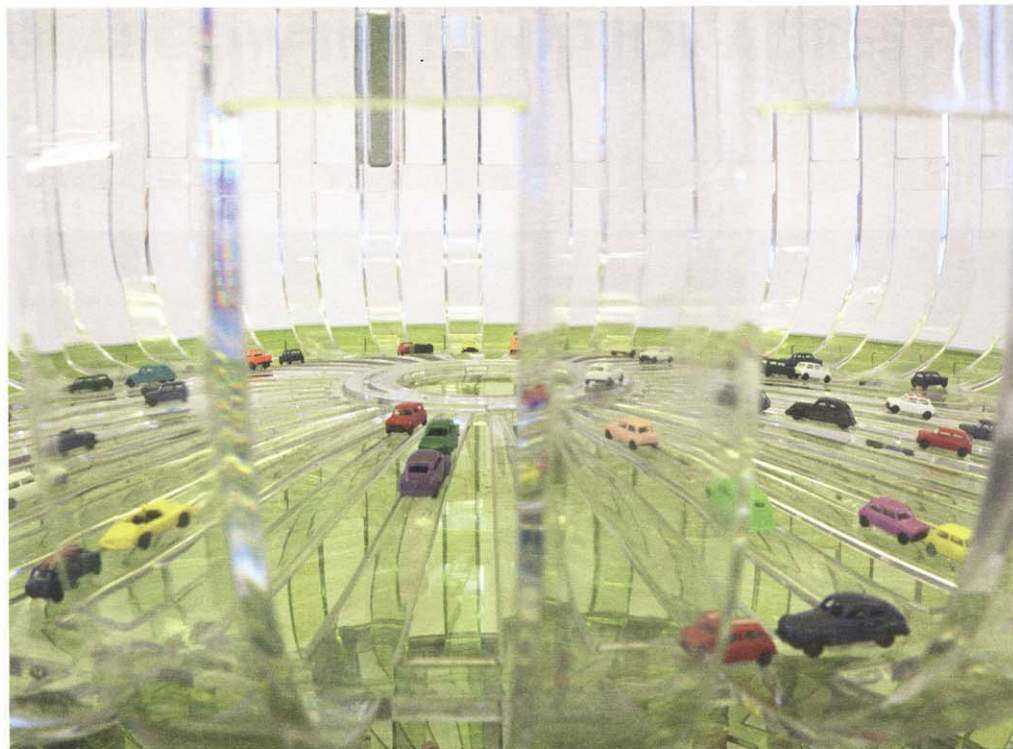


REVIEWS ISA GENZKEN



Car Park (Ground Zero) (detail), 2008, washing baskets, toy cars. Photo: Jens Ziehe. © the artist. Courtesy Hauser & Wirth, Zürich and London, and Daniel Buchholz, Köln

ISA GENZKEN

HAUSER & WIRTH, LONDON
3 APRIL - 17 MAY

"We will rebuild", declared Mayor Giuliani as New York began to count the victims of 9/11. "The skyline will be made whole again." Numerous proposals for the site's reconstruction shortly followed; a number of controversies later, plans by Daniel Libeskind and David Childs were selected, and the Tower of Freedom will soon loom over the site. At Hauser & Wirth, Isa Genzken suggests another scenario, and the 'models' of her alternative proposal occupy the newly reopened American Room of the gallery's premises in a former bank on Piccadilly.

Architecture has long been at the core of the German artist's 30-year practice. When the Berlin Wall was on the point of demolition in the late 1980s, her brutal masses of concrete on stilts typically brought to mind decrepit socialist buildings. A decade later, Genzken proposed a trashy alternative to the sleek lines of the celebrated International Style with *Fuck the Bauhaus/New Buildings for New York* (2000), a series of rickety architectural models made from various found objects. *Fuck the Bauhaus* is also a good example of the artist's fascination with New York, which is evoked in many of her works, including, recently, the American-looking towers she imagined for the German capital (*New Buildings for Berlin*, 2002).

Genzken was in New York on 9/11, and her 2002-3 installation of scrappy miscellany on plinths, *Empire/Vampire, Who Kills Death*, was read by critics as a postapocalyptic body of works, troubled by the phantoms of the World Trade Center. Whether this interpretation (never fully endorsed by the artist) was justified remains debatable, but the junk aesthetic of the *Ground Zero* series in this exhibition is directly linked to *Empire/Vampire's* visual lexicon, now developed to monumental proportions. *Car Park* (2008) is a Brancusian column of endlessly stacked-up plastic baskets sitting on three bike tyres. In *Church* (2008), two large industrial trolleys are wrapped up in bright plastic sheets and crowned by a gold-sprayed cross and skull, and *Hospital* (2008) is adorned with a huge bouquet of flowers springing from its roof like an organic antenna. Occasionally, minuscule human figures appear, clearly indicating the daunting scale of Genzken's vision.

The artist's proposal also includes a gigantic club (*Disco 'Soon'*, 2008) opened by a colossal portico of plastic beads, a Jason Rhoades-like streetlight (*Light*, 2008) made of entangled curtain poles and a *Memorial Tower* (2008). This last model is perhaps the most unsettling: the building is composed of see-through cubes inside which are displayed photographs of the site immediately after the attacks. It seems unnecessarily vindictive, especially compared to Michael Arad's two peaceful square pools which will soon mark the emplacement of the absent Twin Towers. Likewise, *Osama Fashion Store* (2007), the name of Genzken's shopping-mall model, is shallowly provocative, as tokenistic as the artist's choice of *Oil* to title her 2007 Venice Biennale installation. The press release states that the exhibition's emphasis is on 'community projects that might help emotionally regenerate the site'. Looking at Genzken's bitty assemblages, devoid of noncommercial spaces for social gathering and (unlike the real plan) of any cultural venues, it is hard to conceive how this could be the case. *Coline Milliard*