



[highways and byways. together again.](#)

Group Exhibition

Daimler Chrysler Collection: Daimler Contemporary

Alte Potsdamer Straße 5, 10785 Berlin, Germany

17 October 2013 - 16 March 2014

<http://www.artslant.com/ber/articles/show/37601>

Mashup alert! Daimler Contemporary goes contemporary

by Johanna Thompson

Despite its prime Potsdamer Platz location in one of the busiest and most central areas of Berlin, the Daimler Collection remains a bit of a secret, brilliantly hidden in plain sight. To find it one must avoid getting sucked into the nearby shopping mall, multiplex theatre, or one of the uncountable restaurants. Look for [Haus Huth](#), the only remaining historical building at Potsdamer Platz. A doorman will let you in. Take the elevator to the top and you'll suddenly find yourself in a quiet sanctuary only a few meters and yet worlds removed from the consumer madness outside.

Focusing mainly on twentieth century abstract and minimal art, the Collection's exhibitions, hosted in the Daimler Contemporary gallery, are always well put together with a strong art historical message and a clear concept. It's a reliable brand with a predictability that is comforting, if slightly boring. Or at least has been until now.



Nic Hess, *highways and byways. together again.*, installation view with painting by Oli Sihvonen, Daimler Contemporary, Berlin; Courtesy of Daimler Contemporary, Berlin; Photo: Hans-Georg Gaul, Berlin.

The gallery's current installation by Nic Hess is quite a departure from the usual exhibition concept. The reliable, high-caliber art show one has come to expect from Daimler Contemporary is still there, as a sort of show-inside-the-show featuring American Abstract Art, mainly by Josef Albers and the Washington Color School plus other German immigrants to the US. This display, however, is now adorned with the street art style visual commentary of Nic Hess, which simply changes everything.

The Swiss artist creates wall drawings that span entire galleries, and in this exhibition he reacts not only to the space but also to the art on display. His framing of the art works is opinionated, informative, often political and somewhat subversive. Hess is a trained construction draftsman and there is something very pragmatic, normative and obvious about his work, but it is neither simplistic nor arbitrary. It's like he's taking you on a walk through a comic book on art history.

The show's rather verbose title, *highways and byways. together again*, contains the essence of what is happening here. Hess has created visual highways that lead the visitor through the historical exhibition, which starts off with artworks dated from around 1950. A curved entryway that turns three-dimensional leads you into the exhibition space where a constant up and down of lines interacts with and comments on the work hanging on the walls. The squares, lines, and stripes on the canvases are extended or replicated in tape and stickers, street art style. Hess gives these expanded abstract shapes meaning and momentum by adding legs and feet or turning them into a fish.



Nic Hess, *highways and byways. together again.*, installation view with paintings by **Larry Zox**, **Oli Sihvonen**, and **Sylvan Lionni**, Daimler Contemporary, Berlin; Courtesy of Daimler Contemporary, Berlin; Photo: Hans-Georg Gaul, Berlin.

On this journey you encounter Angela Merkel as a kind of avatar, a hare that can jump through walls, and a baby deer speared with an impressive collection of Swiss Army Knives. The deer sculpture complements an Amish quilt, included in this context as a reminder that the square is not a shape unique to abstract painting.

This show is a small revolution, opening up the hermetic world of Abstract Art that can be so intimidating in its untouchable holiness. A purist may argue that

through Hess' playful commentary the paintings on display lose their impact. But the generational and international dialogue happening here is exactly what this collection needs to keep it fresh and, dare I say, contemporary.

—[Johanna Thompson](#)