

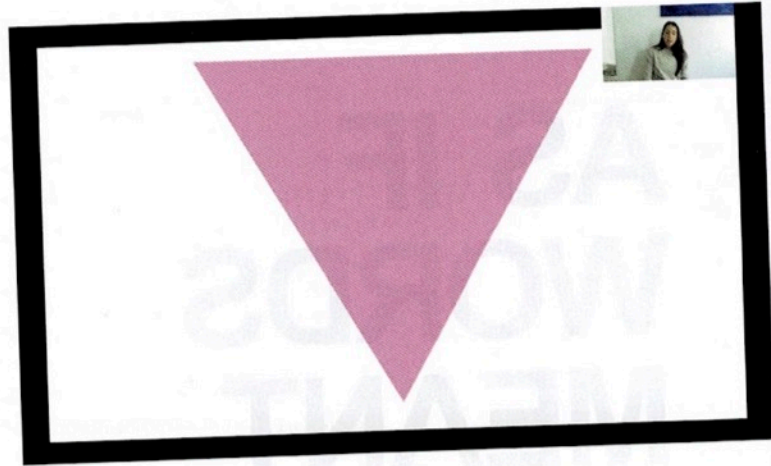
# TEXTE ZUR KUNST

Dezember 2020 30. Jahrgang Heft 120  
€ 16,50 [D] / \$ 25,-

30 YEARS TZK



AMANDA SCHMITT  
THE INVERTED TRIANGLE



Amanda Schmitt on the inverted triangle, screenshot

I first “noticed” the symbol when I was about nine or ten years old, growing up in Dane County, on the edge of rural Wisconsin. I had a neighbor friend whose mother wore it on a baseball cap, or maybe it was on their family’s car bumper sticker, or maybe both. Unlike me, the neighbor girl lived in a household of women: she had multiple sisters and a single mother, who lived with her so-called “friend,” another woman. The symbol was a pink, upside-down triangle, and it was distinguished enough that I knew it meant something. I believe I even understood it inherently, although no one explained to me that she had a lesbian parent and guardian, and no one explained homosexuality to me (or sexuality, for that matter).

I continued to see this symbol, the inverted triangle, throughout my life and it stands as one of the most powerful, charged symbols of all, but conveying different meanings depending on its plurality and orientation: upwards, downwards, right-facing or left.

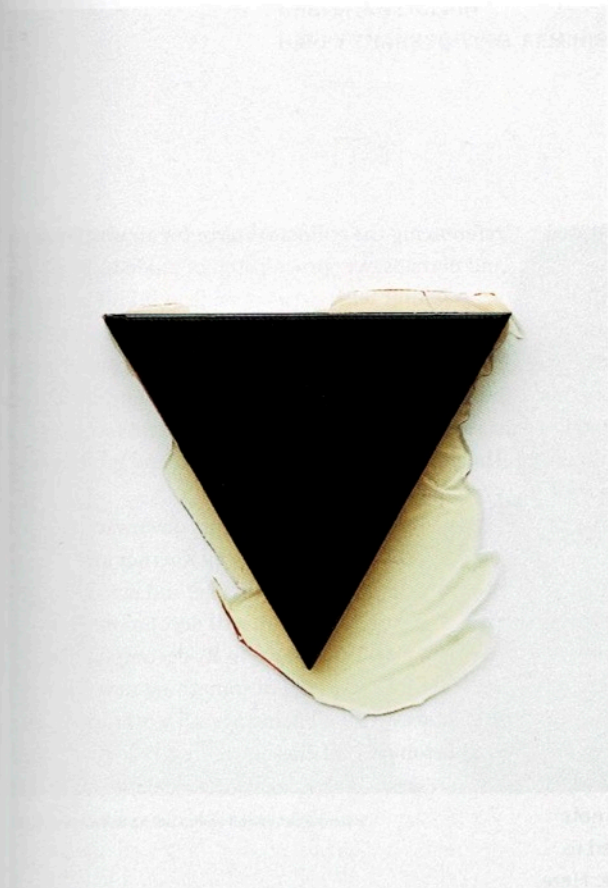
For millennia, the inverted triangle has stood to represent the “sacred chalice,” a pubis, or the womb (diametrically, an upward-pointing triangle may represent the phallus).

If analyzed structurally, the symbol also presents a model of power inverse to the dominant, capitalist mode: in a traditional upward-facing triangle (such as when representing a pyramid), power is concentrated at the top, or in other words, many uphold the power of one. In an inverted model, power is distributed from the bottom upwards, with pillars of support that establish and maintain balance.

An infamous chapter in the long history of the triangle as a symbol is of course its use in Nazi concentration camps, wherein a downward-pointing triangle badge attached to each imprisoned individual would designate their reason for imprisonment and extermination. Pink triangles were used to designate homosexual men, and black was used to designate “asocial” people, including prostitutes and lesbians. Originally



Jutta Koether, "the necessity of multiple inconsistent fantasies," 2006



intended by the Nazis as a badge of shame, the symbol was co-opted and reclaimed by LGBTQ communities in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a symbol of pride and power.

Other than in the myriad forms of representing this pride and power on caps, bumper stickers, memes, tattoos and so on, I continue to see inverted triangles.

There is an ongoing series of inverted black triangle paintings by Jutta Koether that, to my understanding, are not circulated in the marketplace (by her galleries), and are not even for trade, but only gifted. They are made with black acrylic on wood panel, and covered in poured epoxy resin, appearing as if oozing, liquid glass. Small enough to fit in a purse, they are demure, yet with

radical presence. A black mirror image of a Blinky Palermo painting, this series moves far away from cold geometric abstraction into something else: spellbinding, even witchy. The works in this series are painted by Koether with a hard edge, yes, but poured over with the liquid glass medium, they appear to remain eternally wet.

That these works are selected as gestures of goodwill on behalf of the artist signify that they are not simply a static object, but a seed. Giving is neither a loss nor a gain; it is a selfless act of confidence and trust, much like motherhood.

A German artist following in Koether's footsteps is Maximiliane Baumgartner, who is also developing an ongoing series of inverted triangles, entitled *Eckenlehnerin*, wherein each

piece is made from raw wood shingles composed into the shape of a downward-pointing equilateral triangle. While the work is made with a material normally used for a building's façade, it is subverted here by being displayed inside: form overruling function. Baumgartner takes this carpentry craft, traditionally a men's trade, and reappropriates it on feminist terms. This subversion enacts a transit from the certain exteriority of a social function into the radical interiority of an artistic statement.

Interestingly, the title – literally translated as "corner leaner" – refers to a 19th-century social figure in Germany: someone who spent time idling in public space, not doing anything economically viable, but hanging around and commenting upon political circumstances. This figure took root throughout Europe in the *flâneur* and, later on, the dandy. An important aspect to note here is that women were not actually allowed to be on their own in public spaces at the time. Here, however, Baumgartner is determined in assigning the proper noun a feminine role, titling the work *die Eckenlehnerin*; while gender assignment in Germanic languages is not solely determined by biological sex, in this work it is intentional, signaling that "she" hangs alone, in a semi-public exhibition space. Although a simple gesture today, it alludes to a radical positioning in opposition of (too) long-held patriarchal gender norms.

In *Winter Bush* by Lucy Dodd – an American artist known for her one-with-the-earth mysticism – a pile of hay is caked together by a white, clay-like plaster. Hay is of course the main sustenance throughout winter for cows, the animal mothers who ever-produce life-giving milk, both for their own baby calves and for humans around the world. The title is cheeky and sardonic,

referencing the colloquial term for an unshaved and perhaps overgrown patch of pubic hair.

A winter bush exists outside of bikini season. It evokes a period of inwardness and solitude, in the shadows, away from the rays of the sun. Here, however, the winter bush is a state of mind, a statement. On the wall, outwards, and forever. The power of winter regeneration and growth as a symbol of fertility.

The inverted triangle points downwards, to the earth. Like the works by Koether and Baumgartner, this work will age, and it will decay. Hay, as a natural material, will decompose relatively quickly, into a dust, in its decomposition becoming the material of something new. This is true, however, of all paintings, all works of art, all establishments, all eras.