

# KITTY KRAUS

# MATRIX 158

FEBRUARY 4 - MAY 2, 2010



WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART



# DANGEROUS BEAUTY

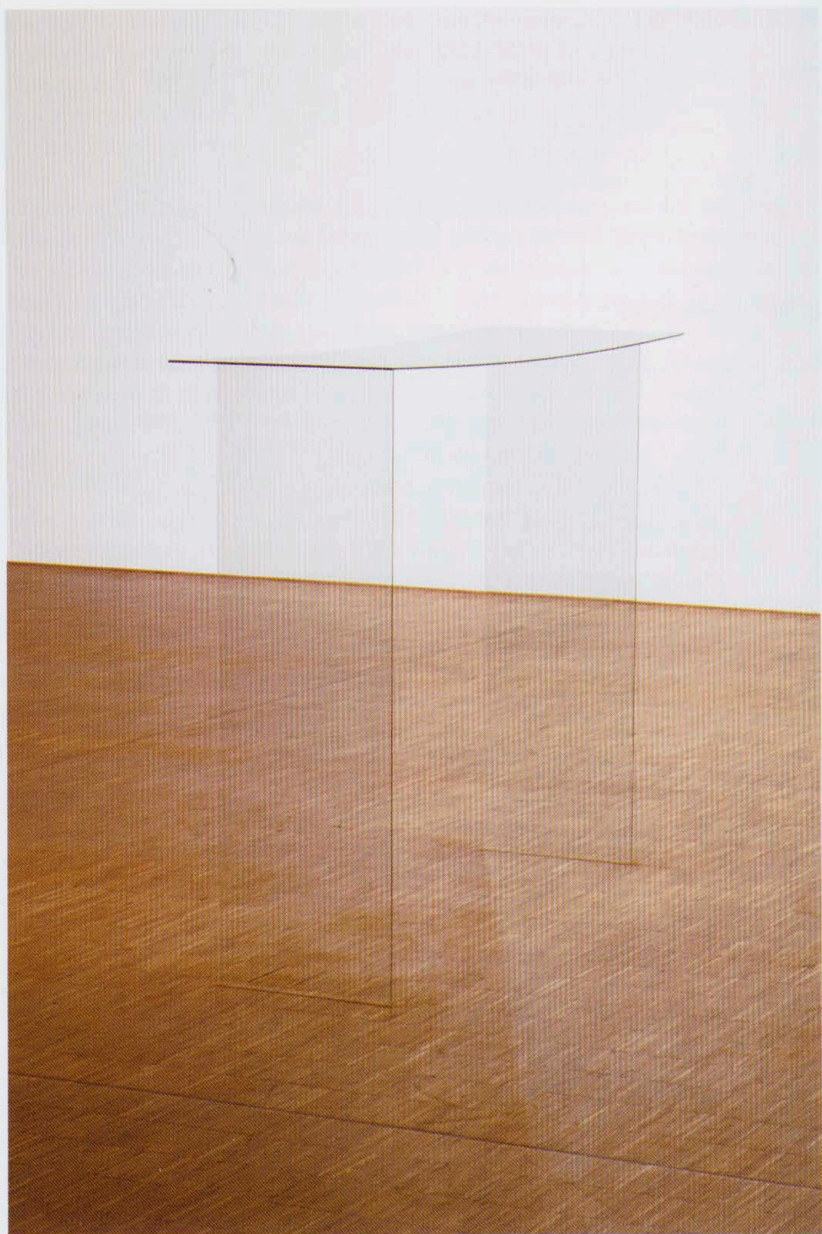
The guillotine assumes the form of a textual artwork in the artist book of Kitty Kraus.<sup>1</sup> Alluring and menacing, the mere mention of the historic killing apparatus conjures an image of the heavy, gleaming, angled blade balanced aloft, threatening to drop at any moment in a swift and forceful gesture, and ending abruptly in the finality of death. However, the guillotine's many complexities prove impossible to elucidate through the artist's distorted collection of words pulled from different internet sources. In a similar way, Kraus's sculptures evoke an inexplicable presence of acute fascination and impending danger, with various nuances that resist words.

Powerful in aura, Kraus's modestly scaled, minimalist works pose a threat that demands an expanded physical space, "although it is still not clear what pose[s] the greater danger, the work to the visitor or the visitor to the work."<sup>2</sup> This sense is central to several bodies of sculptural work, including window glass pieces, ice-encased light bulbs, and mirror lights. Barely there, several panes of window glass magically balance in precarious formations, sagging at the brink of their breaking point. Only the surface glint and roughly cut edges betray their existence and announce their promise to slice the clumsy viewer in a suddenly enclosing space. Just as easily, a heavy-footed visitor could upset the stability of the delicate glass balancing act, shattering the brittle sheets into hundreds of razor-like shards.

Potentially destructive forces also loom large in Kraus's various light bulb works. The artist encases light bulbs and fluorescent tubes in individual black-ink-infused ice blocks that are then positioned on the gallery wall or floor. These process works are plugged in and left to their own devices. The interior light generates heat that hastens the natural melting process, unless or until the bulb explodes. Regardless, the stained ice follows its natural course as the black water drips, falls, pools, and spreads across the gallery floor concluding in a self-made or automatic painting.

Kraus utilizes the light bulb in her mirror lights, in which each small mirror glass cube encases a single light bulb. This body of work combines the two potentially hazardous materials—glass mirror panes and light bulbs—in a single object. As in the window glass sculpture, the mirror panes are roughly cut with their sharp edges gleaming at the visitor. The bulb hanging within the confined space of the box generates heat, which can cause the mirror to break unexpectedly at any time. Such "explosions" bring an exciting element of danger to the installations.

High on impact, but low on technology, Kitty Kraus's mirror lights make up her MATRIX exhibition. Each light includes six roughly-cut, rectangular panes of mirror facing inward to form an imperfectly aligned gray cube. Only a few strips of cellophane tape hold each facet loosely in place. A single clear light bulb hangs on a wire within each box; its black electrical cord snaking and coiling to a wall socket. The simple, fragile construction is initially overshadowed by the visual spectacle created from the reflected and refracted light emitted through the dazzling, jagged seams of the mirror



KITTY KRAUS, *UNTITLED*, 2008. GLASS AND GLUE;  
49 X 59 X 15 1/2 INCHES (125 X 150 X 39 CM).

PRIVATE COLLECTION, GERMANY. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND GALERIE NEU, BERLIN.

PHOTO: SIMON VOGEL

# KRAUS



KITTY KRAUS, *UNTITLED*, 2006. ICE, INK, LIGHT FIXTURE, CABLE, AND LIGHT BULB;  
DIMENSIONS VARIABLE. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND GALERIE NEU, BERLIN.  
PHOTO: GUNTER LEPKOWSKI

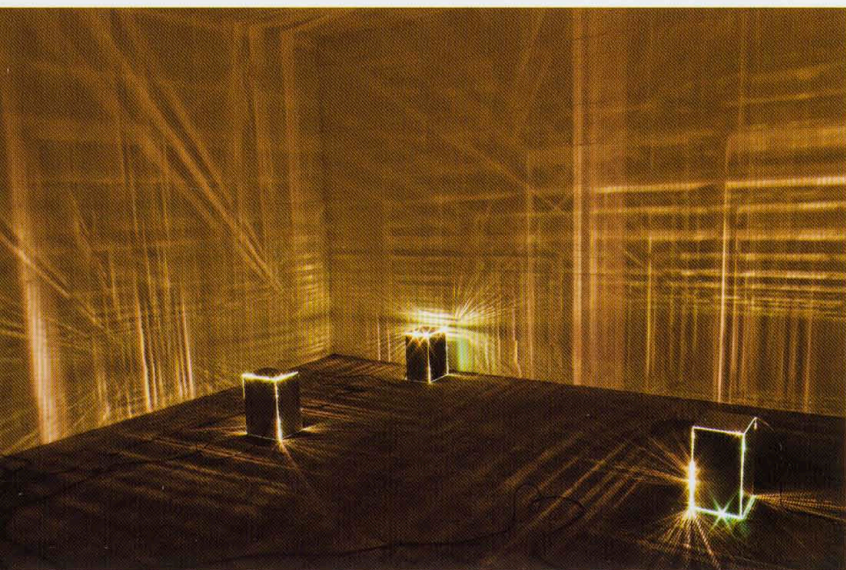


cube. The artist manipulates and adjusts each box, extensively and patiently, taking as long as necessary to achieve the desired fantastic light effects. Brilliant, crystalline bands of light illuminate the floor, ceiling, and walls of the gallery, their perspectival vectors expanding the small room into an infinite space, and simultaneously enveloping the viewer.

Kitty Kraus constructs these dramatic immersive environments through relatively simple means. In fact, all of her materials derive from ordinary life—found objects and common manufactured items.<sup>3</sup> As well as window glass, mirrors, ice, and light bulbs, Kraus also uses fabric, tar, and tape. By defying the typically unspectacular functions of these materials, the sculpture and installations of Kitty Kraus exceed the sum of their ordinary parts, transcend their existence as individual objects, and actually attain magical qualities. A perfect example of this illusory work, Kraus's mirror light installations are a spectacle of light rays that expand the exhibition space, and reach beyond the white cube and into infinity.

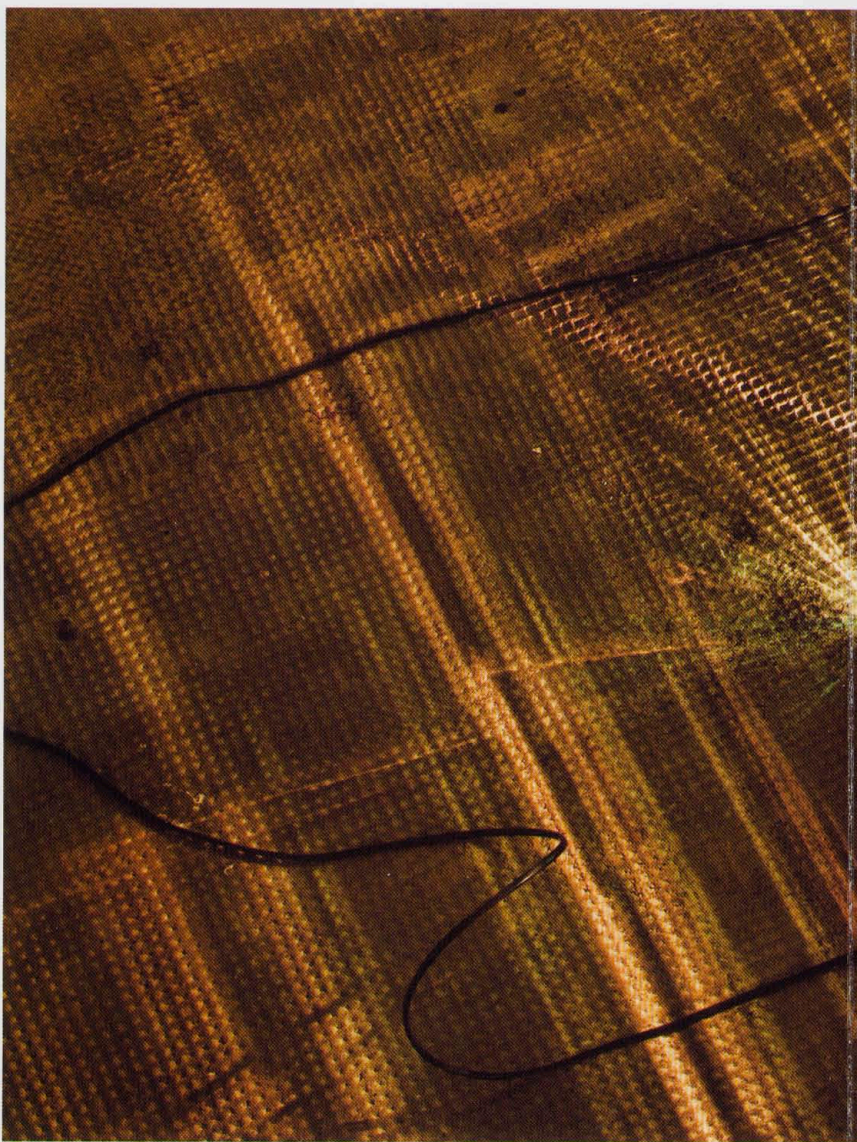
Kraus's breathtaking mirror light installations closely relate to the work of her contemporaries, in particular that of fellow Berlin-based installation artist Olafur Eliasson, who works with natural elements, including light effects accomplished through simple means (albeit on a far grander scale). He, too, makes transparent the mechanisms through which he realizes his dazzling effects. In *The Weather Project* (2003), presented in the expansive Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern in London, Eliasson fully exposed to the audience the substructure and electrical wiring that powered his giant "sun."

In addition to participating in a current art movement that employs commonplace materials in sculpture and installation art, Kraus's work relates, as well, to a variety of art historical movements, mainly from the 1960s and 1970s. These include Minimalism, Arte Povera, Process Art, and Light and Space Art. Given that individual Kraus pieces align with different movements, it rings true when the artist contends that these references are accidental.<sup>4</sup> For example, Kraus's mirror lamps have certain associations with the southern California movement of Light and Space. Led by artists James Turrell and Robert Irwin, they focused on light's redefinition of space, a sensory experience that de-emphasizes the art object. Arte Povera—Italian for "poor art"—comprises three-dimensional art created from everyday materials. Although originating in Italy, the movement moved well beyond the country, and included artists like Joseph Beuys, Eva Hesse, Robert Morris, and Michelangelo Pistoletto. Pistoletto's *Metro cubo d'infinito (Oggetti in meno)* (*Cubic meter of infinity [Minus objects]*) (1965–66)—a four-foot mirror cube—bears a striking connection to Kraus's mirror lights, with his box's inward facing mirror panes tied in place with a simple rope. However, different from the thrilling light shows of Kraus's work, the Pistoletto piece seals its magic within—the experience of the infinite reflections takes place only in the mind.



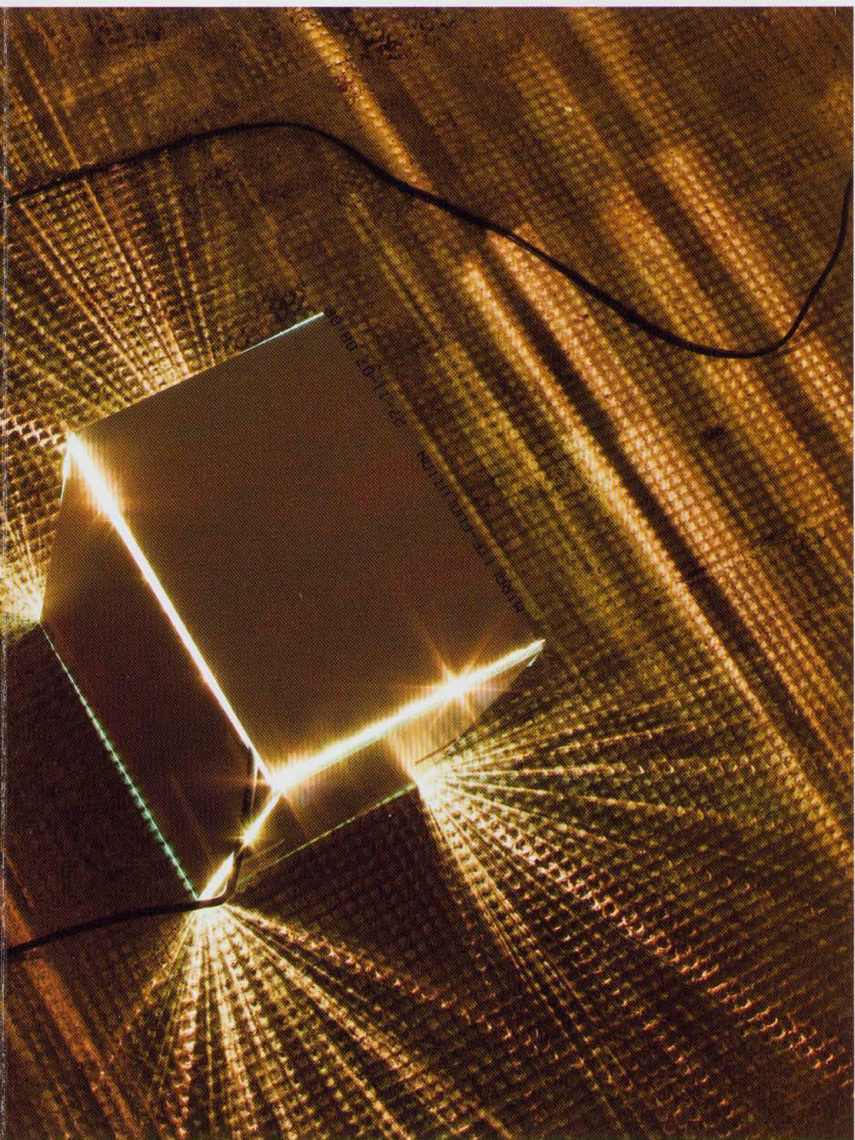
KITTY KRAUS, *UNTITLED*, 2007. MIRRORS, CABLES, LIGHT BULBS, AND TAPE; INSTALLATION VIEW.  
BOROS COLLECTION, BERLIN. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND GALERIE NEU, BERLIN.  
PHOTO: STEFAN KORTE





KITTY KRAUS, *UNTITLED*, 2007. MIRRORS, CABLES, LIGHT BULBS, AND TAPE; INSTALLATION VIEW (DETAIL).  
BOROS COLLECTION, BERLIN. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND GALERIE NEU, BERLIN.  
PHOTO: STEFAN KORTE







Perhaps more closely related to Kraus's art, from the earlier part of the twentieth century, is the iconic *Light-Space Modulator* (1922–30) by Bauhaus artist László Moholy-Nagy. His kinetic sculpture, made of metal, glass, and colored light bulbs, explores the movement of light and shadow throughout a gallery space in a dramatic show of colors and shapes.

Kraus's work also has obvious affinities with Minimalism, through her formal interest in geometric abstract forms and the reductive quality of her sculpture. In this area, the work of Carl Andre resonates particularly well with Kraus's. Both use common and found materials, place their work on the floor (rather than on pedestals), and work with non-representational imagery. Like Kraus, minimalist Dan Flavin's use of industrially fabricated fluorescent tube lights in geometric configurations explored the idea of sculpture beyond the object to include the gallery space. Flavin's signature elegiac light works were often created as memorials to friends and lost loved ones. This concept finds parallels in the more recent work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres. His minimalist-informed, conceptual sculptures of delicate strings of light bulbs (and other everyday objects such as candy and paper) memorialize the departed. These "bright lights" symbolically represent the living, but will ultimately burn out and die. Kraus's light-bulb works similarly refer to life, but as "reflecting heads."<sup>5</sup>

Similar to Kraus's light bulb works—both the mirror lights and the ice lamps—Process Art involves a "life journey" for the artwork. In this genre, the artist sets up a process and leaves the work alone to reach its final conclusion. An element of deterioration or destruction plays an integral role. The fiberglass and latex rubber materials of Eva Hesse's abstract sculptures naturally and actively change, becoming weak, brittle, and decaying slowly over time. Likewise, Kraus's caged light bulbs are set up in a system that creates the potential, even likelihood, of expiration. This death is not a slow deterioration, but a violent pop.

For all these art historical and metaphorical connections, in the end, Kraus's work is uniquely her own. Its familiarity originates from a range of characteristics of past art movements and its relationship to a number of current art interests. But in combination, the components of her art transform into something magical and new. Strong yet fragile, the work is both invisible yet ever-present. Full of beauty and danger, Kraus's art is forceful, swift, and clean, with exacting cuts like the guillotine.

#### **PATRICIA HICKSON**

Emily Hall Tremain Curator of Contemporary Art  
Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

Special thanks to Magnus Schäfer and Sasha Rossman of Galerie Neu, Berlin.

# KITTY KRAUS

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2009 *Intervals: Kitty Kraus*, Guggenheim Museum, New York  
tongewölbe T25, Ingolstadt
- 2008 blauorange 2008 – Kunstpreis der Deutschen Volksbanken und Raiffeisenbanken, Kunstverein Heilbronn  
*Kitty Kraus*, Kunsthalle Zurich

- 2007 Gabriele Senn Galerie, Vienna  
2006 Galerie NEU, Berlin

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2010 *Leopards in the Temple*, Sculpture Center, New York
- 2009 *Carpet and Friends*, Mehringdamm 72, Berlin  
*Flüchtige Zeiten*, Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster  
*Espejos/Mirrors*, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo  
*Black Hole*, CCA Andratx, Mallorca  
*Political/Minimal*, Muzeum Sztuki, Lodz  
*The Generational: Younger Than Jesus*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York  
*Kunstpreis der Böttcherstraße in Bremen 2009*, Stiftung Neues Museum Weserburg, Bremen  
*modern modern* (curated by Pati Hertling), Chelsea Art Museum – Miotte Foundation, New York  
*Two Horizons. Works from the Collections of Charles Asprey & Alexander Schröder*, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh  
*freier Fall*, Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe

- 2008 *Political/Minimal*, Kunst-Werke – Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin  
*Review*, Galerie NEU, Berlin  
*Moments*, MD72, Berlin  
*Were, there, severe, (thin line)*, Galleria Alessandro de March, Milan  
*Open Space*, Art Cologne  
*The Skat Players*, Vilma Gold, London  
*Fais en sorte que je puisse te parler/Mache, dass ich zu dir sprechen kann/Act so that I can speak to you*, Kamm, Berlin  
*Une Saison à Bruxelles, Dépendance*, Brussels MD 72, Mehringdamm 72, Berlin  
*Porzadki Uronje. So ist es und anders*, Muzeum Sztuki, Lodz Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach
- 2007 *Filaturen*, Sies + Höke Galerie, Düsseldorf (curated by Bettina Klein)  
*Kitty Kraus, Jonas Lipps, Blinky Palermo*, Allsopp Contemporary, London
- 2006 *Brunn, 8:8=1+1*, Berlin  
Pudelclub, Hamburg  
*Optik Schröder. Werke aus der Sammlung Schröder*, Kunsthalle Braunschweig  
Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York
- 2005 *The Gone Wait*, Gagosian Gallery, temporary exhibition space of the 4th Berlin Biennial for Contemporary Art, Berlin  
Evas Arche, Berlin  
Black Oriental, Berlin  
Prof. Winkler Stipends, Berlin
- 2003 *Das große Fenster, Raum Freie Klasse*, UdK, Bikinihaus, Berlin



Born 1976 in Heidelberg, Germany  
Lives and works in Berlin, Germany

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"Fazit Spezial: Art Basel," *Deutschlandradio Kultur*, 09.06.2009  
*The Secret of the Ninth Planet* (cat.), ed. Leigh Markopoulos, San Francisco, California College of the Arts, 2009, pp. 48-49  
Sonna, Birgit, "Auf den Kopf gestellt," *art*, 5/2009, pp. 18-26  
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Liebs, Holger, "Bilanz 2008," *art*, 1/2009, p. 54  
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Ihlefeld, Claudia, "Die Macht des Unsichtbaren," *Heilbronner Stimme*, 6. November 2008  
Lange, Christy, "Kitty Kraus. Identical dimensions and precarious constellations," *Frieze*, October 2008  
Schleicher, Sabrina, "MD 72, Mehringdamm 72," *Medium. Referenz. Form*, ed. Institut für Kunst im Kontext, UdK Berlin, Berlin, 2008, pp. 39-40  
Klot, Kristina von, "Hoch gehandelt," *mobil. Das Magazin der Deutschen Bahn AG*, no. 4, 2008, pp. 90-94  
Beyn, Ariane, "Fais en sorte que je puisse te parler/Mache, dass ich zu dir sprechen kann/Act so that I can speak to you," *Artforum*/CRITICS' PICKS, accessed: 4.4.2008  
Völzke, Daniel, "Maiewitschs Enkel," *Monopol*, no. 2/2008  
2007 *KITTY KRAUS JONAS LIPPS BLINKY PALERMO*, London: Alisopp Contemporary, 2007  
Probst, Ursula Maria, "Exzentrischer Minimalismus," *spike*, Fall 2007, p. 115  
Vogel, Sabine, "Kitty Kraus," *Artforum*/CRITICS' PICKS, accessed: 5.9.2007  
N.N., "Der Mond ist eine Birne," *Wiener Zeitung*, 22.8.2007  
N.N., "Kitty Kraus," *Monopol*, no. 7/2007  
N.N., "Vorsicht Reflexion," *Der Standard*, 14.6.2007  
2006 Allen, Jennifer, "Kitty Kraus: Galerie NEU, Berlin," *Artforum International* 45, no. 3, November 2006, pp. 312-313

## WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Kitty Kraus

*Untitled (Mirror Lights)*, 2006/10

The reflection angle is a right angle, thus the light does not reach the lamp.

Mirror, light bulbs, cable, tape

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Neu, Berlin.

## ARTIST TALKS

MATRIX Small Talks

Kitty Kraus

6 pm and 7 pm

Thursday, February 4, 2010

Artist Kitty Kraus will give 15-minute, informal talks about her work in the MATRIX gallery.

*MATRIX 158* has been made possible in part by the current and founding members of the Wadsworth Atheneum's Contemporary Coalition.

Support for the Wadsworth Atheneum is provided in part by donors to the Greater Hartford Arts Council's United Arts Campaign, The Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism, and the National Endowment for the Arts.



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<sup>1</sup> Kitty Kraus's artist book from the Kunstpreis blauorange 2008 der Deutschen Volksbanken und Raiffeisenbanken contains a four-page text-based artwork focusing exclusively on the guillotine. Using guillotine-related text found on the internet, Kraus adds to this artwork each time it is reproduced/reprinted. See "Dekaputtkapitalisation," in *Kitty Kraus* (Bielefeld, Germany and New York: Kerber Verlag, 2009), pp. 50-53.

<sup>2</sup> See Jennifer Allen, "Kitty Kraus: Galerie NEU, Berlin," *Artforum International* 45, no. 3, November 2006; p. 312.

<sup>3</sup> In recent years, numerous contemporary artists have rejected traditional art materials in favor of appropriating everyday things to create their work. A recent exhibition celebrating aspects of this humble material "movement," a resurgence of collage and assemblage in contemporary art, was organized as the inaugural show at the reopening of the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York. Titled *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century*, the exhibition was on view from December 1, 2007 to April 6, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Kitty Kraus in Christy Lange, "Kitty Kraus: Identical dimensions and precarious constellations," *frieze*, October 2008, p. 284.

<sup>5</sup> E-mail correspondence from the artist to the author, January 19, 2010.