

subsequent works are less prescriptive for the audience. We can engage with them without being placed in a situation of conspicuous participation, choosing to reflect on their internal narratives or artistic considerations of colour and form without being herded onto the centre stage of the unfolding action.

A good example of this is her long-term evolving series 'Montes Sovietici', realised in a number of manifestations. But, a good example of what we might experience from it could include a series of diverse drawings installed on the walls and a vitrine-like structure in the centre of the exhibition space. Both the drawings and the contents of the vitrine evoke or refer directly to the world of space travel and rocket science, or astronomic science more generally. The contents of the vitrine, include forms made out of chestnuts that overtly reference scientific models of molecular structures, DNA or stellar systems.

'Montes Sovietici' grew organically out of a previous installation called 'A la Recherche'. In this earlier installation, Romantic notions towards landscape and 'nature' were the underlying theme. At the same time, Carl was struck by the comparable, simultaneous attitudes of the explorer-as-conqueror and the sad, nostalgic retrospective 'singer of nature's lost virtues and beauties' imbued in the exploration of the earth's poles, a hype of the pre-World War I epoch. She noted that these early twentieth century polar explorations were not really motivated by economic interest, but rather by nationalist fervour and a kind of martyr-like frenzy. This, in turn, led to a growing fascination for the history of the conquest of space, beginning with the very first maps of the moon and its subsequent conquest – via denomination – so symptomatic of the Western understanding of the world.

A dominant preoccupation of the work is Carl's reflection on how the opposing political ideologies represented in the Space Race were intrinsically embedded in both the motivations for extra-orbital travel itself and the cultural iconography disseminated to the broader population. Like many others growing up in what was then the BRD or 'West Germany', Carl would have been fed a line of expectation to side with the American space endeavours, perhaps even encouraged to dismiss or at least be suspicious of the Soviet efforts, especially when they included their DDR East German allies.

The work goes further than simply analysing the envisioned ideologies contained within the artefacts and representations surrounding the space race and its related paraphernalia, though that is certainly one area of its consideration. The installation design itself gives a bit of a nod to the codifications and objectification of the Space Race as seen in hundreds of science museums and visitor attractions the world over. Carl's overriding fascination seems to be with the absurdity of some of the end points of thinking skewed by ideology and ego as exemplified by the apparent – and ridiculous – need to appropriate barren or untenable extraterrestrial realms. The name of the series itself is drawn from the name given to a mountain range on the dark side of the moon first documented through Soviet photographs. For thirty years the name held until it quite literally, became redundant by events unfolding on terra firma.

It struck Carl, for example, that there was nothing more foolish than the strategies by which individuals or states attempted to make some unviable corner of the galaxy somehow theirs; the planting of flags or the issuing of egotistical or nationalistic names to some natural phenomenon on some heavenly body never likely to serve any purpose congruent with ownership. The work engages with the ironic naïveté of the blatant 'colonisation of space' at the same time that, on earth, decolonisation and the development of Post-Colonial discourses were transpiring.

Mirroring the general absurdity of such psychologically fallacious thinking, Carl's humour is allowed to show through. In one work, for example, what appears to be a planet has, in fact, been derived from George Bush's chin shoplifted from a photograph.

In 'Montes Sovietici' and in other series of work such as 'Bilder Über Die Kultur' ('Images About Culture') and 'A la Recherche' ('In Search..') literally; referencing Proust's 'A la recherche du temps perdu') we find that cultural artefacts such as books, pamphlets, magazines or manufactured objects often form a starting point from which Carl conducts her examination of how ideology becomes intentionally or unintentionally synonymous with a visual language. It could be argued that this was fairly obvious if one considered propaganda or things with an overt political intention. But, Bettina Carl is not concerned with such overt and extreme items, preferring



Bettina Carl, 'Live (Gitarrenspieler Nr. 6)', 2006, 50 x 65cm. Water colour, pencil/paper.