

Rudolf Polanszky's first exhibition in China: Letting the material run freely out of control.

December 11, 2021

Written by **Georgina Zhao**

Translated by **Izzie Yang**

"What is free in a work of art, is only the moment in which it is not yet comprehended."

— Rudolf Polanszky



Portrait of Rudolf Polanszky / © Rudolf Polanszky -
Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech - Photo: Xandra M.
Linsin

In 1970s Europe, award-winning art star Dieter Roth had just started a series of "flat scraps" made of readymade materials; Franz West was testing the waters of what would become his world-famous interactive sculptures made of unconventional materials; and Rudolf Polanszky, also from Austria, was a close friend and contemporary of both, and has spent the past forty years consciously avoiding the tidal wave of modernist influences and focusing on the exploration of originality and the human subconscious.

Born in 1951, Vienna, Rudolf Polanszky is considered one of the most influential artists in the region. At the beginning of his career, he built up a conceptual structure of randomness against a deliberate aesthetic framework and gradually found a unique artistic vocabulary - he deliberately embedded "chance" in his approach. A series of works, including *Schweinsfettzeichnungen* and *Sprungfedernbilder*, became the most pioneering experiments of the time. In the same period, he also used Super 8 mm film to turn his own creative self into the protagonist of performance art and video works.



Rudolf Polanszky, *Coil Spring drawing*, 1983, Acrylic on paper, photographs mounted on wood, in artist frame, 109.8 x 189.6 cm, 43 1/4 x 74 5/8 in / © Rudolf Polanszky - Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech - Photo: Alessandro Wang

When asked about the reason for creating in a different medium, Polanszky says, "The reason for working in different media was an intention allowing the development of ideas to exist according to the inherent properties of the medium. As film and video are linear and thus sequential, works in those formats result in an entirely different point of view, whilst the static works are more complex, requiring a key for interpretation."

Polanszky's father was a jazz musician and his mother was a designer, and he also spent a lot of time living abroad. As a result, for Polanszky, the concept of homeland was shallow - in the constant process of moving and meeting new people, art became the only constant childhood companion. From an early age, Polanszky began to seek spiritual freedom through art.



Studio of Rudolf Polanszky / © Rudolf Polanszky - Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech - Photo: Jorit Aust

"I remember a situation when I was 16 or 17 years old. I was waiting in front of a train station, where behind me was a graveyard. As I stood watching the moving trains, and as they stopped at the station the dynamism of combined simultaneous states led to a philosophical crisis and epiphany, of a sort. I was looking for an answer to why all philosophical concepts have been assigned a purpose, and if there are any human concepts without any? I was looking for a free concept, without the limits of right or wrong etc.... Suddenly I had the idea, that there is maybe one concept without purpose, and that could be art. I decided to learn more about it. It started with a paradox, to learn something I cannot learn."

In 1981, Polanszky began to put down roots in his studio on the outskirts of Viana, where he still lives today. When asked about his favorite tool in the studio, his answer is not a brush and canvas, not scissors and glue. "My favorite is the light switch," he says. "but I try to work more with daylight." He has never had a creative assistant and always work independently. He can't answer the question, "What is a typical day like at your studio?" explaining, "I do not like repetition, as every day is as special as it is new."



Rudolf Polanszky, *Apeiron*, Almine Rech Shanghai, Dec 10, 2021 - Jan 27, 2022 / © Rudolf Polanszky - Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech - Photo: Alessandro Wang

In the beginning of the 1990s, Polanszky introduced now iconic discarded materials into his work, aiming to bring abstract mathematical and scientific concepts into life. From the detritus of his studio, he selected artifactual scraps including acrylic mirrors, silicone, industrial glue, epoxy, resins, copper foil and gossamer mesh, are also subjected to chance patina by exposure to the elements, encounters with animals or organic matter. The artist says, "For me, discarded materials are interesting because they are separated from any function or purpose, with a special beauty as they are useless and out of control according to their original purpose. For me, that is an important aspect of creation."

On December 10th, *Apeiron* opened at Almine Rech Shanghai. The title of the exhibition, *Apeiron* reflects the artist's "Ad hoc synthesis" to constructing and deconstructing purely abstract forms. Polanszky explains, "It is a method to reduce any outside influences, and use only materials I have collected that are assigned to a particular project. Since freedom is the basis of the decisions made to create works that are without rules, that also requires 'free materials' which are emancipated from their former utility." These materials become, in Polanszky's "canvas" - discarded cardboard or other flat surfaces, or space itself - as sparse a building block of art history as oil paint or charcoal, with their specific textures and colors easily win the attention of both the artist and the viewer.

ALMINE RECH



Studio of Rudolf Polanszky / © Rudolf Polanszky - Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech - Photo: Jorit Aust

ALMINE RECH



Rudolf Polanszky, *Apeiron*, Almine Rech Shanghai, Dec 10, 2021 - Jan 27, 2022 / © Rudolf Polanszky - Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech - Photo: Alessandro Wang



Rudolf Polanszky, *Apeiron*, Almine Rech Shanghai, Dec 10, 2021 - Jan 27, 2022 / © Rudolf Polanszky - Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech - Photo: Alessandro Wang

The artist's connection to Almine Rech goes back to Miami in 2018, when the Rubell Museum was holding an exhibition of Polanszky's work and Rech was drawn to these particular works and offered a solo show for Polanszky at her Brussels gallery in the following year. As the exhibition went successfully, the second show in Shanghai was planned, but due to the epidemic it had been postponed until this year.

This is Polanszky's first solo exhibition in China. It is because of its forced postponement that his new works in 2021 has been able to get up close and personal with Chinese audiences. "I was fascinated from the different aspects of change from the materials in response to other materials, creating multiple interpretations of 'non-linear' observations."

ALMINE RECH



Rudolf Polanszky, *Chinera*, Almine Rech Brussels, Oct 24 - Dec 21, 2019 / © Rudolf Polanszky - Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech - Photo: Hugard & Vanoverschelde



Rudolf Polanszky, *New Acquisitions*, Rubell Family Collection, Dec 3, 2018 - Jun 22, 2019 / © Rubell Family Collection



Rudolf Polanszky, *Reconstructions / Choros*, 2021, Copper foil, cardboard, mirror foil, aluminium, resin, silicone, acrylic glass, pigments mounted on cardboard, in artist frame, 151.1 x 171.5 cm, 59 1/2 x 67 1/2 in / © Rudolf Polanszky - Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech - Photo: Alessandro Wang

In the *Reconstructions* series, Polanszky further "reconstructs" the modernist format through hybrid painting and sculpture. Polansky's body of work finds inspiration from mathematical metaphysics, rather than the canon of art history. In *Reconstructions / Choros* (2021), the images shimmer with a shimmering metallic sheen, bronze meets dark mirrored foil, and the chaotic interplay between the contrasting metallic colors and random geometric shapes creates a visually overlapping fusion that transforms the silent into the audible, echoing the title of the work. These anomalous combinations are the result of mathematical calculations driven by intuition.



Rudolf Polanszky, *Apeiron*, Almine Rech Shanghai, Dec 10, 2021 - Jan 27, 2022 / © Rudolf Polanszky - Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech - Photo: Alessandro Wang

The same elements appeared in completely different ways in previous works. Looking back at *The Musical Ape*, which the artist created in the 1980s, the artist had used contradictory anatomical self-portraits to interpret sounds and images, superimposing images of his two left faces and two right faces into an imaginary whole. As curator Steven Pollock writes, "The evolution from the existential slapstick of *The Musical Ape* enhanced with the boundless and infinite possibilities suggested by the *Reconstructions / Choros*, flourish with echoes of the sublime."

Returning to the title of the exhibition, according to the Greek philosopher Anaximander, "Apéron" is the origin of all things, an infinite force from nothingness, the spiritual basis that allows Polanszky to follow no limits or boundaries. "I was interested in early Greek Philosophy since my youth. In my opinion, the concepts originating from Ancient Greek thought, are the basic structures that developed into most of our current ideas about art and culture. Anaximenes of Miletus was the first philosopher who gave an abstract idea of reality a name, which was Apeiron; that which is defined as an unlimited power, the origin or source of everything, and manifestation of matter itself."



Rudolf Polanszky, *Apeiron*, Almine Rech Shanghai, Dec 10, 2021 - Jan 27, 2022 / © Rudolf Polanszky - Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech - Photo: Alessandro Wang

For Polanszky, the beginning and end of art are unimportant, the choice of medium lies in the medium itself, the materials are liberated beings, and exploring art is merely an expression of exploring philosophy - "The decision is by way of process, I do not calculate for the results. "



Reconstructions / Choros, 2021
Copper foil, cardboard, mirror foil, aluminum, resin, silicone,
acrylic glass, pigments mounted on cardboard, in artist frame
151.1 x 171.5 cm - 59 1/2 x 67 1/2 in

Rudolf Polanszky

鲁道夫·波兰斯基

Apeiron

阿派朗

Dec 10, 2021

- Jan 27, 2022

ALMINE RECH