

New Editions 2016

Claas Gutsche

Die Gestaltung 2 (Composition 2) (2016)

Linocut, image 50.7 x 40 cm; sheet 61 x 48 cm. Edition of 10. Printed and published by the artist in Germany. Available through Aspenwall Editions, New York. \$1,500.

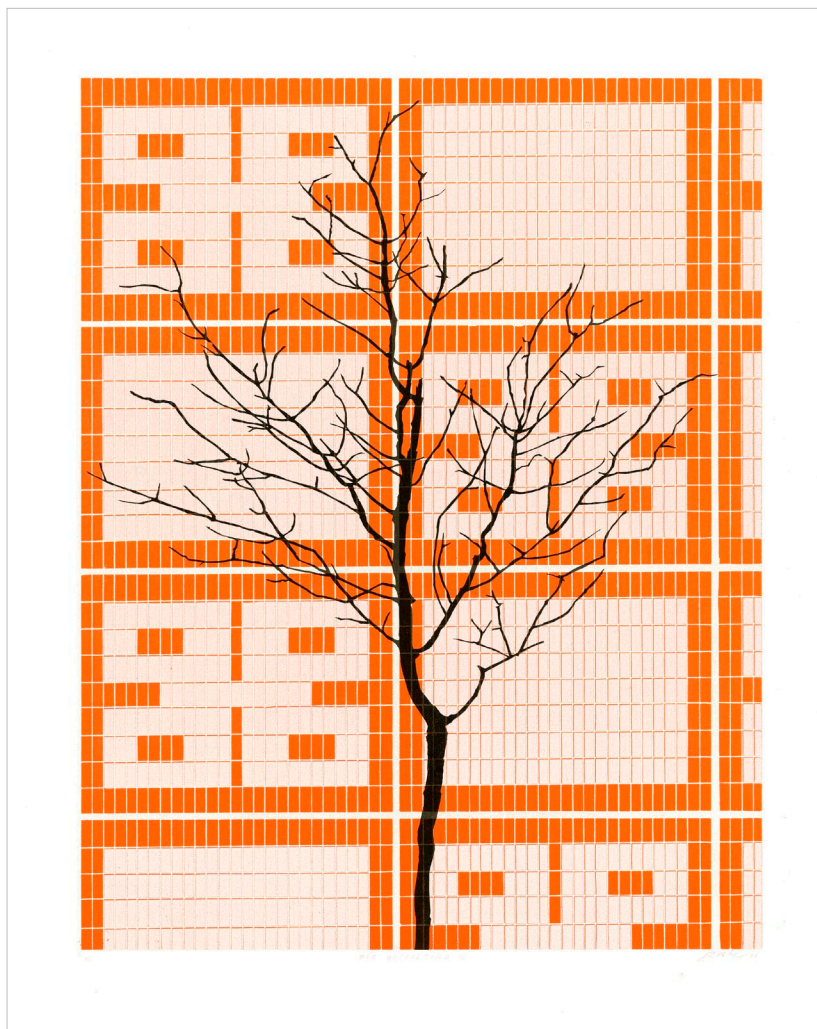
Claas Gutsche, born in East Germany seven years before the Berlin Wall fell, makes two kinds of work—bronze sculptures and meticulous linocuts—of two kinds of subjects: the bits of nature that city dwellers encounter (trees, birds' nests, broken branches, spider webs) and urban vistas in the former German Democratic Republic.

His monumental and disquieting black-and-white linocuts distill these subjects into sharp shadows and shimmering light. Visually arresting, they convey a steady thrum of dread—carefully designed places without people, beautifully articulated trees without leaves, a “utopia” where it is always winter. As Christoph Tannert has written:

The dreams of superiority of the socialist citizen were shattered as the years went by, just like all other economic plans, causing an emotional fog to descend over the country, which Claas Gutsche has artistically and effectively portrayed with documentary sharpness.¹

Gutsche's recent prints are a departure—smaller in size and aglow with color. At this scale the architectural elements are softened, the grim granularity of the large prints giving way to bright geometric tile or patterns of sun on concrete; skies bend blue.

The latest of these, *Die Gestaltung 2 (Composition 2)*, draws the viewer in with a calming pattern of cheery, creamsicle-orange tiles. It might be taken for mid-century geometric abstraction in the vein of Anni Albers, were it not for the way it runs off the right and bottom edges, indicating the continuation of a larger architectural façade, and for the intrusion of a single, leafless black sapling. No matter how jolly the tiles,



Claas Gutsche, *Die Gestaltung 2 (Composition 2)* (2016).

Gutsche suggests, it is still winter. (Similarly, the cerulean sky in *Relict* (2015) serves to silhouette a guard tower.)

While many of Gutsche's prints are explicit in their locations (it's hard to be confused about the monument to Lenin or the watchtowers), others are potentially more ambiguous. They quote the kind of 20th-century International Style institutional buildings that can be found from Los Angeles to Ulan Bator. The geometric shapes in *Vorgarten* (2014), for example, resemble the ceramic tiles of the Italian architect and designer Gio Ponti, while the

orange tiles of *Die Gestaltung 2* are similar to the glazed bricks of the Friedrich von Schiller School in Chicago, originally built for Chicago's most notorious public housing project, Cabrini Green.

As a child, Gutsche found himself in a nation state where everything was the same, but everything was different. That sense of disorientation is now broadly shared. ■

Notes:

1. Christoph Tannert, "There Is No Absolute Truth," in Claas Gutsche: Changing Truth, (Berlin: Claas Gutsche, 2014), n.p.