

Annett Zinsmeister

Digital Art Museum, Berlin

Bankers are using it, scientists are using it, automobile-engineers are using it and artists are using it: the computer. It's a tool that has completely changed our work life, our communication, our lifestyle, and is now changing the fine arts. But how it has changed photography!

Even so, it took more than forty years for the art world to realise the influence the computer has on our perception of aesthetics—the effects are now all around us, in magazines, movies, and design. In this new section, I would like to introduce artists whose artwork has been influenced by, or fully created on, a computer. Starting with Annett Zinsmeister from Berlin, Germany, who in working in architecture, design and fine art, has the ability to crossover disciplines, an increasingly necessary skill in our contemporary culture.

Wolf Lieser [Digital Art Museum, Berlin]: You have made a name for yourself as architect, artist and academic. What meaning does art have for you?

Annett Zinsmeister: Art came at the beginning of my professional qualification and has been my constant companion. That means, first I studied art, then architecture, and was active as a designer. Because all of my works have always overtly revolved around architecture—the so-called “mother of all arts”—I chose a profession that allowed me a greater leeway in my artistic practice. Art was always meaningful for me and has occupied increasingly more space in the past years. It offers me on the one hand a freedom that I

do not have in any applied artistic discipline, and on the other hand, it provides me with a cognitive model for actual questions to do with, for example, representation, the creation of form and space, and the limits of perception, etc.

WL: How would you describe your basic artistic approach?

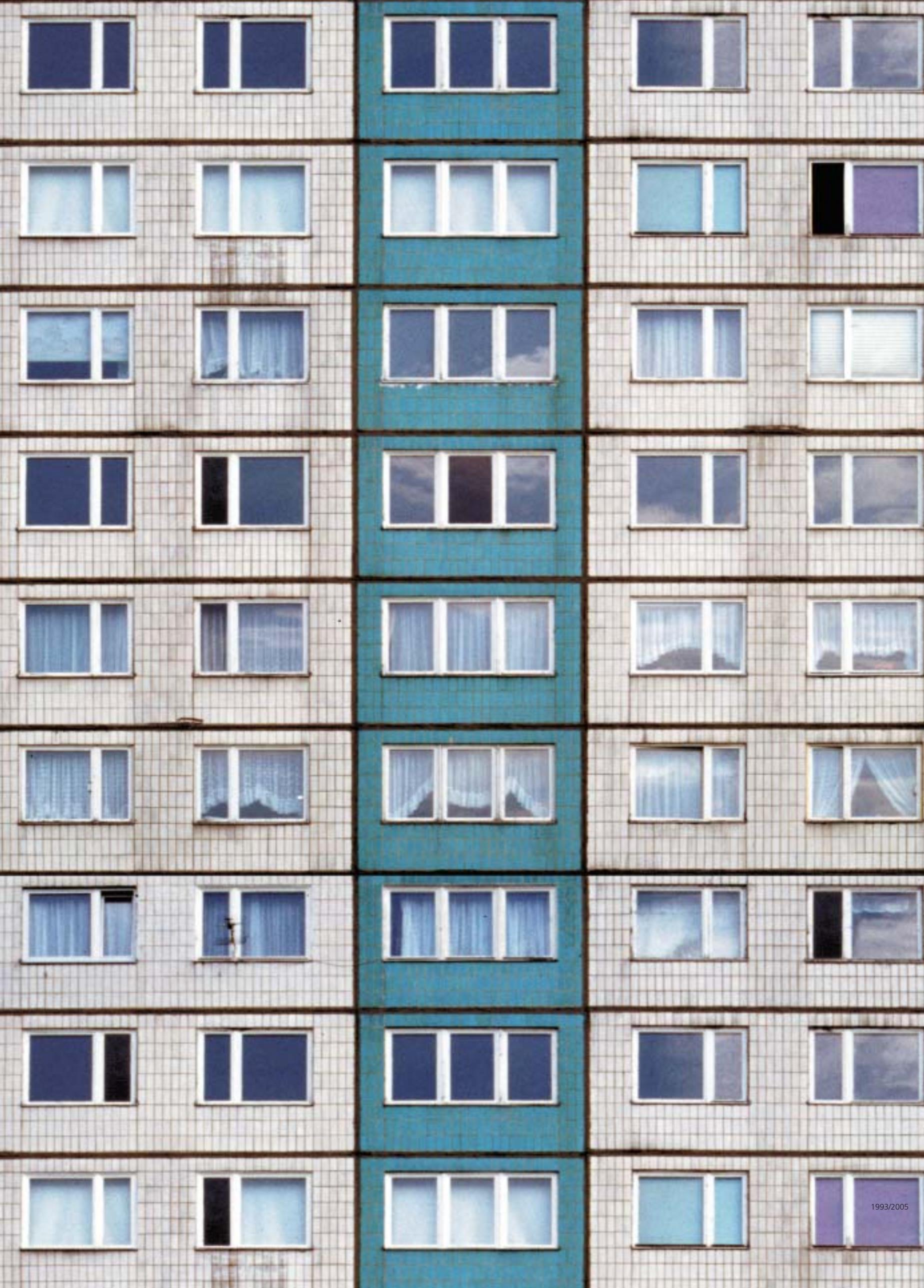
AZ: My work is very much conceptually shaped: raising central questions as well as the process itself, are fundamental artistic aspects for me. As opposed to purely conceptual art, my works also function—or perhaps it is more accurate to say are effective (“wirken”)—on an aesthetic level. The art historian Beat Wyss called my installations “sublime” in Burke's sense, since to an extreme degree they exercise a strong effective power (“Wirkungsmacht”) on the observer. In the first moment of observation, the intellectual and conceptual background of the work does not play a large role. The work takes effect—it stands for itself. A closer look, however, reveals an internal density that determines the work of art, and in which the observer can enter and sink into—yet does not have to.

WL: Some of your best-known works are occupied with “Plattenbau” (which are essentially tower blocks). How did your intensive engagement with architecture come about and how important is this theme in your work?

AZ: I started to work with *Plattenbau* in 1993. It was the peak of its unpopularity. I've been fascinated by the oscillation between the ugly and the beautiful and I've been interested in the superimposition of social, utopian ideas and the political repression inscribed into this architecture. In my opinion, *Plattenbau* couldn't be reduced to ugly mass architecture: it is a multilayered cultural phenomenon that has to earn serious criticism and respect and which needs to be analyzed precisely. Therefore, I started to work with *Plattenbau* for several years as artist, as architect and designer, and the theme became a recurrent element in my art work; my current spatial compositions and installations are all constituted by elements of serial architecture. I use extracts from my photographs (documents of a disappearing architecture) and arrange them as serial installations or as virtual environments. The multiplication and re-arrangement of the serial architectural elements lead to a play with unexpected and controversial spatial effects and irritating perspectives.

WL: In exhibitions, you do a lot of work with installations that are mostly based on photographs, as you mentioned before. Today, you are working on an installation series called *Virtual Interiors*, from which I saw this impressive projection in Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart. What is the idea behind this artwork?

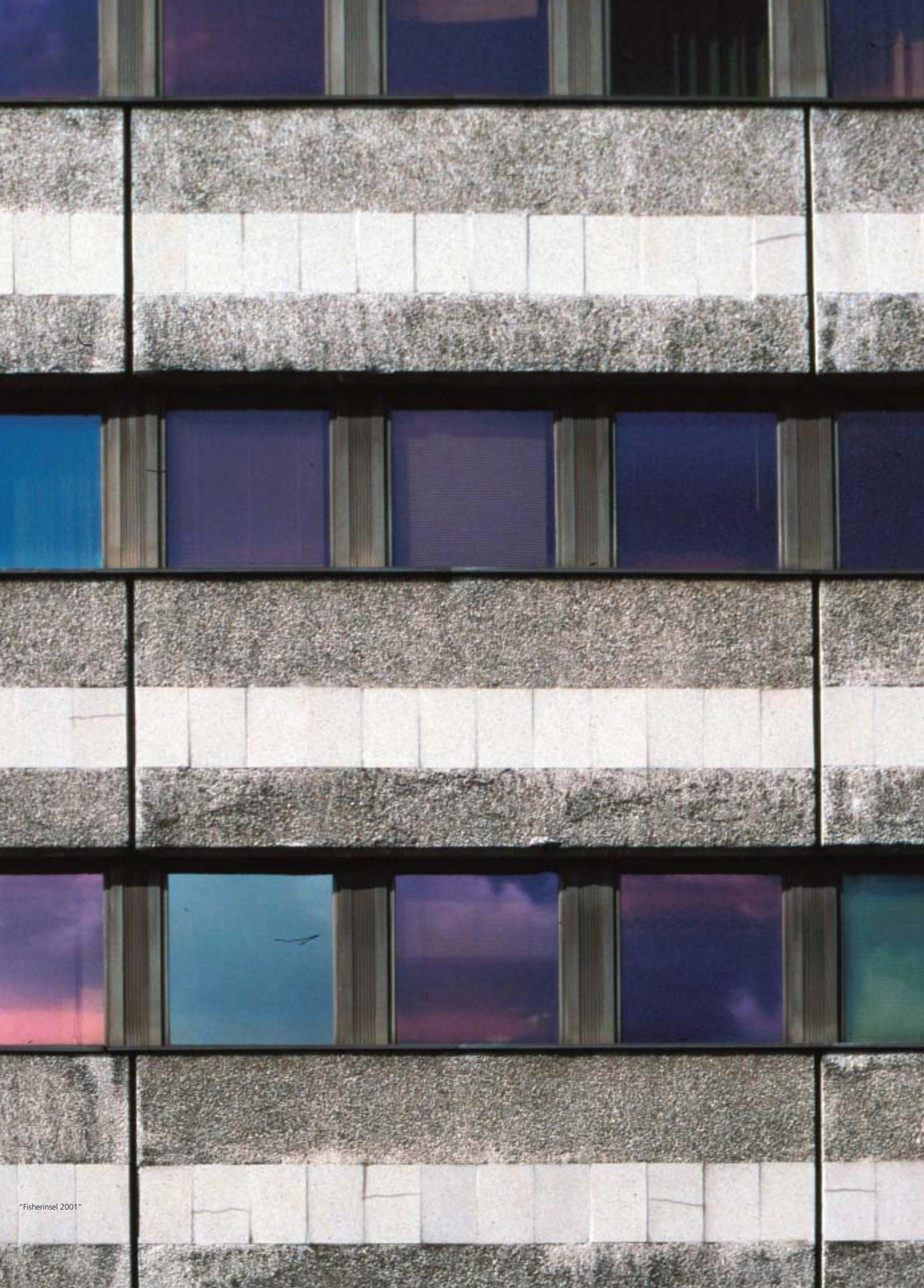
AZ: For a long time I have been fascinated by the history of panorama as a machine of perception. The idea to realise an installation by turning the outside

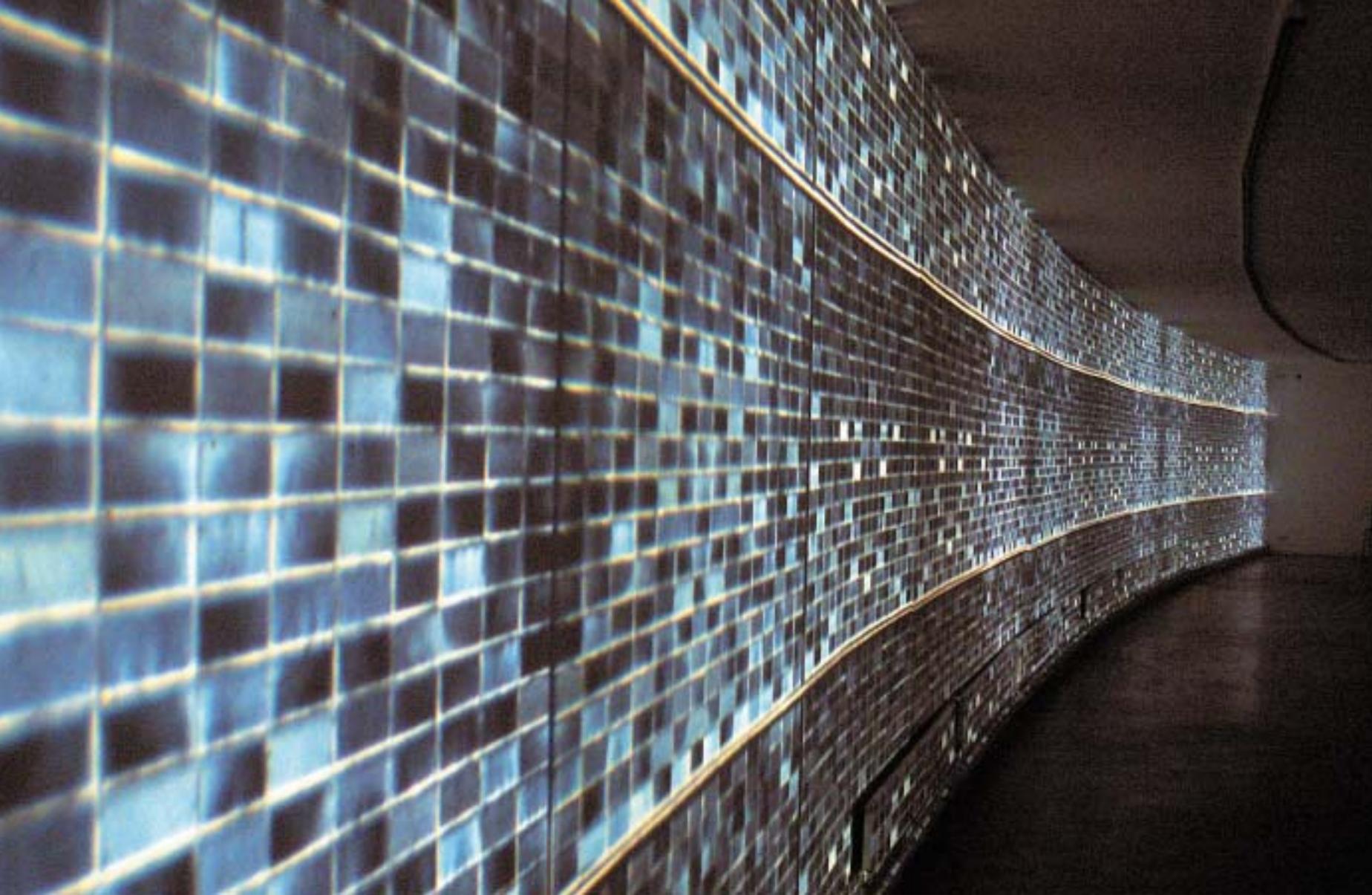






"Alexanderplatz 2001"





“Installation Solitude 8”

(façade) into a room or inner space came up in 2000. I began to design a wallpaper series with Plattenbau façades. The reversal of the outside and inside augmented and focused the abovementioned aspects that became important to me when I went deeply into the subject. I wanted to clarify and focus on them to develop an experimental and sensual space caused by a high compression of the visual material. I wanted to create an extreme and pure space where this architecture's serial aspects could simultaneously unfold the cruelty of endless repetition and the aesthetics of the minimal. The oscillation between restricted monotony and the fascinating beauty of a structural and serial pattern made the work into a tightrope-walk for the visitor who often found him or herself between two extreme effects. Different spaces for my installations were offered. One, for example, was the basement of the Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart—an extreme space, about 50 meters long, slightly curved, without windows. Another show was in a gallery where the exhibition could best be experienced through the window from outside. I created a virtual architecture of the exhibition space and the exhibition was shown as a simulation. I projected this picture from inside through the storefront window to the outside. The opening consequently took place outside the gallery where the illusion was perfect!

WL: What meaning does the computer have in your work? Has it decisively shaped your artistic work?

AZ: The computer has gained increasing importance for my artistic approach with photography. This can

best be illustrated through current works. The installations are based on a photographic documentation of Plattenbau types. I began this documentation as I mentioned in 1993, when the demolition and restoration of Plattenbau became an important subject in architectural practice. I worked further with these photographs in condensing and transforming them with the computer, for example, in using different techniques of changing and multiplying pictorial elements. On first sight these virtual constructed facades seem to be authentic photographs. On the second look you realise that something is definitely strange. Through this process, the images oscillate between document and artefact.

The images and spatial installations called *Virtual Interiors* are not conceivable without the computer. It has to do with the (re-)shaping of real and fictive spaces. Collage techniques that have fascinated me since the beginnings of my artistic practice can accomplish some things, but in this regard, the use of the computer opens new dimensions, not only in the image processing, but also in the simulation of space. For me, this is an extremely fascinating topic: The opening of new spaces of representation in the intertwining of art and technology.

TEXT BY WOLF LIESER

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Courtesy:

[DAM] Berlin, www.dam.org/berlin

Publications:

Annett Zinsmeister (ed): Plattenbau oder die Kunst, Utopie im Baukasten zu warten, (vice versa, Berlin 2002)

Annett Zinsmeister: MEMODUL, digital memory of Plattenbauelements and urban utopias (Berlin 2002)

Annett Zinsmeister (ed): constructing utopia. Konstruktionen künstlicher Welten (diaphanes Zürich/Berlin 2005)

Annett Zinsmeister (ed): welt[stadt]raum. Mediale inszenierung (transcript Bielefeld 2006)

Wolf Lieser is the founder and director of the virtual Digital Art Museum [DAM], www.dam.org. Since 2003 supplemented in Berlin with the gallery [DAM] Berlin, which is now one of the leading international galleries for Digital Art. The Digital Art Museum [DAM] launched in 2005 the annual international d.velop digital art award [ddaa], a lifetime award for major pioneers in this field. The award consists of 720,000 an exhibition at the Museum Kunsthalle Bremen and a catalogue.

Annett Zinsmeister is currently Professor for Conceptual Design at Bergische Universität Wuppertal, Germany. From 2003-04 she was Visiting Professor at Kunsthochschule Weissenhof in Berlin. She studied fine arts, architecture and media theory, graduated at University of Fine Arts, Berlin.