

OPENINGS: KLÁRA HOSNEDLOVÁ

Martin Herbert on Klára Hosnedlová



Performance documentation for Klára Hosnedlová's 2019–21 series "Nest," Ještěd Tower, Liberec, Czech Republic, 2019. Photo: Adrian Escu.

SHORTLY BEFORE her 2020 exhibition "Nest" opened at the Berlin gallery Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Czech Republic-born artist Klára Hosnedlová brought two female "performers" into the space. She dressed them in odd, retro-futuristic costumes—skimpy black silicone jerkins designed by Katharina Dubbick—and, after giving them some instructions, started taking photos. The women moved, as visitors to "Nest" would, through a mise-en-scène of sorts, one waiting for activation. Its elements, united by pallid colorways, included an artfully wonky metal table-*cum*-sink containing reishi mushrooms (long used in Asian traditional medicine and now being tested in cancer treatments); a vaguely phallic floor-to-ceiling light fixture in smoky ombré glass; and intricate cotton-thread embroideries that resembled realist paintings. These impressive textiles were set in dark-gray frames presented on large, grooved terrazzo panels suggestive of Brutalist architecture and inset with colored-glass disks. A diagonally angled geometric doorway that seemed borrowed from an overdesigned sci-fi movie led to a large curving partition into whose verso was nestled a slice-shaped sofa. From this perch, visitors could focus at leisure on a hushed, bluish embroidery of a young man cradling a shelter cat.



View of "Klára Hosnedlová: Nest," 2020–21, Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin. Foreground, from left: untitled, 2020; untitled, 2020. Wall: untitled, 2020. All from the series "Nest," 2019–21. Photo: def image.

Much of the formal inspiration for these artifacts came from the Czech Republic's Ještěd Tower, a high-tech, hyperboloid example of Eastern Bloc modernism erected on a mountain peak in the mid-1960s as a combination hotel, restaurant, TV antenna, and ideological fist pump. The embroideries in "Nest" were based on a photo shoot the artist arranged in the tower itself. In the photographs that Hosnedlová later published on Instagram, her latest actors (the women in

the mod jenkins) wandered through the show's evocation of the tower and seemingly tried to give it life while not understanding what they were looking at. Leaning into soft creative misprision, they manipulated the mushrooms, handled live butterflies, drew perilously close to the lamp, wielded magnifying glasses, and generally acted as proxies for anyone baffled by Hosnedlová's show. The overweening, implicitly masculinist architectural lineaments of twentieth-century techno-idealism (towers, rock-hard materials, etc.) typified by Ještěd Tower are still here, the photos and exhibition proper reminded us—are indeed still active, even as the kind of surveillance symbolized by these looming buildings increasingly disappears into the digital ether (the title, "Nest," refers both to a safe space and to Google's smart-home tech). At the same time, Hosnedlová posited a temporally ambiguous point when the story lines and positions originally attached to these structures and the objects designed to furnish them have washed away, creating an opportunity for repurposing, reinscription, regrowth.

The narratives of the past century have gone up in orange smoke. The traces that have been left behind are being repopulated by those they were designed to exclude.

Hosnedlová was born in 1990. She grew up in a former Soviet country amid buildings that, despite their adamant solidity, had been rendered virtually ectoplasmic by the demise of the political faith they embodied. When she went to art school in Prague—where, after deliberately taking up small representative needleworks in the face of macho tutors pushing large-scale abstraction—she became interested in modernist architecture. Who designed it, and for whom? Who was excluded? Hosnedlová's Ph.D. dissertation is on the work of Adolf Loos. She's a dedicated archive rifler. For her earliest exhibition, in 2016, she placed intimate embroideries focusing on women's hands, nails, and hair in an elegant wood-paneled apartment, unrenovated and patinated with the past, that Loos designed in the Czech city of Pilsen. The notoriously sexist, racist, ornamentation-averse Austrian architect, she'd noticed, tended not to design private spaces for women; here, Hosnedlová staged a gendered occupation across time.



View of "Klára Hosnedlová: *Sakura Silk Moth*," 2021, Art Basel Parours, Basel. Photo: Zdeněk Porcal/Studio Flügger.

Over the next several years, Hosnedlová continued to think about space, privacy, and the ownership of being seen. For "Ponytail Parlour" (2018), in the atrium of Prague's National Theatre, she installed embroideries focusing on braided ponytails—the artist's mother, a hairstylist, exposed her early to private communities of care centered on women's hair. In the cloakroom, Hosnedlová presented racked, color-coordinated costumes from the theater's archive. She staged a photo shoot with female performers lounging around dreamily, stroking their selected garments in a kind of pastiche of men's fantasies about what women might get up to, unobserved, in a dressing room. For "Seated Woman" (2018–19), at Prague's Karlin Studios, Hosnedlová inaugurated the daisy-chain approach to image generation she's followed since. Here, she hung embroideries based on the "Ponytail Parlour" photo shoot in an installation that combined elements of Czech dramatist Karel Hugo Hilar's boudoir-like 1924 set for the National Theatre's *Romeo and Juliet* with references to Henry Moore's *Seated Woman*, 1957, which, title notwithstanding, might strike viewers—and struck Hosnedlová, she says—as a masculine figure. Here again was a braiding together, and a reclaiming, of men's views of where women belonged, how they might look.

BEFORE "NEST" OPENED, Hosnedlová bred half a dozen silk moths from cocoons in the gallery. Deriving partly from a fantasy of self-sufficiency in which she'd be able to produce her own silk thread for stitching, this move duly hatched the presentation that followed, "Sakura Silk Moth," 2021, at Art Basel Parours. Here, in the high-ceilinged Maurerhalle of the Swiss city's Brutalist trade school, tightly vertical embroideries—based on the "Nest" performance photos and including one of a performer teasing silk from a butterfly's cocoon—were attached to six large, translucent white epoxy sculptures in conjoined segments that reared upward, wavering to left and right. These columns were intended to converse with Hans Arp's outdoor sculpture *Bausteinsäule (drei Formen)* (Structural Column [Three Forms]), ca. 1955/61, visible through the venue's plate-glass windows. Arp's sculpture is austere beautiful, a stone stack of cubes, bowls, and variously truncated forms; it's solid and weighty but with the seeming potential to collapse. Hosnedlová's uprights, by contrast, were literally supportive of something else and felt like elongated protective shells, but they, too, suggested towers that could fall. Alongside them—



Klára Hosnedlová, *Ladies' Tears* (detail), 2019, cotton thread, terrazzo frame, embroidery: 16 3/4 × 12 1/4". From the series "Seated Woman," 2018–19.

on the floor and on a metal trolley—were more segments, situating the show between upward growth and good old-fashioned abjection.



Klára Hosnedlová, *untitled* (detail), 2022, epoxy, stainless steel, cotton thread, 13' 1 1/2" × 1' 11 5/8" × 1' 7 3/4". From the series "Sound of Hatching," 2022.

Strewn amid the columns were pieces of tubular glassware surrounded by scraps of organic material and broken charcoal. In the inevitable accompanying photos, Hosnedlová's latest performers—dressed in raggedy but cool shredded latex-and-denim costumes (created in collaboration, as usual, with a designer of her own generation, this time Cissel Dubbick, sister of the aforementioned Katharina)—attended gingerly to the chrysalises. The next major project she produced, for the 2022 Biennale de Lyon, was titled "Sound of Hatching." One half of this two-part project was installed in a disused factory. Here, the columns reappeared—alongside new embroideries and new tubes—while ashes collected by the artist covered the floor, as if the fragments of charcoal from the cocoon casings had propagated. The other segment, in an archaeological museum, economically mobilized the venue's Brutalist sci-fi architecture: Hosnedlová took an existing concrete alcove looking out onto a preserved Roman amphitheater, tinted the window with a rust-colored foil so that the view appeared unnervingly out of time—and/or radioactive—and covered a sofa with a shaggy layer of matted cotton. More glass tubing snaked in and out of it, waiting for activators.



View of "Klára Hosnedlová: Sound of Hatching," 2022, Lugdunum Museum, Lyon. From the Biennale de Lyon. Photo: Aurélien Mole.

Consistently, in all of these works, the baggage of modernity gives way to something improvisatory, fragile, tentative; much is left open-ended. You can intuit the idea of structures being dismantled, in Hosnedlová's art, simply on a formal level, where rules are repeatedly bent, definitions fugitive. What appear at first to be paintings aren't, and the larger objects to which they're typically attached defy the viewer's impulse to give the whole a name. Freestanding sculptures are simultaneously part of a fragmentary scenography, are sometimes blasphemously functional, and are subject to future recombination. Static objects mix with living materials. Exhibitions continually seed other ones. And, of course, Hosnedlová's "documentary" photographs feature people the viewer would never otherwise see (she has never staged a public performance) and are equally designed as generative for the artist's own practice. In the categorical fug, nevertheless, a strong yet purposely disjointed sense of narrative emerges. All of this is happening after the narratives of the past century have gone up in orange smoke. The traces that have been left behind—structures slow to rot, in any case sometimes still beautiful—are being repopulated by those they were designed to exclude. Though is *after* the right word after all? *When* is this taking place? Leaving that question open is just one of the ways in which Hosnedlová makes her viewer a participant-observer. Her temporalities are as layered as her formal gestures; whatever other eras they might inhabit, her elliptical story lines are happening right now.

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