



Installation view

**Erika Hock. What Bananas Say**

4 July – 6 September 2015

Kabinett

In the Kabinett space of the Salzburger Kunstverein is a project by German artist, Erika Hock, who is artist-in-residence at the Salzburger Kunstverein for June and July 2015. In this exhibition, Erika Hock engages with the designs of the unconstructed home for Josephine Baker, originally designed by Adolf Loos, as well as with so-called Shyrdaks, felt rugs, as they are produced in Kyrgyzstan. According to a Loos-ian principle of clothing, textiles and carpets are precursors of built walls, and this sentiment is played out by Hock in her exhibition.

Erika Hock (1981, Kirgisistan former UdSSR) lives and works in Brussels and Düsseldorf.

## ***Erika Hock: What Bananas Say***

*Text by Séamus Kealy*

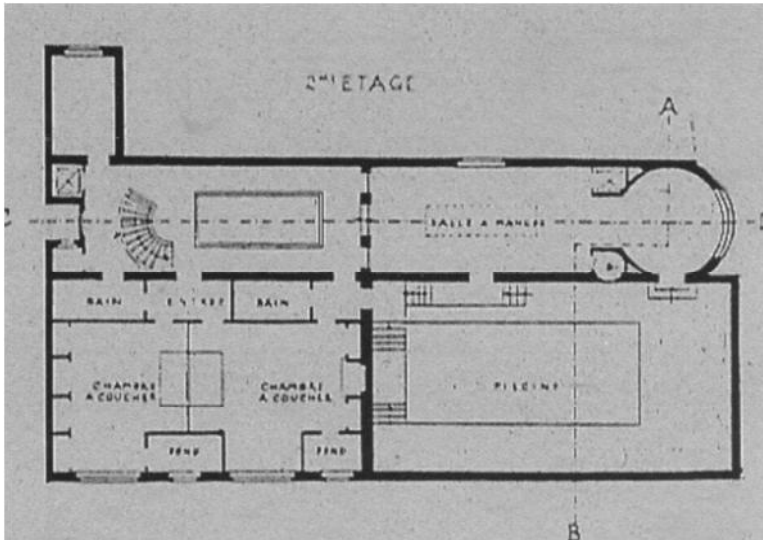
In this exhibition, tailored for the Kabinett space of the Salzburger Kunstverein, Erika Hock engages with the designs of the unconstructed home for the legendary American performer Josephine Baker, originally designed by the Austrian architect Adolf Loos.

It is unclear whether Loos ever met Baker. An account by Loos' wife does hint at a possible meeting in Paris, where Loos revealed to Baker that he was himself an architect after she was allegedly complaining about a design for a house she commissioned. Whether this *rendez-vous* (or a variety of possible other encounters) happened or not, Loos took it upon himself to design a house for Baker, and either Baker ignored the designs or never learned of them. The latter may be more likely, as the designs are themselves, we might then conjecture, an unsent love letter or the erotic gestures of a married, modernist architect who was himself bound within personal and professional circumstances. Much has been made of his French counterpart Le Corbusier as an unwitting rival to his affections for Baker, having apparently had an affair with her, if briefly. But this happened in 1929, one year after Loos' sketches, and eliminates one more line of gossip and speculation from the tale, to rather enable more romanticism and mystery to the story.

The design by Loos involves re-defining two existing houses on the corner of the Bugeaud Avenue in Paris. The facades were to be clad with black and white strips of marble. The spaces were lightened and re-formatted to enable more of a visual or even voyeuristic passage through the rooms. The three-story house also included a café and an indoor swimming pool with windows established for underwater viewing, presumably of Baker herself, swimming in the nip. Ultimately and evidently, we might postulate that the entire design was in itself an expression of the architect's desire for Baker. One can imagine Loos himself fantasizing about Baker moving about her house, dressed scantily or nude as she often presented herself as a performer, and bathing in the central pool within an architecture of voyeurism and spectacle. The confines of the space also hold the dancer's exotic, black body within an erotic chamber of desire and an almost tactile embrace. This is, Hock conjectures, an act of dressing her and undressing her simultaneously within an architecture of desire. The situation is of course impossible. The designs were never sent (or acknowledged), and the motivation for the design originally arises, we can speculate, from Loos' own amorous feelings and fascination with Baker, rather than a commission or practical consideration.

This story is the backdrop to Erika Hock's project, which extends to another matter of architecture, still within an architecture of desire: a more intimate relationship between architectural design and dressing the body. As Loos' designs were akin to wrapping his arms around Josephine Baker, Hock reflects upon architecture itself as a form of clothing. The textile forms that she places in the Kabinett play upon this notional combination of clothing, cladding and architecture. Hock was born in Kyrgyzstan, and for this exhibition uses felt textiles in reference to Shyrdaks, which are traditional felt rugs produced in her birth country. According to a Loosian principle of clothing, textiles and carpets are precursors of built walls, and this sentiment is played out by Hock the Kabinett. "Decke," she reminds us, is the German word for both ceiling and blanket. The tradition of Kyrgyzstani nomadism is also referenced; specifically *yurts*, which are portable, round tents covered with skins or felt and used as dwellings by nomads in

the steppes of Central Asia. Incidentally, *yurts* have become fashionable items for “glamping,” a new trend of high-end camping in North America and Europe, where luxury tents with an exotic touch are rented for high prices.



*Adolf Loos, Plans for Josephine Baker House, Second Floor, 1928*

Hock hangs a series of tapestries in the Kabinett to offer a walk-through of architecture with these considerations in mind. In addition to references to traditional Kyrgyzstani designs, the tapestries also reference proto-modernist forms, early geometric forms found in sculpture and painting of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century for example, and perhaps replicated in architecture, as well as Bauhaus-like forms.

Overall Erika Hock offers a playful series of questions on notions of architecture, tapestry, fashion, sculpture and desire. The title itself continues this playfulness, making reference to Josephine’s famous banana skirt and banana dance, which itself took the signification of western desire for the exoticized other and shook it up in a mad dance. Baker’s skirt, comprised of bananas bouncing off her barely concealed body, is an emblem of western eroticisation, animalisation and exotification of the black, female body, which is turned upon itself and re-enacted in a liberatory and licentious gesture.







More information & photo material:

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Hours exhibition: Tue-Sun 12-7 pm

Hours Café Cult: Mon-Fri 9 am – 11 pm