

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

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Lothar Hempel

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The layers of Lothar Hempel's dense artworks are indeed manifold, with references to ideologies, music, theater, Greek tragedy, politics, and historical eras adding up to one uniquely complex world. Curated by Florence Derieux, the artist's first large-scale retrospective presents more than sixty pieces, including new work made specially for the exhibition. The show follows less of a chronological protocol than a thematic one, with drawings, videos, sculptures, installations, pictures, and collages sorted according to the miscellaneous methodology of many of the works themselves. In the first room, the viewer is greeted by *Vorwärts (Forward)*, 2006, comprising an old, large, black-and-white photograph of a woman with an umbrella mounted on a metal horse of Indian origin. This assemblage is a good example of how Hempel stitches together different media and questions. As the exhibition unfolds, it becomes clear that Hempel's universe is a flexible one, with the potential to expand endlessly via a complex circuit of references and cross-fertilizations. Many of the works recall surreal stage sets, exploring and amplifying spatial tropes of flatness and depth. *Der Kompass Spielt Verrückt (The Compass Goes Crazy)*, 2006, features another photograph of a lady with an umbrella, this one freestanding behind a wooden frame while steel, bronze, and aluminum rings arranged on the floor weave a narrative of confusion, complexity, and perfectionism. Here, Hempel's multifaceted body of work is brought together in an unironic yet humorous, seamless yet scattered, theatrical whole.

—Power Ekroth