

About Art in Architecture – A Space with no limits?

The Talk between Sabeth Holland and Natalie Kreutzer

At Galerie Kunsthaus Rapp, November 06, 2024

Edit transcript of the Podcast

Sabeth Holland is an internationally successful painter and sculptor. She ranks among the most established contemporary artists in Switzerland. Though, her art in architecture projects are less well known to the general public. The artist has regularly realized “Raumgriffe” (art in architecture) since 1998. As part of her exhibition “no limits - Under the spell of fantasy”, which was featured by Galerie Kunsthaus Rapp in Wil from October 24 to November 22, 2024, Natalie Kreutzer spoke to Sabeth Holland about the topic of “Art in architecture - a space with no limits?” And in particular about her work, her development, the sudden urge to create sculptures with her own hands, the meaning of and lack of understanding for installations in public space, her key projects and why purple is currently her favorite color. Natalie Kreutzer is a text creator for art and space and has been working with Sabeth Holland for some time. The two once met in the context of art in architecture.

kunst am bau

Das Apérogespräch mit
Sabeth Holland und Natalie Kreutzer
Mi 6. Nov 2024 ab 18.30 bis 20.00 Uhr
Rapp Collectors Lounge
(angegliedert an die Galerie, gleich an-
schliessend an den Begegnungsnachmittag)

Seit 1998 hat Sabeth Holland regelmässig monumentale Projekte im Bereich Kunst am Bau realisiert. Der breiten Öffentlichkeit blieben viele davon unbekannt oder nur schwer zugänglich. Wir haben Natalie Kreutzer, Textgestalterin für Kunst und Raum aus Vorarlberg, für Sie eingeladen, um ein spannendes Gespräch mit der Künstlerin zu führen.

Sabeth Holland wird erstmals so umfassend Einblicke in ihr beeindruckendes Schaffen gewähren und über ihre konzeptionelle Arbeit am Bau sprechen. Zudem erhalten Sie Zugang zu einigen der wertvollsten Dokumente und Modelle aus ihrem Privatarchiv.

Wir freuen uns sehr auf den Austausch zusammen mit Ihnen im exklusiven und sehr persönlichen Rahmen der Rapp Collectors Lounge.



kunst am bau

Ein Raum mit no limits?

Natalie Kreutzer:

Dear Sabeth, we are sitting together in the Kunsthaus Rapp gallery in Wil, where your exhibition “no limits - under the spell of fantasy” is currently on show. You have created some great works for this exhibition and also a lot of new things in terms of form and structure. You have now been working as a full-time artist for around 25 years - and with great success. Your works are not only represented in Switzerland, but also in France, England, Hong Kong and most recently in Singapore. Congratulations on this! The exciting thing is that you never actually wanted to become an artist. You are also self-taught. For me, teaching yourself how to paint and create art, as you have done, requires boundless curiosity, joy and courage. Tell us what it was like for you?

Sabeth Holland:

I think curiosity is also the key word for me, in the sense that I gained my most important experiences and knowledge when I was actually still a girl, a teenager. My parents knew a lot of artists and

musically talented people who we often visited. But my parents never made room for us children - it was always terribly boring. So we watched, listened, developed fantasies in the background and hoped that such afternoons would end quickly. And I think we unconsciously laid the foundations for a lot of things there. For example, I was able to learn how to make bronze casts, weave or knot carpets, how to make pottery, how to hammer iron, make bells, but also my first paintings using a wide variety of techniques. All of this became ingrained in me and then lay dormant for a long time. I assume that this slumber was not a slumber, but that many things manifested themselves during this time and then emerged.

Natalie Kreutzer:

Obviously many influences that had an impact on you at a young age. Do you feel today that you have absolutely found your artistic expression? Or is it an ongoing process that never comes to an end?

Sabeth Holland:

I always say that for the time being I have something to tell, I have something to say, something to present. And I have the feeling that I can unfold in this huge biotope and create something new. But I keep asking myself how long my energy, my imagination and also my imaginative and physical strength will be enough to create something new. I will stop the day I have nothing more to say.

Natalie Kreutzer:

The joy of color is also characteristic of your art. Do you actually have a favorite color?

Sabeth Holland:

Definitely not black, but turquoise. However, at the moment turquoise has some stiff competition from the color purple, as my grandchild loves purple more than anything - that inspired me. In general, I just like to have lots of colors.

Natalie Kreutzer:

What is less well known to the general public, Sabeth, is that you have regularly realized art in architecture projects since 1998, including monumental installations. It all started after a short stay in New York with your so-called bunthalms. That was a sculptural work and I was interested to know what New York had to do with it. And briefly describe the bunthalms, what inspired you to create them?



Sabeth Holland:

After New York, it was very obvious for me to create the bunthalms. Everything you see there is vertical, shoots upwards, just long-format stelae, and I simply enlivened them. For me, these were no longer apartments and commercial buildings, but images that I depicted on these bunthalms. You have to imagine square timbers between 2.00 and 2.20 meters high, of which I preferred to install many in one go.

Natalie Kreutzer:

Many, as well as many colors, lots of structure and fragments, a characteristic that reappears there. In connection with the bunthalms, let me mention that you always choose such wonderful word creations as titles for your artworks, including your studio works. Is that part of your artistic process?

Sabeth Holland:

I think that names, titles or designations are program. Firstly, I like to show what is really meant, and secondly, I introduce a perspective into the future. In the case of the bunthalms, I didn't want to simply say Stelae, as it is normally called, because that was too boring for me and didn't have enough cheerfulness in it. I wanted something more concise, more modern, that wasn't already preconceived. Something that would make people curious. It's interesting that the word bunthalm in particular has established itself. People still use it. Just this afternoon, someone approached me again and said that he had three bunthalms of mine.

Natalie Kreutzer:

For a short phase you continued with painted object installations as an expression of art in architecture. Then you started creating sculptures yourself. Your first sculpture, the Big Bubble Fish, was created in 2006. Let me briefly quote Marianne Rapp Ohmann of Galerie Kunsthaus Rapp: "[...] the Big Bubble Fish marks one of the most important turning points in the artist's work. From then on, she insisted on shaping her sculptures herself. From this point on, we also speak of Sabeth Holland as a sculptor - with an incredible natural talent." Tell us about the Big Bubble Fish as a turning point in your artistic career. How did it challenge you?



Sabeth Holland:

That's an interesting question in that it really was a challenge, namely the dimensions of the Bubble Fish. But first of all, what was very important was that it gave me a material that I could work with, that could be worked sensually, that had depth, was resilient and was also suitable for outdoor use. Niki de Saint Phalle was my role model - with all due respect and esteem. Marianne Rapp also supported me in finding the material and that's how I came to the polyurethane through a long story. Back to the challenge that was the Big Bubble Fish. I had to climb ladders and lie underneath it to work on it. It took several people to move it. It was so heavy. But the most difficult thing was that I only made it one centimeter narrower than the width of the exit door from my studio.

Natalie Kreutzer:

You picked up on a keyword earlier, namely dimension. Getting out of the studio and into public space is a completely different horizon in terms of time and space. As an artist, you probably have to learn how to move in it first. How did you experience that?

Sabeth Holland:

At the beginning I was very shy and reserved and had the feeling, do I dare to do this? Then I received my first invitations in connection with competitions, naturally with the involvement of other artists. And I actually won a few competitions. For me, that was the first confirmation that I had totally outgrown myself and got the feeling that I could conquer new dimensions. Doing things you've never done before. I didn't look elsewhere, I just tried to explore what I personally had in mind - no limits, once again. And areas have already opened up that are exciting.

Natalie Kreutzer:

I can hear that you don't have the personal claim that art in buildings or public spaces has to please everyone?



Sabeth Holland:

No, that would never please everyone - but it is extremely polarizing. What I find very important in what I do - and I only speak for myself, not the others - is that it has a certain meaningfulness. That what I portray, convey something that is not or not yet visible to others. That's what I'm working on, that's my main concern in public space, combined with creating new spaces for play or experience.

Natalie Kreutzer:

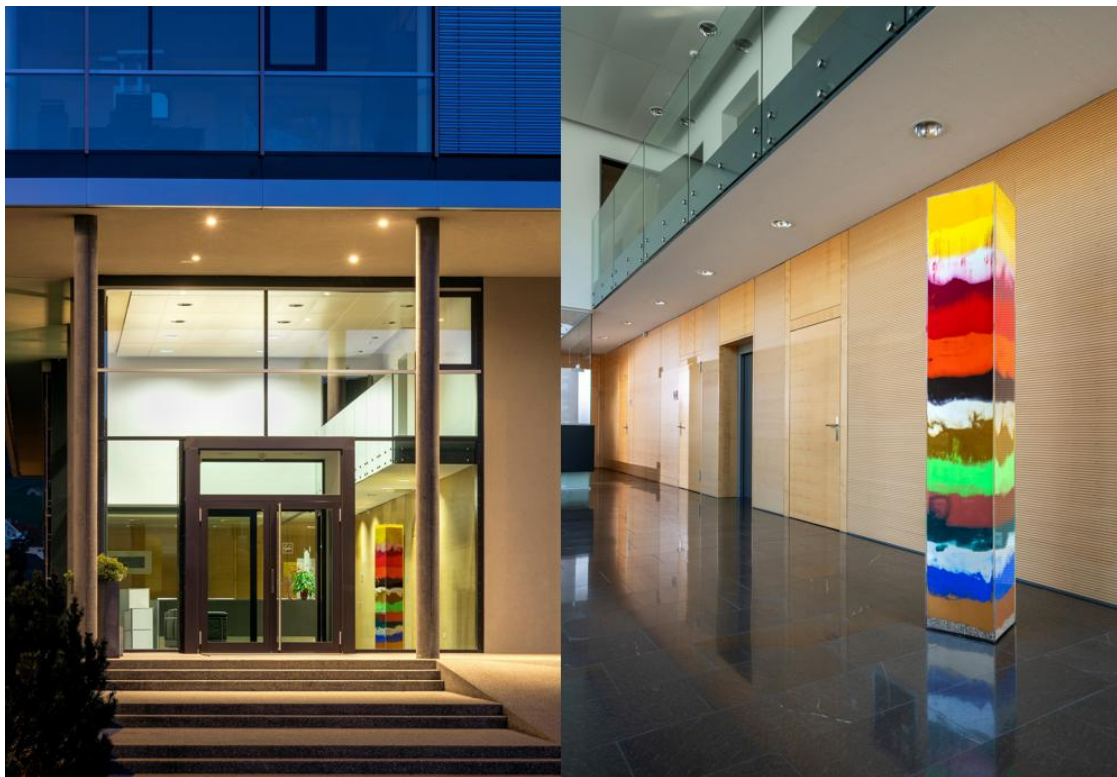
Back to your sculptures again. Why did you suddenly feel the urge to create the sculptures yourself and with your own hands?

Sabeth Holland:

It was interesting. Even when I was painting pictures, I often danced around my pictures in my mind at night and was able to imagine everything better from a different perspective than from the front, i.e. from below, from the side. Then I discovered that I can fly around an object I'm imagining like an astronaut and look at it from all sides. I also discovered that I can do this much better if I include the third dimension rather than just the two-dimensional - that's where I kept failing. In this respect, the depth that I wanted to create didn't work for me in the early years in the way that it did in the figures, and sculptures.

Natalie Kreutzer:

Conversely, has your art in architecture influenced or changed your work in the studio?



Sabeth Holland:

Very strongly. The issue with art in architecture was that the projects were all defined, so they had framework conditions that had to be adhered to, thematically, but also in terms of all other expenses,

and above all there was a defined timeframe. In the course of the project, we also had to involve all the people around us, some of whom were not so motivated and more or less purposefully involved - but you also had to get them on board. That's how I learned to communicate things very well. Through sketches, photos, words and the way I started talking about things myself.

Natalie Kreutzer:

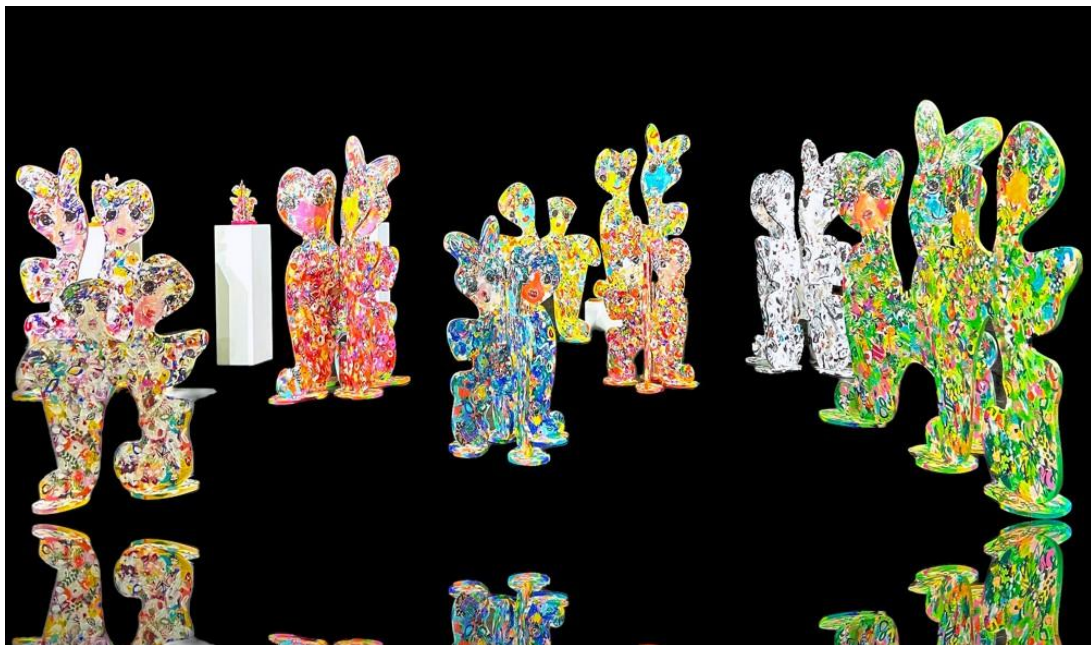
Were there any other key projects that are still very present in your work today or have added a different direction to your work?

Sabeth Holland:

The Treasure Island theme, which I implemented for Greiner Packaging International around 2010, was very interesting. I was invited to work in an undefined area, around 3,000 square meters of space in a new administrative building. And there I was able to let my imagination free in all areas. I was able to influence the wall colors, carpet quality, the choice of furniture, lettering and was allowed to do photo editing, photo transformations, word games, reliefs, paintings - in fact, the entire range of my work came into play. The whole thing together with a team that was firstly highly motivated and secondly very efficient. There were three or four of us in the team and we rarely had more than five to ten minutes for our meetings. But the decisions were made and implemented - and it looks great.

Natalie Kreutzer:

I can only confirm that, I was already allowed to watch it with you. There seemed to be no limits to your creativity here. What else is it like, is the existing architecture or the built environment restrictive for you? Or is it a space with *no limits*?



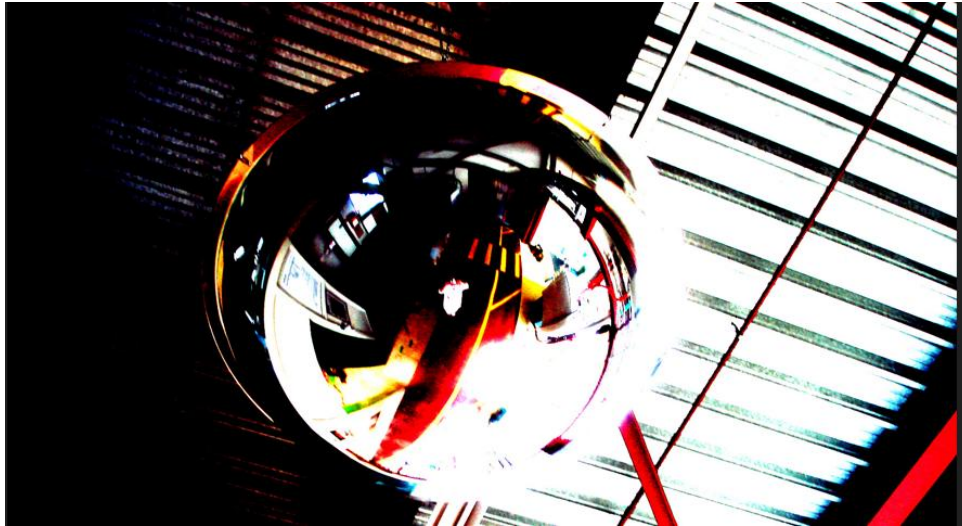
Sabeth Holland:

No, I would say exactly the opposite. Basically, it is a space that is very restricted. The starting point is usually that the topic to be worked on with the objective being pursued takes place in a specific location, has a target audience and a defined budget. For art, you always get the budget last and that naturally restricts you, so you can't go completely wild. But that was never relevant for me - not at all.

For me, there were the framework conditions, it was like the space itself, the time, the material and the purpose played a role, and then my only thought was: I'm going to make the biggest, the most bombastic, the most diverse and exciting and, above all, the most enjoyable thing for the people who come and go in this space.

Natalie Kreutzer:

Why, in your opinion, should or must art in architecture/art in public space take place at all?



Sabeth Holland:

I think this is a very important topic. A very important topic at a time when private space is becoming increasingly cramped, when there is hardly any room left for a balcony or an open window. I think it's almost the task of the public to create places in public spaces where you can play again, where there are no limits, where not everything serves a purpose, but where playfulness is inspired and the soul can find a form of peace, where you can distance yourself from the whole "I have to be successful, I have to achieve something" thing. Places where you can just be - just be. The environment, which is designed with art or with artistic interventions, is always a challenge. Not everyone likes it, but it's not about liking it, it's about the motivation behind it. Art motivates. And art leaves room for mental experiments that would not be possible in real life.

Natalie Kreutzer:

The design of outdoor spaces in cities, of liveable spaces that should be accessible to all, is very much part of the architectural discourse. Places where people like to spend time. Do you think that art can make a contribution to neighborhood design?

Sabeth Holland:

I myself live in a street where there are lots of small children. The street is a dead end and would be predestined for a meeting space. Actually, this is also being considered, but because cars are always speeding through the space at speeds that are too high for small children - I'm going to say slow - I see an issue there. Of course it is practical to drive through at a fast speed. But I think it's very important that children are given space to develop. And perhaps it's art that could create the framework conditions here to combine the two issues of traffic and the accessibility of play and

meeting zones.

Natalie Kreutzer:

Do you see art in public spaces as an opportunity to overcome boundaries, social boundaries? Also in the sense that groups of people who otherwise have no access to art can develop a perception?

Sabeth Holland:

We experienced something very interesting when we opened the traffic circle (roundabout) in Wittenbach SG. It was open to the public and the public was divided on whether something like this was necessary or too costly. The moment people were able to understand why the traffic circle was there, that it had a purpose, that it was actually a place that marked a center - which still doesn't exist in this village today, but thanks to the traffic circle, is marked much more - they began to recognize the meaning and purpose of this art. They have had fun trying to correctly interpret the signs on these colorful pillars, such as the fire station, Dottenwil Castle or families with bicycles, or discovering the horses and the cows. I think it's a huge opportunity.

Natalie Kreutzer:

You have also installed your bunthalms or a further development of them in the traffic circle (roundabout).



Sabeth Holland:

Yes, that was a further development. I call them colored columns because they are much higher at 3.60 meters.

Natalie Kreutzer:

Is art in architecture a generational issue? In addition to acquisition, it needs to be preserved for a long time. Is this a challenge or an opportunity?

Sabeth Holland:

I think everything we do, we would like to do for eternity or see it last. My experience is that events roll over us so much faster that sometimes we almost can't keep up. When I look at my art in architecture projects, I see how much has already moved and changed. In general, I see that art in architecture requires a rethink. An idea perhaps becomes mobile, is not stationary, a sculpture, but a concept for something that, if it can no longer be in one place, can be rethought and installed in a new location. And what happens if the author is absent? Even then, it should be possible to expand

or change the project and, above all, to make it enjoyable again

Natalie Kreutzer:

Tell us, Sabeth, what intuition do you have for the future? What kind of interventions are needed for art in buildings, in public spaces or art in general to find greater acceptance, a broader perception?



Sabeth Holland:

I believe that lean solutions are not successful. A short intervention in just one word or with a brushstroke is not moving. What is presented has to be fascinating, full of passion. And it must have a huge amount of content and be technically strong. Then it can reach people. Even those who ask themselves, what is art? Is that really a need of ours? If we think back to art from the Middle Ages or from earlier times, nobody today discusses whether it is art or not - it is art in itself. I believe that we also need to create art in this way, and that's why we need this space. The artist needs to stand up more strongly and deserves the support of the side of the client, and together they stand up for themselves and their project, even when the first criticism comes. Don't fall over, but say we need this. You don't yet see why, but the day will come when you will see and understand.

Natalie Kreutzer:

Sabeth, what is your wish for the future, in which environment or built environment would you like to make your next installation?

Sabeth Holland:

The sensuality of water comes to my mind quite spontaneously. Combinations of water, nature, colors and the play of colors - 10,000 ideas come to mind of what you could do. I imagine it a bit like when I was a child and created worlds in the sand with flowers and stones, which were then simply washed away again by the Rhine.

Natalie Kreutzer:

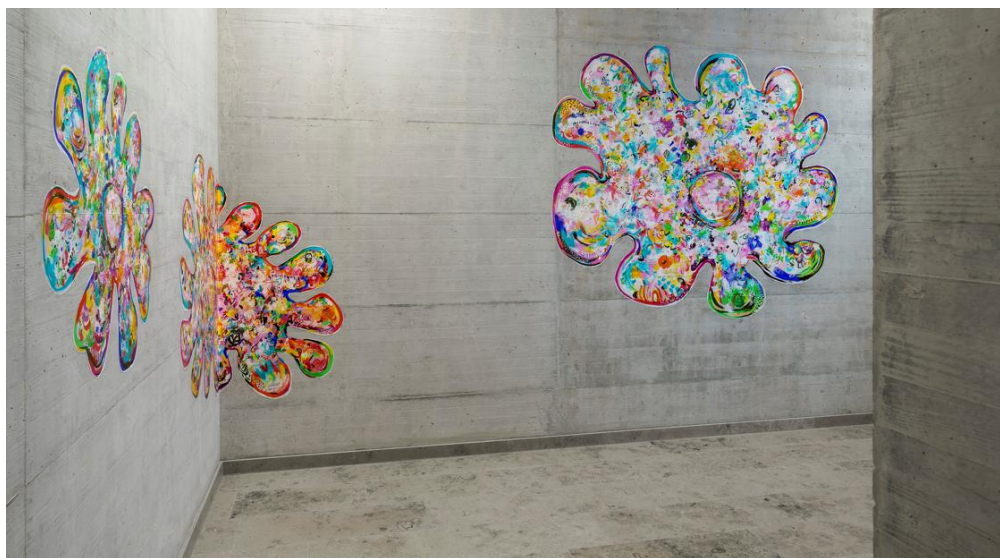
Sabeth, thank you for the wonderful talk. We are very excited to see what else we can expect from you in the future. I wish you continued success and all the best.

Sabeth Holland:

Thank you for the exciting interview, Natalie.

Appendix

Illustrations:	Page 1	Invitation to the Talk
	Page 2	Bunthalms
	Page 3	Big Bubble Fish at Lake Lucerne
	Page 4	Ironbloom for CSL Vifor
	Page 5	Rainbow Tower for ARCOLOR
	Page 6	Comprehensive Spacers installation at the “real/virtual” interface
	Page 7	Treasure Island photo transformation 01 for Greiner GPI
	Page 8	Station traffic circle (roundabout) “Encounter” for the municipality of Wittenbach/ St. Gallen
	Page 9	Pretty Pink Lovable, Treetop Lovable and Sunray Lovable
	Page 10	Soulflowers for Psychiatry St. Gallen



Photos:	Page 3	Brigitte and Gerhard Gastpar
	Pages 2, 6, 7, 8	Sabeth Holland
	Pages 1, 4, 5, 9, 10	Johannes Eisenhut

Artworks: Sabeth Holland

Podcast, Editing and Translation: Natalie Kreutzer