In the Studio

# Christoph Weber, Vienna

## »I dissect concrete.«

Thrust, jerked, thrown, wrapped, rolled – in Christoph Weber's hands, concrete, the commonplace material par excellence, finds constantly new and surprising forms. His works are the result of a long-term experimental approach and the unexpected poetry of the material. During the interview in his spacious studio in Vienna's Favoriten district, the artist tells us how he approached the contradictions of concrete and how he works beyond them.

**Christoph, your art has something earthbound to it. Could one put it that way?**

Concrete barely has a certain grounded quality to it, plus its weight and the pull towards the earth, plays a role. It covers the distance all. I'm interested in the contrast between the solidity and the fragility of the material. I look for contradictions, and that's why I'm also interested in concrete. Every part of our work "concrete is a material that constantly defies classification."

**Concrete is typically characterized by its robustness. What other aspect would you want to show?**

Concrete is not just robust and resilient, but at the same time it is also quite brittle. I intend to fight against the grey, dull impression that concrete represents. To do this, I use colour, for example, or I try to make the surface of the work shine like a dog-like satin. Or I conceive it instantly in such an abstract fashion that, as it sets, the fragility is in the foreground, this way. I don't have to break the concrete first in order to create special tension through contrast.

**It sounds as if concrete's acknowledged strength means it is spotted for you precisely because it is not what it appears to be.**

Exactly! Concrete is also one of the materials that rules the Anthropocene epoch. From a geological point of view, it is already clear that concrete – along with other anthropogenic materials – will be a kind of marker for our epoch, a new kind of stone. We produce as much concrete as humans did bricks in the 19th century. Concrete is a material that is ubiquitous. The artist Ilkhan Ali Zadeh-Zolbanin is a renowned geologist dedicated to this compelling topic.

**To move from the ecological impact of concrete to the artistic one. As a sculptor, you have chosen a demanding material. Concrete is difficult, it has good mastermind's rock that nature has given to us, to quote the words of Heine.**

Yes, that's opposite – for me, concrete is more fire and water. Mortar has always been the material for sculpture. Concrete is actually not a modern equivalent of it. Some of my works, which are shiny or fragile, fail with the material, which is why I'm also interested in the contradiction between the material of modernism and concrete. In question is meaning in today's world. Concrete is a material that is not classical, but it is also not modern.

**Do you remember how you began to deal with concrete and to think it through as a material?**

It was triggered by my preoccupation with the geopolitical crisis of the Middle East. Concrete is a material that is very, very, very contemporary, if you can speak, on the material that stands so much for the supremacy of the West. The desire to fight an industrial society that seals itself off with massive barriers was the trigger for my interest in concrete. I'm also very much interested in the material that also allowed the rathouse of concrete. But once you start working with concrete, you realize how incredibly fragile it can be. Ok, now several hundred years have passed, but the Roman Empire collapsed. If you know the geo-historical cycle always come to the fore.

**What interactions with the material has that let you in?**

I'm very, very, very interested in the contradiction between solid, which for example, I'm working on together with Nikolaus Eckhardt on a project in Israel. But the whole nature-culture continuum – Pina Bausch talks about it in her work – is very important to me. Concrete is a material that is very natural, but also artificial about the material? Concrete is 96 % natural material. At the same time it is highly artificial, not least because resource extraction is often heedless. I'm also interested in concrete because it is a material that is at the centre of discussion that increasingly concerns me. In addition to this, what has always been important to me is the question of what is actually meant by "modernism". That's another reason why, out of psychosomatic curiosity, I have always liked to dissect concrete. I'm interested in what is behind it, what it is made of. Once again, the roads lead back to the ancient Romans. Concrete is one of their serious aspects of this confrontation with a simple gesture, as for example Constantin Brancusi or Yves Klein. *Chaos Discover* which appeared in a 2020 edition of *Collectors Agenda*.

**Is the goal, especially in your more process-oriented works, to give concrete a completely new aesthetic dimension?**

I have had a strong desire to do away with the aesthetic dimension of concrete. I'm not interested in the aesthetic dimension of concrete. I'm interested in what concrete means as a material, what it means. What happens when it is left out of a building and what happens when it is left out of a building and what happens when it is left out of a building and what

Crack Stop Motion Contact Sheet, Photo work, Photo: Christoph Weber

béton brut matrix, 2017, wood, steel, 72,6 x 161 x 80 cm; Drawing: Pencil, cement, glue on paper, 41 x 33 cm, Courtesy ProjecteSD, Barcelona, Exhibition view: On Fold, ProjecteSD, Barcelona, 2017, Photo: Christoph Weber

Cast and Uncast, 2018, Concrete, rope, Dimensions variable, each slab 70 x 100 x 15 cm, Courtesy Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Exhibition view: Contact, Ibid, Los Angeles, 2018, Photo: Christoph Weber

not yet titled, 2019, Concrete, steel, 34 x 40 x 40 cm, Courtesy Galerie nächst St. Stephan - Rosemarie Schwarzwälder, Studio View, Photo: Christoph Weber

Beton (gestoßen), 2016, Concrete, 2 parts, 30 x 155 x 110 cm, Courtesy Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Exhibition view: Carton / pierre, Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris, 2016, Photo: Christoph Weber

Interview: Gabriel Roland
Photos: Maximilian Pramatarov

Links:
→ Christoph Weber's website
→ Galerie nächst St. Stephan Rosemarie Schwarzwälder, Vienna
→ Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris
→ ProjecteSD, Barcelona
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