



CRITICS' PICK HAMBURG

Olga Balema

Kunstverein in Hamburg | Klosterwall 23

February 8, 2025 - April 27, 2025

By Jens Asthoff

March 28, 2025 2:40 pm



Olga Balema, *Loop 232*, 2025, Polycarbonate, solvent, 27 1/2 × 9 × 21 1/4". From the series "Loop" 2025. Photo: Edward Greiner.

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Olga Balema’s latest outing at Kunstverein in Hamburg manages to redefine space with sculptural interventions that simultaneously elude their surroundings. Fourteen sculptures from the ongoing series “Loop” (all 2025) are prefaced with *Threat to Civilization 2*, 2015, which serves as a quietly disturbing companion in a separate vestibule. The latter work led Balema to develop her series of small to medium-size “Loop” sculptures, made of transparent, ultrathin polycarbonate panes. The thermoplastic synthetic material is produced for industrial applications and not intended for manual processing. Balema manipulates the clear sheets using emphatically simple practices like bending, folding, and cutting. With the aid of solvents, polycarbonate can also be bulged, glued, or modified with streaks or bubbles. Shaping the pieces mostly happens in her studio in varying lighting conditions, without sketches or preparatory drawings. The final layout is decided at the exhibition site, where the artist makes finishing touches on the artworks and their arrangement. At the Kunstverein—a nearly 10,800-square-foot hall with windows running along two opposite sides—Balema gave herself three weeks for this process, demonstrating the poetic precision with which she shapes the individual works into an ensemble that responds to the room and light.

Many of the translucent pieces were set directly on the gray floor, where they often verged on the invisible. In their crisp crystalline airiness, *Loop 232*, right by the entrance, and *Loop 242*, at the center of the room, seemed like apparitions. Part of the fascination of such works is that they enter the beholder’s perception as a surprise and mutate within it—as when changing daylight suddenly causes an unexpected reflection. Some works were in immediate communication with the architecture, such as *Loop 236*: a slender, vertically oriented piece positioned on the floor, almost tenderly leaning on a massive pillar. Balema combined a few works with pedestals, yet instead of using the plinths as a common display tool, she treats them as objects themselves. In the instance of *Loop 241*, the pedestal is laid horizontally on the floor, while *Loop 233* stands beside the pedestal entirely. A gesture of radically anti-monumental bricolage is felt throughout the exhibition, one in which the sculptures perform a multifarious balancing act between presence and invisibility.



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