

PURE INTERVIEW (full length)

INTERVIEW WITH SABINA LANG & DANIEL BAUMANN (L/B)

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You made an important and original contribution to the Palais de Tokyo's program, in the form of a hotel room. Can you tell us more about it?

Hotel Everland was conceived as a mobile work. It was initially presented on pillars in the Lake of Neuchâtel, in Switzerland (2002). After having it on the roof of our studio building for a while, we showed it at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Leipzig, Germany (2006-07), then at the Palais de Tokyo, the perfect final destination. During the planning phase at the Palais de Tokyo, it was really exciting to explore the building and to think about how and where *Hotel Everland* could ideally be placed. The process led us up to a side terrace, then finally to the roof, a place that had never been used before—really, an unknown territory. Nobody knew how to access the roof or could tell us about its static aspect—everything had to be discovered first.

Hotel Everland is a hybrid, a work of art and a hotel in which to spend a night. It is a metaphor for being both a guest and a stranger: it appears welcoming and accessible to all, but it is also an exclusive, isolated space for the lucky few. It is the antithesis of common economical efficiency but acts as if it still would follow this principle. It is a simple idea followed by a complicated process. This is also true of the entire process of installing, then running *Hotel Everland* during a year and a half on the museum's roof. We very much appreciated the huge effort of the team of the Palais, the architect Jean-Pierre Vallier and the partner Hotel Sezz. We felt a bit like we were part of the Palais family during these years.

Your work is situated at the threshold of visual arts, architecture and design. How do you define yourselves? How are your projects imagined?

We see ourselves as artists who occasionally use elements of architecture or design in our work. We hardly ever work outside the context of art. We both started very young and immediately began to work collaboratively. Our background is in the alternative scene: we collaborated with musicians, did all kinds of experimental stuff, performances, etc. Our interest was always in working with the space.

Our aim is to learn about a situation, to understand a space by transforming it (by adding, altering or emphasizing). Of course this could be called architecture or design (according to the philosophy of the Bauhaus, these disciplines aren't strictly separate) but we call it art because it frees us from the obligation of justifying our work according to pre-established criteria, and allows us to set our own rules. We aren't interested in exhibiting our work in the context of architecture or design; we want to interact with the people who look at art. This is a different initial position, especially nowadays. By including elements of functionality, we can offer the viewer an alternative way of accessing our work. It could be called a "distraction while entering". For example, in *Hotel Everland* the viewer can spend several hours inside of the work, or even sleep in it.

Your aesthetics is set between the 1960s-1970s and futurist utopias. How do you balance the two?

They both deal with a strong image of (or even a belief in) the future. We are more influenced by the time that followed, the 1980s, which was more about questioning the future. But our general aim is to work with a well-known pictorial language, to use aesthetics with which the viewer is familiar. Although we use a loud "style" (in terms of the shapes, colors and materials we employ), the visual aspect becomes almost secondary because it is not new to the viewer. We try to operate in a very precise way, considering each detail, so the work becomes an aggregate, one whole thing. We like the idea of "flow" in the aesthetics of the 60s and 70s.

Are you trying to seduce visitors by creating works of pure beauty?

"Beauty" means nothing and everything the same time. Sometimes we think it is a word that shouldn't belong to the vocabulary of art, like "pure" which should only be used for honey. But because of this we like to use it in our titles (Beautiful Walls, Beautiful Entrance, etc.). It underlines our opinion that the viewer might complete this empty term. We're rather skeptical about artworks with extremely meaningful and pregnant

titles. We prefer to put our energy into the artwork itself. Seducing the audience (ourselves included) can be a part of what we do.

Both works you presented at the Palais de Tokyo—*Hotel Everland* and *Perfect #2*, an in-situ work that was featured in the group show “5,000,000,000 Years”—place the viewers outside the usual limits of art and lead them to a seemingly parallel universe. Are you trying to create a better world?

We offer an alternative, which can be better or worse. It is real, present, physical; you can touch it, dive into it. But it will not last forever. Maybe it is more like an episode, a dream or a trip?

You create installations, environments, public interventions, paintings, games... Is the sky the limit? What will be next?

We have always used different media simultaneously. We call them “tracks,” some of which we continue to follow, some we have abandoned. There are always new ones that can start. We've perceived that this way of working—not focusing only on one single thing—matches us well.

Your work consists of poetic additions to landscapes, architectures... Your aesthetic identity is quite strong; nonetheless it always matches its context. How do you manage this?

We try to be very careful and precise in our analysis and in understanding a context. We discuss a lot and in this process we often have to convince each other, explain what we mean and search for this precision before we start. When we begin the actual work, we know exactly what has to be done. But we're always very curious to see the result and to discover whether or not the thing we have imagined will work.

The space (indoors or outside) is like a third person who collaborates with us, influencing us and giving us ideas about what to do.

The visitor is never quite the same after spending a night at the *Hotel Everland* or having experienced one of your *Beautiful Steps*, *Walls* or *Carpets*. Do you feel like each of your artworks is a rite of passage, an initiation?

Maybe it is an illusion, but we really believe that the viewer completes our work. Only when people are walking through it and experiencing its various aspects do we consider that the work is complete. It is important for us never to give the final answer and the total explanation, but to always leave one part open to interpretation.

Daria de Beauvais