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Christine Hill

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Modell Bauhaus

Martin-Gropius-Bau

July 22 – October 4 2009

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Do-It-Yourself Bauhaus

A contemporary installation by Christine Hill in the Martin-Gropius-Bau coinciding with the 90th anniversary of the Bauhaus.

In the context of the major “Modell Bauhaus” anniversary exhibition, an installation by the American artist Christine Hill in the atrium of the Martin-Gropius-Bau will set out to ask how the legendary Bauhaus is reflected in everyday life and the domestic culture of today. Even the Bauhaus protagonists themselves pointed out that there was not just one Bauhaus, but six, seven, eight or even countless versions of Bauhaus. An unambiguous definition of what Bauhaus really stands for and what the idea of it actually represents has never been made, thus leaving the door wide open to stylistic howlers. Accordingly Christine Hill’s motto is: DIY Bauhaus – build your own Bauhaus!

Hill’s installation can be seen as a contemporary commentary that uses present-day artistic means to examine the extent to which “Bauhaus” influences life today, and the extent to which the Bauhaus as part of the high-and-low culture as well as of everyday living is subject to the widest variety of interpretations or “appropriations”. Christine Hill’s main concern is the fundamental idea of the Bauhaus, which first and foremost included a cultural as well as a political and social dimension. Today however – according to the artist – this aspect has been largely forgotten or has receded into the background. Nowadays the Bauhaus is primarily linked with practical, functional, high-quality conception, simple and elegant, sometimes also elitist or luxurious, with reference to the development of design or architecture. Yet a crucial maxim of the Bauhaus under its second director Hannes Meyer was: “The needs of the people, not the dictates of luxury”. Satisfying the dictates of luxury instead of providing a modern framework for the social environment, as promised in the Bauhaus manifesto: that was the conflict the historical Bauhaus itself already found itself constantly facing. And that contradiction seems to live on uninterrupted in the classic products or architectural imitations. The trivialisation of the Bauhaus idea ultimately went hand in hand with the commercialisation of Bauhaus objects or Bauhaus architecture. That is exactly Christine Hill’s point of departure when she sets out to question, classify or ironically diffract this development with her installation, on the basis of current examples, against the background of the current Bauhaus anniversary celebrations.

Consequently an active communication area alternating between contemporary shopping, domestic and everyday culture will be a key feature of Christine Hill’s installation. The renewal of domestic culture was one of the main preoccupations of the historical Bauhaus, with the aim of anchoring

modernism in real everyday life. It had to be advertised, marketed and sold. Today exquisitely selected Bauhaus products have become a fixed component of our homes and lives via the many different reception and marketing routes, as re-editions as well as atypical products or oddities such as a Bauhaus urn, all equally under the label of the Bauhaus style.

Taking the philosophy and working methods of the "Volksboutique" she founded in the early 1990s as her basis, Christine Hill will uncover these different appropriations of the Bauhaus. Slogans, starting from historical quotations, furniture from the everyday realm and objects connected with tourism, merchandising and the travel industry will make visible and comment on the many diverse commercialized levels with which the "Bauhaus" theme is now associated.

Christine Hill, a professor at the Bauhaus University in Weimar, is one of our foremost contemporary artists. Her special field of work includes the conceptual development of communicative situations and thinking about themes such as "lifestyle" or "branding strategies". Hill is represented at many exhibitions throughout the world; she presented her last major installation at the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007 at the invitation of Robert Storr, a curator at the New York Museum of Modern Art from 1990 to 2002.

In 1995 Christine Hill founded the now legendary Volksboutique which was set up on a temporary basis at a wide variety of places in Europe and the USA, and is now located in New York and Berlin. This project made Hill a fixed star on the international art scene. From being a second-hand shop in Berlin where people could kit themselves out with the help of the artist's advice, from the mid-nineties the Volksboutique developed from a meeting place and social space into a label that is uncoupled from any concrete locational reference. Today Volksboutique is a brand, as well as being the designation of a workshop, and under that name the widest variety of projects by Christine Hill are amalgamated, pursued or tried out as an organizational form. Volksboutique is concerned with value concepts in our culture and re-endows traditional objects with meaning and use. As a kind of amateur archivist and librarian, Christine Hill compiles inventories of specific everyday phenomena in this way. Christine Hill lives and works in Berlin, New York and Weimar.