting up and sleeping rough. Genzken clearly does not subscribe to the maxim of not kicking a man when he's down, although, given Dresden, why should she? Her show seems oddly dated, as though Brecht and Weill are hiding around the corner whistling un-American things about whisky and knives. But then the tale she tells – Genzken was born in 1948 – sets out to be both old and new. It is the story of the fall of empires and Reichs, of the morbid inevitability of all history everywhere. Some things never change, wherever you see them.

Charles Darwent