ALICJA KWADE

Alicja Kwade, “Against the Run”, 2014
Found clock, 30 cm diameter
Mercedes-Benz Art Collection, © Courtesy of the Artist and KÖNIG GALERIE, Berlin; photo: Roman März

The MERCEDES-BENZ ART COLLECTION is one of the most prestigious corporate art collections in the world. Director Dr Anne Vieth presents her highlights here. This time: a functioning wall clock, but one that has been altered in such a way that it disorientates us, breaks with our viewing habits and challenges us to change our perspective

Text by Dr Anne Vieth

Artist Alicja Kwade has modified the mechanism of a found wall clock in her work “Against the Run” so that the clock face moves anti-clockwise. The second hand advances by one second, and the numerical display turns back. The time can still be read because the hours and minutes correspond to the actual time. It is the alignment, however, that is truly disorientating. The usual orientation points, i.e. the vertical 12–6 axis and horizontal 9–3 axis, shift. This disrupts our viewing and reading habits and makes us change our perspective.

The artist invites us to look at things and situations from our everyday lives in a different way in many of her works. She is known for taking scientific and philosophical questions over into artistic concepts. In doing so, Kwade explores culturally significant theories on space, time, perception and cognition. Her sculptures, installations, films and photographs search for different explanations to better understand our existence – even in all its absurdity.

Her work “Against the Run” focuses on the importance of time. Aligning our lives with the time factor begins with the daily 24 hours that determine our actions. The longer the time spans are, the more difficult it is to estimate them. Time can be both immediate and intangible at the same time. A range of man-made measuring devices show us that it is constantly dwindling. This also applies to the clock, which is a cultural object that has evolved over thousands of years. Even in ancient times, people divided their day according to the rising and setting of the sun and designed the first sun dials. Clock inventions always reflected the technical and social state of their time of origin in the epochs that followed. Clocks have been regarded as symbolically charged objects across cultures and centuries. A watch can be an emotional heirloom, a fashion accessory, a luxury item or a means to an end. Whether on a mobile phone or in the car – nowadays it appears in many places as a digital display on a plethora of screens. And it has always symbolised the transience of life. By disrupting the conventional way of reading the time, Alicja Kwade raises awareness of time as a constant companion. In this way, her artwork encourages us to reflect on how we deal with this elementary quantity both individually and socially. Such as having time, which is increasingly perceived as a true luxury. Or alternative time models that depart from the linear understanding and depict the course of things cyclically.

A video illustrating the mechanism of the artwork can be found at mb4.me/kwade

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