ARTIST'S STATEMENT: IN-BETWEEN

"In-Between" is the title of my new work at the South London Gallery. "In-Between" wants to give form to a kind of 'in-between'-state, neither unconscious nor dreamy, a non-determined state, such as my indetermination when I read for the first time the quote of Antonio Gramsci: "Destruction is difficult. It is as difficult as creation". This affirmation – in its logic, its clearness and its incommensurability – is pointing to a dynamic, a movement. "In-Between" is the vibration, the uncertainty which appear when separation between two terms that are apart, two objects of thinking, two geographical places or two moments in time don't make sense. 'Somewhere in between' means a 'somewhere' not defined, but also a 'somewhere or something' to work on, continue, develop - to become.

"Destruction is difficult. It is as difficult as creation", I see this as the in-between-status of a journey or trajectory. To me, the quote is not about separating or opposing 'creation' and 'destruction', but about the difficulty of positioning oneself in the midst of the moving world. The challenge of confronting the world's reality stands between 'creation' and 'destruction'. "In-Between" is the affirmation of a precarious dimension, the dimension of the non-guaranteed. But nevertheless, Antonio Gramsci's quote contains the non-corruptible and non-negotiable will to survive – and this is where 'precariousness' stands. Antonio Gramsci expresses the contradictions of our today's world and the difficulty to reach its reality. I love this quote for its simplicity and complexity.

"In-Between" is an artistic assertion. The assertion is – following Gramsci's quote –: To give a form to destruction is difficult, to give a form to ruin is the problem and to give a form to disaster is the aesthetical challenge. Creating destruction is difficult – to me as artist – because it means:

Removing things, destroying things, demolishing things start in the mind, as an 'idea', as the work's guideline, as the artistic logic. It is to understand – of course – not literarily, but as an artistic gesture which allows changing everything.

Nothing is added and nothing is supplemented means, that everything to see, to touch, everything given to the visitor is something coming from an 'idea' of disaster and destruction. Again 'nothing added' is my guideline to give form to this work, not literally or anecdotally working without extra material or without adding intellectual or physical implication and effort.

Make the hidden connections visible is the gift or the chance for something to come out and reveal itself within destruction. For example, destruction makes unseen structures behind the façade visible. Ruins show what the materials of the making really are. Ruins – in their state of Ruins – want to tell us something. Ruins stand for something. A Ruin stands for a structural, an economical, a cultural, a political or a human failure.

The aim of "In-Between" is to create a work which achieves Form by questioning: "Why do I think what I think?", Why do I do what I do?", "Why do I use the instrument which I use?" and "Why do I give the form I give?" This is how I can create Form, something essential to me. I want to create the conditions for provoking the essential questions: "Where is my position? What do I want?" This is the challenge of Form. My ambition is that "In-Between" fulfill a dynamic questioning – addressing myself and the visitor in the gallery. I also want – in and with my work – to avoid related issues around, or 'about' such as: 'Why?', 'Where?', "When?" or 'How was it done?' which are matter of information, comments, facts and opinions. I want "In-Between" to be the question as such, the question itself, the form.

To create destruction is an aesthetical challenge. To make it - precarious and floating but dense and charged is the challenge. To do a work beyond 'the spectacular' – and I am not afraid of this notion, because I know, I have to pay the price for my aesthetic. But the work must by its aesthetic, give credit to the affirmation that only what touches the surface has a chance to reach profoundness. To touch the surface is the impact 'In-Between' wants to create and extend under the surface.

The aesthetic of "In-Between" borrows from known pictures of destruction – destruction by violence, by war, by accident, by nature, by structural-failures, by corruption, by fatality. I have been working since two years with this aesthetics: "Concordia, Concordia", 2012, "Break-Through", 2013, "Abschlag" and "Höhere Gewalt", 2014. I want to establish a body of work which encompasses Antonio Gramsci's quote. Without being anecdotic or literal I can testify, that to set-up a work in an exhibition-space which gives form to destruction is indeed as difficult as anything else.

With "In-Between" I want to create a new form, I want to propose an experience, an art-experience in the range of 'successes', failures and in-betweens.

Thomas Hirschhorn

THOMAS HIRSCHHORN: IN-BETWEEN
26 JUN – 13 SEP 2015

Having emerged as an artist in the 1990s, Thomas Hirschhorn is internationally regarded as being one of the most important artists of his generation. Born in Bern, Switzerland, he lives and works in Paris. Over the past twenty years Hirschhorn has exhibited in museums and galleries worldwide, and equally importantly in more openly public locations, from city streets to housing estates. Using low-grade materials – cardboard, plastic sheeting, packing tape, aluminium foil – variously combined with newspaper and magazine cuttings, mannequins, furniture and a wide range of other miscellany, together with references to radical theorists such as Gilles Deleuze and Georges Bataille, he has established an expansive but distinctive visual language with which he creates extraordinary, provocative artworks imbued with political content. In the lead up to the opening of his South London Gallery exhibition, he discussed the show with the SLG's Director, Margot Heller.

Margot Heller: The exhibition you've made for the South London Gallery is an entirely new work, largely made in your studio but with the SLG's space very much in mind. Whilst it's site-specific in that regard, the primary impetus behind it was your desire to further develop a body of work you've been creating over the past three years in which you explore the aesthetic of contemporary ruins. What prompted you in the first instance to start thinking about ruins as a potential subject matter for a new body of work?

Thomas Hirschhorn: "In-Between" is the form of my work for South London Gallery. This means it's the sense, it's the core, and it's the message. My interest in contemporary (and also antique) ruins doesn't come from aesthetic considerations: to me, ruins are 'Form', because each ruin says something, each ruin is the Form of its own Disaster, of its specific Reason to be a ruin and of its History. Therefore, in our time of incredibly and increasing amount of contemporary ruins, I am interested in ruins and am trying to establish a critical corpus and a body of works with this Form."In-Between" refers to well-known pictures of destruction – destruction by violence, war, accident, nature, structural-failures, corruption, or fatality. The beautiful and thoughtful quote of Antonio Gramsci (from his Prison Notebooks): "Destruction is difficult; indeed it is as difficult as creation" is my 'guideline' throughout this work here at South London Gallery, and I pointed it out as the only text, the only 'readable' element of the work. I understand the word 'difficult' in Gramsci's sentence as the difficulty to destroy inegalitarian systems, the difficulty to destroy all kinds of aristocracies, the difficulty to destroy cultural, economic, social habits, and the difficulty to destroy unfair laws. To make a revolution is difficult. And to me "the difficulty of creation" is the difficulty to create something new, something egalitarian, something based on truth, to create real autonomy, and it is the difficulty to create a base for understanding and for touching the Other. With his sentence: "Destruction is difficult; indeed it is as difficult as creation" Gramsci pointed out with lucidity and sharpness, decades ago, that to create – to be a creator – is indeed difficult. As a counterpoint to today's consumerist ideology trying to push the idea of consumerism as a creative act (the capitalist dogma that 'every consumer is a creator'), Gramsci's words are crucial to re-affirm the difficulty of creation. His sentence is an encouragement to undertake this body of work – in saying this I am aware of the deepness and complexity of Gramsci's quote, but I also think it is important – as an artist – to do what I need to do: To keep my work on the surface, because I am convinced that it's only when a work offers a surface to be touched, that the audience can have a chance to reach profoundness.

MH: Unlike many of your works, media images aren't directly featured in *In-Between*, but a process of selecting and analysing relatively recent photographs of war-torn cityscapes, ruinous and bomb-damaged locations all over the world informed the making of the work behind-the-scenes. How did you go about selecting this source material? What drew you to certain images, and did the location or origin of the pictures matter to you?

TH: Pictures taken from newspapers, magazines or from the Internet have always been one of the materials I work with, for collages but also for other works. I use them either as material – integrating them directly into my work – or as "References" to remember some specific details or elements that I refer to in my work. Most of these pictures are taken by witnesses and have a status of testimony. Their origin is often unclear and unverifiable, there is no source and this unverifiable provenance reflects today's uncertainty. This is what I am interested in because I want to affirm the world in which I live and I want to affirm also the negative side of this world. I affirm the world in which negativity is also shown and in which the hard core of reality, of negativity is not bracketed off. I want to show also this hard core. I want to turn towards the negative; I do not want to be cynical or a cunning devil. I do not want to look away. I want to be attentive and I want to create a new world alongside and in the existing world. Therefore to see pictures, to look at pictures of ruins matter to me. Looking and seeing is what matters, and not 'knowing' or being 'informed', because today how can one ever 'know' and how can one ever be 'informed'? That's why the context or circumstances of pictures do not interest me; I am rather interested in the pictures as such.

MH: I can see that it's the formal characteristics of the source images which stand out for you, but aren't they also reference points for expressing the broader idea that ruins are the enduring visual product of war and destruction? The quote which appears in the work seems to encourage this line of interpretation. To what degree did Gramsci's words inspire the work, or was it rather that they seemed to chime with the direction your thinking was taking as the work evolved?

TH: I love Antonio Gramsci's life and work. Therefore I dedicated one of the monuments of my 'monument-series' to him ("Gramsci Monument", made in The Bronx, New York in 2013). My love includes everything coming from him, without exception. As a fan – as every fan – there is no criticism, no distance and there is no limit. Being a fan cannot be explained or justified. As already mentioned, one of his fabulous quotes encouraged me to do "In-Between" and other works in the body of ruins. I am a Gramsci-Fan because he was a hero, because he was a revolutionary, because he was ready to pay the price for his commitment, because he was a strategist, because of his passion for the Political, because of his proposition to self-define one's own position, because of his hate of indifference, because he wrote Notebooks and Letters in Prison, and each one is a beautiful and strong foundation from which one can build an education, because his faith in the human capacity and competence was unlimited, because he wrote "Every human being is an intellectual" - which was echoed by Joseph Beuys when he declared "Each human being is an artist", because he understood Art and Philosophy as a friendship-movement, because of his question: "Is Philosophy independent from politics?" which encourages me – as an artist – to then ask: "Is Art independent from politics?".

MH: In your statement about *In-Between* you underplay the importance of the tension between destruction and creation to emphasise an analogy with the difficulty of deciding how and where to position ourselves in an ever-shifting world. Seeing the work come to fruition in the space, what strikes me most strongly is how impressively it conveys the sense of precariousness which you refer to in your text, and the feeling that everything within it is held in place with the barest of threads. It's as though you are subjecting visitors to that sense of precariousness, making them feel it and therefore reflect upon it.

TH: Precariousness is an important notion to me. Precariousness can be a tool to work out the contemporary problematic of economic, social, religious, political and cultural issues. The logic of the precarious is, to me, the logic of preciosity. The preciosity of making encounters and creating an event through the precarious, thanks to the precarious or despite the precarious. As an artist, to do a work which claims to be precarious is to risk exposing myself to an incredible challenge without foreseeing or measuring the difficulties. Working – as an artist – means understanding art as a tool, an instrument or a weapon. I understand art as a tool to confront reality. I use the tool 'art' to encounter the world I am living in. I use the tool 'art' to live within the time I am living in. My love for 'the precarious' comes from my understanding of every human activity as precarious, from my belief in doing things instead of considering their unavoidable incommensurable precarity. And here, your observations about the progress of "In-Between" at the South London Gallery are sharp. My love of precarity comes from the strength and courage which is necessary to create something, despite its precarity, despite the precarity of all things and despite the precarity of life. The logic of the precarious is an absolute necessity and complete emergency – the contrary of an ephemeral – logic which is nothing else than the logic of death.

MH: Over the years your work has come to be known for its political content, confronting people with often uncomfortable realities they might otherwise choose to overlook. What has driven this? An impulse to express your own perspective on the world, or a conviction that art can make a difference?

TH: Yes, Art can make a difference because it's Art! Art is autonomous. Autonomy is what gives the artwork its beauty and its absoluteness and Art – because it's Art – can create the conditions of an implication – beyond anything else – from one to one. Each human being can be transformed by the power of Art. I believe this and I experienced this, myself. The 'political content' – as you name it – is only 'political' because I take Art seriously, because I believe in Art and because I trust Art. And by doing this, it gets 'political': this is what the assertion 'working politically' means! The 'uncomfortable realities' you mention go hand in hand with the discourse of sensitivity – actually 'hypersensitivity' – which is about keeping one's comfort, quiet and luxury. Distance is only taken by those who won't confront with their own eyes the incommensurable of reality. Distance is never a gift; it's something taken by a very few to keep their exclusivity intact. 'Hypersensitivity' is opposite to the 'non-exclusive public'. In order to confront the world, to struggle with its chaos, its incommensurability, in order to coexist and cooperate in this world and with the other, I need to confront reality without distance. Therefore it is necessary to distinguish 'sensitivity', which to me means being 'awake' and 'attentive', from 'hypersensitivity', which means 'self-enclosure' and 'exclusion'. Definitively, I want to do an inclusive and beautiful work. And I want to do this in giving Form. I think Form is the most important issue in art, because it questions: How can I take a position? How can I give this position a form? And how can this form create a Truth, a Universal Truth? The problem is *to give* a form, my own form, something belonging to me only, something only I see and understand as such, and something only I can give. I want to do an artwork in exaggeration and preciseness, a work which, in its charge and density, stands for a new form. To give Form is decisive. I use the term '*giving Form*', not 'making' a form or 'doing' a form, because it means 'giving from my own'. This is the 'political'.

The exhibition is generously supported by Stephen Friedman Gallery, Beth Rudin DeWoody and the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia.

Thomas Hirschhorn in conversation with Adrian Searle
Sat 12 Sep, 7pm

www.southlondongallery/thomashirschhorn

Image: Thomas Hirschhorn *In-Between*, 2015, courtesy the artist.
Photo by Mark Blower.

Order:111679 Job:29941_SLG Gallery Guide Press Sheet:1 Side:Front 03_07_2015