

YOU ARE HERE

Peter Bauhuis' Tangible Transformation Lab

Search for places and directions on the Internet's most frequently used search engine, and you will find on its maps an icon that marks the spot you seek. A dotted red circle shaped much like a ball-head pin, it tapers downwards to point to a location. Peter Bauhuis picked up on this digital signpost and turned it into a bronze ball with a needle-like tip, thereby transforming an untouchable grapheme, electronically generated behind a screen, into a three-dimensional object for fingertips to touch. The orb and its bronze surface exude an elegant aesthetic charm, albeit with a whimsical nod to the original's 'iconic' function: When the light strikes at a certain angle, the object's shadow assumes the contours of the 2D search engine's icon. But more than that, the bronze pin also serves the same purpose as the original in that it marks a spot. So it took no great stretch of the imagination for Bauhuis to name his bronze 3D icon *You Are Here*.

You Are Here is not wearable jewelry—the object makes a fine addition to walls and panels. However, it is pervaded by the same tongue-in-cheek conceptual spirit evident in jewelry crafted by Bauhuis. In a sense, *You Are Here* can even be interpreted as a manifesto of sorts: Jewelry is not some superficial, precious exercise in accessorizing; it always goes deeper than that to reveal something about the wearer. There are traces of *You Are Here*—the pointing gesture—to be found in an earlier collection of tiny gold and silver lapel pins. Looking suspiciously like bits of lint, these pins prompt the observer to touch the wearer: "Rather than resting with admiration on the piece of jewelry, one's gaze is arrested with irritation at the [presumed] bit of lint. Often, this triggers a reflexive flick of the wrist to brush off dust and the like from the apparel."

The bronze pin's kinship with a digital icon and the lapel pin's strong resemblance to lint evince a key principle of Peter Bauhuis's Transformation Lab. The objects crafted here are not just about form and material, even if Bauhuis eagerly explores both—his very deliberate treatment of metals and the casting processes that constantly rebalance artistic intent with the physicochemical dynamics of the processes set in motion attest to that.

However, Bauhuis reaches beyond craft and physics to work with semantics, associations and narratives. When he juxtaposes two vessels, one of Corinthian bronze and the other of Nordic gold, this goes not just to contrast one's deep violet luster against the other's matte gold. This is also about the meanings invested in the names of the materials. *Corinthian* and *Nordic* are synonyms for the south and north of Europe, for the ancient past and the recent present. Nordic gold, originally developed for the Swedish 10 crown coin, now serves to mint euro coins. The shine of the evocative name 'gold' is merely semantic, as Nordic gold is guaranteed to be gold-free. It is made of copper, aluminum, zinc and tin. And yet this 'gold,' the value of which is measured in cent coins, exudes a material charm with a visual appeal not far removed from that of matte gold. Corinthian bronze, on the other hand, contains 1% gold. Its provenance is the stuff of outlandish myths and narratives. The Roman historian Florus, for instance, imagined it to be one common mass fused by the melting together of countless brass, gold and silver statues and images when Corinth was conquered and burned. (Epitome 2.32)

That which is palpable and tangible in the here and now stands in contrast to such intangible historical phantasms. The hand's touch figures prominently in both Corinthian bronze and Nordic gold, albeit in converse fashion. The Nordic gold alloy was developed specifically to prevent contact rashes when the money is handled, particularly by allergy sufferers. The reverse is true of Corinthian bronze. Contact with the skin has a healing effect. A simple touch is all it takes to restore the black coating when that typical deep violet-black patina is damaged.

Bauhuis plays with chemical properties here, and his aforementioned playful, ironic take on semantics is also evident when he speaks of *Chains and Flowers, chained and unchained*. 'Chains' can be interpreted to mean fetters or jewelry. When chains and flowers are mentioned in the same breath, the semantic pendulum swings towards fetters for the latter, while the former conjures notions of peace and freedom. The antithetical word pair *chained* and *unchained* also suggests moments of bondage and freedom. The title *Chains and Flowers, chained and unchained* alludes to a transformational process by which a necklace is born of a plant-like gold structure. To make jewelry of chained oval links,

Bauhuis crafted molds whose individual parts resemble orbital trajectories that, taken as a whole, suggest trees and flowers. The 'unchaining' liberates this chain from its existence as a cast orbital plant, transforming it into a necklace. Even so, the chained state is by no means preferable to the unchained condition. As long as the intricate chain forms an orbital sculpture that has the potential of becoming a necklace, it is both a tree and, conceptually, a chain.

Provenance matters. The origins of *You Are Here* are rooted in the icon; for the Corinthian and Nordic vessels, they are the source materials. With his *Replicas*, Bauhuis is referencing a project of his own, the *Gallium Treasure*. The narrative alludes to the collections' origins in two ways: The *Replica* collection of rings and earrings replicate in bronze the forms that were made of gallium for the *Gallium Treasure* collection. The *Gallium Treasure*, in turn, is a fictional excavation site concocted by Bauhuis. In order to lend credibility to this construct, he exhibited these 'excavation pieces' alongside 'scientific' evidence in a museum – Munich's Archäologische Staatssammlung. With the *Gallium Treasure*, Bauhuis translated his work of fiction into an eminently fitting material: Given the material's low melting point, jewelry made of gallium begins to dissolve as soon as it comes into contact with the human body. And with that, the bronze *Replicas* can be seen as wearable reminders of a reality that simply dematerializes upon closer contact.