

When I walk on the streets these days, somehow I can't relax...

2007

slide projection, 123 slides
projection size app. 120 x 180 cm
wall paintings

The slide projection shows the cross-fading images of a pile of papers: one sheet after another is taken away, revealing the next image. The images show examples of façades decorated by artists in Tokyo after the Great Kanto Earthquake.

On September 1, 1923, Tokyo and Yokohama were hit by an earthquake estimated to have had a magnitude between 7.9 and 8.4 on the Richter scale. The quake and the following fires resulted in the destruction of 80 percent of the mainly wooden buildings in Tokyo, with around resulting in about 100,000 dead casualties and leaving about 1.9 million people homeless. Earthquakes happens regularly on the Japanese Archipelago, which is mirrored in the architecture and layout of the cities. But this one is one of the major seizures in the history of the city of Tokyo and marks a particular moment in Tokyo's transition into modernity.

In the days and weeks after the earthquake, reconstruction of the city began, and very soon, temporary structures for residential and commercial purposes were constructed in all the affected areas, known as barracks or in Japanese, "*barakku*".

In the year leading up to this event, groups of artists and designers had emerged, contesting the traditional Japanese art as well as the imported academic western style painting. They were well connected and informed about international movements such as Dada, Bauhaus and de Stijl, but also about Bruno Taut's work as the city counselor of architecture in Magdeburg, and his ideas about the coloured city.

The tabula rasa situation and complete urban chaos after the earthquake was seen by many artists as a unique opportunity to rebuild the city, and to take art "from the studio to the street". Artists and designers formed groups and companies with the express purpose of decorating the façades, and sometimes even the entire barracks and their interiors, the most well-known being The Barrack Decoration Company, Forefront and Mavo. They offered their services to the owners of the new, temporary structures, typically restaurants and shops, and produced a series of full-scale designs and paintings on the façades of the houses in the months following the earthquake, believing in a new kind of art that is closely related to everyday urban life. This practice lasted only a few months after the quake and disappeared thereafter. Today, only a portion of this work can be witnessed through black and white photographs and descriptions by contemporary witnesses.

In the form of a slide projection and two wall paintings, "When I Walk on the Streets these Days, somehow I can't relax..." analyses these façades and the photographs representing them, investigating a moment in architecture and design following urban disaster. It looks at the temporality of Japanese architecture, the performativity of the façade as an urban stage set and as a carrier of something that was a radical, modern gesture at the time.

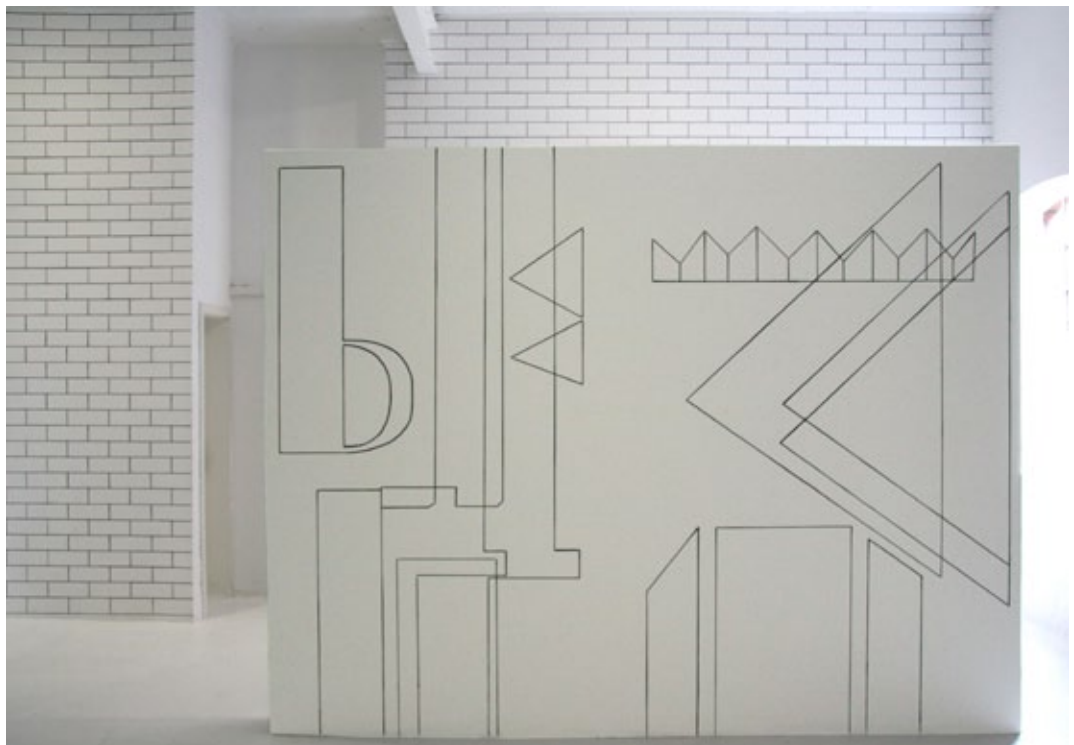
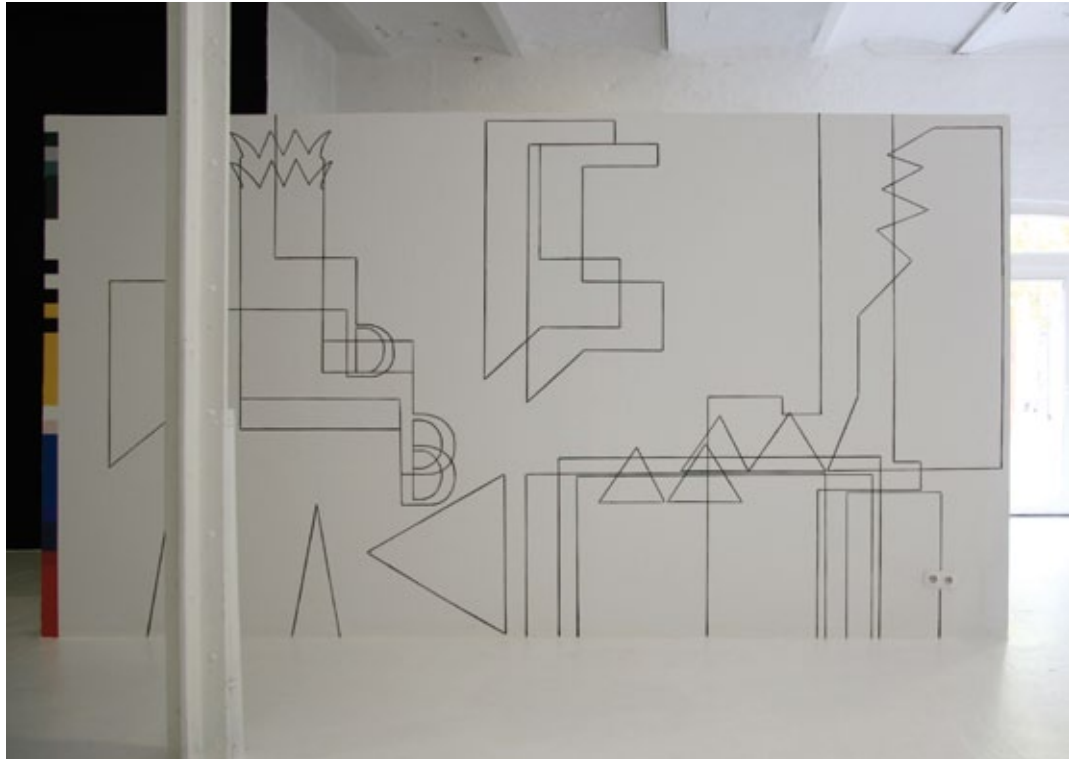
The wall paintings in the Lüneburg - version of the installation are based on the elements of a design for a façade by the Japanese architect and painter, Kato Masao, for which a documentation also appears in the prologue of the slide projection. He exhibited a model of this design in June, 1923, a few months before the earthquake. Later on, he was not directly involved in the barrack decorations, however, he was well acquainted with the main protagonists of this movement.



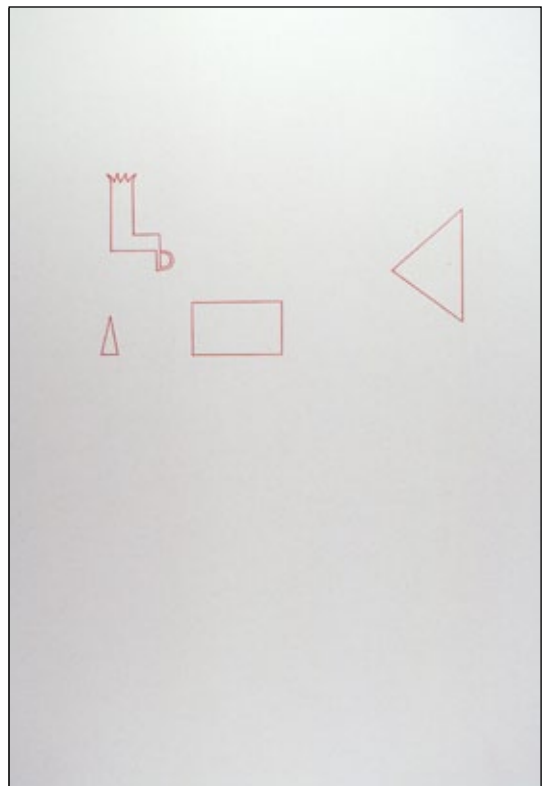
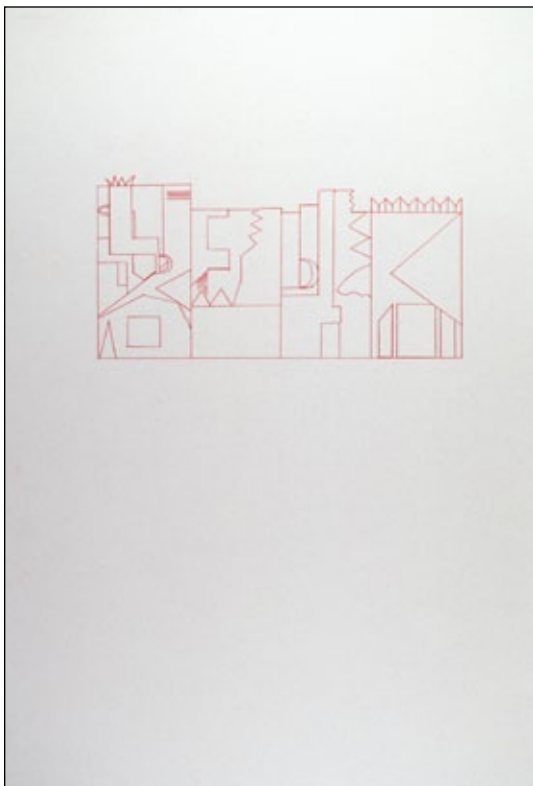
Installation view,
The Achromatic Island
Aarhus Art Building 14.11. 2009 – 24.01. 2010



Installation views
Wandmalerei
Halle für Kunst
Lüneburg
20.10. - 2.12.2007



Installation view, wall paintings
Wandmalerei
Halle für Kunst
Lüneburg
20.10. - 2.12.2007



Slides / prologue

