

For the seventeenth iteration of Garage Exchange, Benjamin Hirte and Nancy Lupo present *Antwerp*, a group of new sculptural and video works. Taking its title from a 1980 novella by the Chilean author and poet Roberto Bolaño, *Antwerp* channels a similar sense of dislocation—a constant blurring of map and territory. Like Bolaño, Hirte and Lupo are attuned to the shapes and structures of the contemporary city; the artists look intently at its liminal spaces, turning empty plazas, parking lots, and other semi-public arenas into their raw material.

Benjamin Hirte's recent works often turn a technological eye onto these spaces, using drone videography and 3D scanning to surveil their textures and tiled walkways, forgoing the passive act of two-dimensional imaging for a more active mode of circumambulation. In his new video *Antwerp*, conceived especially for the exhibition, Hirte filmed and assembled a montage of footage that winds its way in and around an annular, 1980s office complex, its empty plazas and darkened windows made more ominous by a droning score of appropriated and sculpted soundscapes, lifted from a German true-crime TV series.

*Nearby*, *Lots* consists of two suspended sheets of thin black rubber, atop which seven rows of thin metal wires sprout up like seedlings. Lit by tiny LED lights, they are miniature models of tall metal area lamps, seen from above. Suddenly, the scuffed black surface of the rubber becomes an expanse of asphalt, turning into the distinctly American landscape of a parking lot at night, a space both romanticized and problematized as a site of danger and crime. On the rubber sheets' versos, Hirte attached a poster with collaged poetry written during his residency at the MAK Center in 2013.

*Nearby*, a cartoonish, polyurethane beehive dimensionalizes a symbol most commonly associated with worker productivity, often seen on signage outside public and union housing.

The intertwining of care and cruelty is a common theme in Nancy Lupo's work. Her ongoing series of benches, which replicate outdoor furnishings found in civic, commercial and imaginary space, scrutinize the manufactured cheer of municipal design. In *Antwerp*, she presents a new iteration in her series of *Bench* works, which replicate, in  $\frac{3}{4}$  scale, one bench per year since 2015, sourcing originals from parks, train stations, and other civic spaces.

Her latest site of inquiry is the Caltrans District 7 Headquarters Replacement Building in downtown Los Angeles, focusing specifically on a series of identical, squiggling steel pipes, part of a sweeping plan devised by the prominent LA firm Morphosis Architects. Planted into the plaza's cement perimeter as barricade bollards, and bisecting its wide, concrete benches, their shiny, playful shapes convey a friendliness that belies the underlying cruelty of defensive architecture. Lupo underscores this contradiction by further distilling and repeating their form; stationed outside, they function as mounts to tablet-shaped panels, embedded with grids of scaled-down wall niches, and a row of soap dishes coated in pearlescent nail polish on their opposing sides. Titled Department of Transportation and cast in solid aluminum, these works strip the original shapes of their intended, steely purpose, removing their latent cruelty and coaxing out a consideration of the built environment's psychological and somatic gestalt.

— Written in collaboration with Juliana Halpert