

# **Betha Sarasin-Baumberger**

**“There’s no rule that forbids wishing—hoping for miracles”:  
Diversity between Chaos and Order**

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The oeuvre of Aarau-born artist Betha Sarasin-Baumberger comprises a wide variety of works. They range from large sculptures and installations to works with glass, graphic works, commercial advertising illustrations, drawings and pictures (both figurative and concrete), and also include trompe-l'œil renderings and works based on alienation effects—always in search of basic structural elements and the regularity behind visible reality.

The leitmotif of the design principle is alienation. Retrospectively, from a temporal distance, earlier works are painted over, adapted, daubed, stickered, sprayed; and in so doing, the process of engagement with one's own creativity, one's own career and self-understanding, remains comprehensible—a communicative process with earlier visual expressions is thus created for both artist and viewer.

Since 1958 the dominant material is glass. Its transparency creates clarity; it makes visible the hidden and permits deeper insight on the one hand. On the other, in a subtle way, it can simultaneously create and preserve distance and form invisible spaces, most impressively in the church windows. There are also sketches for Venini-Salviati, exhibited, e.g., at the Museo del Vetro in Murano. In Venice—for decades her second home after Basle— she sketches glass objects and lighting structures together with her husband Teff Sarasin, and also for him, for example her compatible glass element *Tube Triangolare* of 1962 which was awarded the *Premio Bevilacqua la Masa*. The cube as constitutive element characterises the sculptural work of Betha Sarasin; to her it is the highest form of perfection with its six smooth sides, sublime and of inviolable beauty.

In the work of the artist, cubes can be found as unique individual pieces as well as arranged in rows, stacked, in a square, or also in combination with other elements. Tension is created where the original perfection of the geometric form shows a flaw, where edges are bevelled or corners missing. The viewer is led to an intriguing analysis of the disturbance, is confronted with the issue of the mental exploration of underlying geometric laws and, based on them, the reconstruction of an ideal initial state.

Another key concern of Betha Sarasin's is the artistic realisation and representation of temporal processes, the change from one state to another; this with the help of the Fraunhofer Institute for Mechanics of Materials in Freiburg im Breisgau since 1976. The collaboration resulted in three-dimensional realisations of two-dimensional trompe-l'œil drawings, sculptures of nested tetrahedra and the construction of a cubic spiral. The cooperation also led to the *instrument sculptures* intended to make audible the temporal, fourth dimension and which were played by Bruno Spoerri at the world premiere of the *Erdenklang-Symphony* at the *Ars Electronica* in Linz in 1982. Together with Markus Ganz she created the multilayered multimedia book *The Trip to the Lakes* (in English, German and Chinese, with a CD) in 1988, in which the major themes of her work are expanded and developed in poetic images and fantastical metaphors.

Betha Sarasin's drawings form a large part of her work, and they cover a very broad thematic spectrum. If rather abstract geometric pictorial inventions tended to be central at an early stage, she finds a visual language very much her own in her later representational works in which ever-recurring motifs can be recognised. By far the largest group of these drawings thematises the human face as the most important characteristic of human

identity. Faces are mirrored, distorted, superimposed—here again in search of underlying truths and challenging the viewer to engage in conversation.

Susanne Zeilhofer