

Roman Signer

Revue de presse
Press review

BESANÇON EXPOSITION

Exposition du Frac : « Aller contre le vent, performances, actions et autres rituels »

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OÙ ?

FRAC FRANCHE-COMTE (Besançon)
2, passage des arts, 25000 Besançon

QUAND ?

- Du samedi 22 janvier au samedi 30 avril 2022

Découvrez l'exposition "Aller contre le vent, performances, actions et autres rituels" jusqu'au 30 avril 2022 au Frac Franche-Comté...



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L'exposition rassemble des œuvres de la collection du Frac Franche-Comté relevant de la dimension performative au sens large du terme, autrement dit des œuvres ayant à voir avec les notions de durée, d'éphémère, de mouvement et de vivant. Elle est le reflet de la problématique centrale de la collection qui, depuis 2006, gravite autour de la notion de temps, et de son ouverture à la transdisciplinarité, notamment via un dialogue avec le spectacle vivant.

Elle témoigne aussi de l'évolution d'une collection qui, au fil du temps, a pris en considération des œuvres s'inscrivant dans la mouvance des années 60-70, période qui a vu émerger les happenings et performances : des propositions qui s'inscrivaient alors dans le rejet des institutions et des valeurs traditionnelles relatives à la définition de l'œuvre et au statut de l'artiste. Autrement dit un mouvement de contestation auquel fait écho le titre de l'exposition emprunté à l'une des œuvres qu'elle présente : *Wandering in the wind* (1976) du collectif japonais The Play.

Aller contre le vent rassemble ainsi des œuvres dont la forme relève de l'archive ou de la trace d'« actions ». Elle se compose également d'œuvres qui, sous forme de dessins, matérialisent des projets de performances. Et d'œuvres dont la matière première est une performance ou une action – parfois non publique et engageant ou non le corps – mais qui prennent la forme de son enregistrement ou de sa captation (films, vidéos, photographies) ou encore d'œuvres qui les prolongent – les recyclent en quelque sorte – sous la forme d'installations ou de volumes.

Elle se compose enfin de performances qui seront régulièrement réactivées et d'œuvres requérant l'intervention du public. A partir de ces deux derniers ensembles, l'exposition interroge plus particulièrement la question de la délégation. Celle inhérente aux performances qui intègrent désormais les collections publiques sous condition d'être « ré-activables » – une condition supposant que ces performances seront ponctuellement « interprétées » par des individus choisis par l'institution, conformément aux préconisations de l'artiste dans le cadre d'un protocole (1). Mais aussi la délégation inhérente aux œuvres qui supposent une activation par le public que l'auteur, instaurant ainsi une relation de confiance et de partage, transforme en « acteur » essentiel à leur achèvement. Ces dernières, au même titre que les performances, n'existent réellement ou n'atteignent vraiment leur complétude qu'au moment où quelqu'un leur donne vie. C'est le moment où l'œuvre a lieu (2). Dès lors, l'exposition interroge les points de convergence entre les arts visuels et le spectacle vivant (art de l'éphémère par excellence), et ce plus explicitement au travers des œuvres de Saâdane Afif, Alex Cecchetti, mais aussi de Xavier Le Roy, Ulla von Brandenburg ou Angelica Mesiti.

© ***Aller contre le vent, performances, actions et autres rituels***

Cette performance met à l'honneur les pratiques actuelles issues d'une période où l'institution était rejetée par les artistes relevant du champ des arts plastiques autant que du spectacle vivant. Pour eux, il s'agissait alors de réduire l'écart entre l'art et la vie et d'aller à la rencontre directe d'un public qu'ils pouvaient parfois solliciter et associer. Contestant également la société de consommation, ils optèrent alors pour des œuvres immatérielles et éphémères. Mais les problèmes relatifs à la visibilité de leur travail, comme ceux inhérents aux réalités économiques, les conduiront à revenir dans les espaces conventionnels et à des productions monnayables.

Dans les musées et les galeries, ils donneront à la documentation relative à leurs projets éphémères un autre statut, celui d'œuvres d'art pérennes. Ils n'hésiteront pas à faire ainsi le mouvement inverse à celui qu'ils avaient réalisé précédemment.

Dans cette exposition, *The Play* et *Untel* en sont l'illustration, tandis que les autres artistes tout en s'inscrivant dans leur héritage ont su inventer d'autres modalités pour poursuivre l'aventure de la performance, dans son acception la plus large, au sein d'une institution avec laquelle ils entretiennent une relation symbiotique. De fait, celle-ci s'est adaptée. Réinventant ses pratiques de médiation, elle incite le public à manipuler des œuvres tout en orchestrant désormais des sortes de « cérémoniaux » à l'instar du théâtre ou de la danse. En intégrant les œuvres immatérielles que sont les performances dans ses collections, elle se transforme aussi en producteur d'événements, voire en directeur de casting. In fine, à tous les stades, elle incorpore désormais le vivant.

Sylvie Zavatta

(1) Les protocoles de certaines performances seront visibles dans l'exposition.

(2) Cf. Jean-Marc Poinot, *Quand l'œuvre a lieu, l'art exposé et ses récits autorisés*, Les presses du réel, 2008.

Calder Now

Kunsthall Rotterdam



Roman Signer, *Orgelpfeife*, 2020. Photo: Ossip van Duivenbode, Kunsthall Rotterdam.



Calder Now

November 21, 2021–May 29, 2022

Add to Calendar

Kunsthall Rotterdam

Museumpark, Westzeedijk 341

3015 AA Rotterdam

The Netherlands

Hours: Tuesday–Saturday 10am–5pm

T +31 10 440 0300

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Artists: Alexander Calder, Olafur Eliasson, Žilvinas Kempinas, Simone Leigh, Ernesto Neto, Carsten Nicolai, Roman Signer, Aki Sasamoto, Monika Sosnowska, Sarah Sze, Rirkrit Tiravanija

Kunsthall Rotterdam presents *Calder Now*, an impressive exhibition that explores for the first time in Europe the modern master's enduring and unmistakable influence on contemporary art. *Calder Now* presents 20 sculptures by Alexander Calder, alongside works by ten prominent contemporary artists: Olafur Eliasson, Žilvinas Kempinas, Simone Leigh, Ernesto Neto, Carsten Nicolai, Roman Signer, Aki Sasamoto, Monika Sosnowska, Sarah Sze, and Rirkrit Tiravanija.

Enigmatic, gravity-defying installations, sculptures that induce extraordinary optical experiences, and art that appeals to all the senses reveal new connections with Calder and bring into focus the countless extensions of his legacy. This must-see Kunsthall production will lead the visitor through a multisensory experience. The exhibition is realised in close collaboration with guest curators Dieter Buchhart and Anna Karina Hofbauer, and the Calder Foundation. Many of the sculptures and installations will be shown in the Netherlands for the first time.

Visionary

In the exhibition, Calder's works—a career-spanning selection that includes his iconic mobiles and stabiles—alternate with the installations and sculptures of the contemporary artists. In a fascinating interplay of visual and thematic connections, the public can discover links between the art of today and that of the modern master. The works by artists from our own era resonate with important themes in Calder's oeuvre: light and reflection, humble materials, the senses, sound, activation, architecture, ephemera, gravity, performance, and positive and negative space. The ten international artists in *Calder Now* are showing works that wouldn't exist without the precedence of these themes in Calder's visionary body of art.

Firsts

Some of the works were especially made for *Calder Now* and will be shown to the public for the very first time at the Kunsthall. In the spring of 2021, Aki Sasamoto (Japan, 1980) spent four months as an artist in residence at the Atelier Calder in Saché, France. There she created *Squirrel Ways*, a piece on the cutting edge of installation and performance. On several occasions during the exhibition, Sasamoto will deliver her performance in the architectural installation.

In keeping with the rest of his work, Rirkrit Tiravanija (Argentina, 1961) has created the accessible and participative piece *untitled 2021 (le jeu de l'araignée rouge)*. In the exhibition space, visitors will encounter a billiards table with one white, one yellow, one blue and multiple red balls, and everyone is invited to play a game of billiards.

With nothing more than a wall, magnetic tape and a fan, the artist Žilvinas Kempinas (Lithuania, 1969) has created a dynamic and constantly changing installation called *Flaming Tape* (2021). The kinetic work is activated by air currents that set the strips of tape in motion like a 3D drawing.

Experiences that stimulate the senses

The use of humble materials is what connects the work of Simone Leigh (United States, 1967) to that of Calder. Leigh finds inspiration in West African and Native American ceramics traditions. She uses materials like cowrie shells, roses and raffia. The histories and experiences of Black women play an important role in Leigh's work. In 2022, the artist will be representing the United States during the 59th Venice Biennale.

Carsten Nicolai (Germany, 1965) aims to make complicated processes of time, sound, and space accessible and visible to the spectator. In *Calder Now* his impressive installation *pionier I* (2011) will be shown. At intervals, a sizeable, white silk parachute is blown up by a wind machine, simultaneously flooding the Kunsthal's large HALL 2 with sound.

Ernesto Neto (Brazil, 1964) appeals to all the senses with his immersive and sensuous installation *It Happens When the Body is Anatomy of Time* (2000). Like diagonal columns, enormous Lycra tulle sacks filled with fragrant cloves, cumin and saffron are stretched between the floor and the ceiling.

Olafur Eliasson (Denmark, 1967) uses natural phenomena such as light and reflection for his research into perception. With his sensory installations he aims to directly involve the spectator in his work. In the exhibition he will be presenting two very different works: *Black and yellow double polyhedron lamp* (2011), and *The lost compass* (2013).

Roman Signer (Switzerland, 1938) takes inconspicuous, everyday objects and transforms these into imaginative and surprising pieces. A white shirt, for instance, with the sleeve lifted up by a helium-filled balloon (*Hemd*, 1995), or a bent organ pipe (*Orgelpfeife*, 2020).

Experimentation and energetic activation are central to his humorous work that offers unexpected perspectives on the world around us.

Still Life with Desk (2013–15) by the American artist Sarah Sze (1969) manifests itself to the public like a moment frozen in time. With this installation made of wire and objects, such as photographs, stationary, and disposable cups, Sze researches the construction and measurability of time and space.

And Monika Sosnowska (1972) transforms architectural traces of post-war Poland—her native country—into elegant shapes. On the one hand her *Gate* sculptures appear to be heavy, but on the other they also seem weightless and light-hearted when suspended from the ceiling.

Revolutionary artistic innovations

Alexander Calder (United States, 1898–1967) instigated many revolutionary artistic innovations. In his quest to move beyond the three spatial dimensions—making the fourth dimension of time a prominent and indispensable element of his work—Calder succeeded in transforming the dominant understanding of sculpture. He was the first to remove sculpture from its pedestal, suspending it in mid-air. The exhibition shows how, even 50 years after his death, the legacy of Calder is still a source of inspiration for contemporary artistic practices. The work of the groundbreaking artists in *Calder Now* invites new conversations and interpretations of his oeuvre.

Nothing is Lost: Art and Matter in Transformation

GAMEc – Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Bergamo



Michel Blazy, *Fleurs de bain moussant*, 2000. Plastic, 6 elements, variable dimensions. Courtesy of the artist and Art : Concept, Paris. Photo: Romain Darnaud. © Michel Blazy, by SIAE 2021.

Nothing is Lost: Art and Matter in Transformation

October 14, 2021–February 13, 2022

Add to Calendar

GAMEc – Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Bergamo

Via San Tomaso, 53
24121 Bergamo
Italy

www.gamec.it

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On October 14, *Nothing is Lost: Art and Matter in Transformation* opens to the public, curated by Anna Daneri and Lorenzo Giusti. The show is the second chapter in the *Trilogy of Matter*, a long-term exhibition project begun by the GAMEc in October 2018.

The project involves **art historians, curators, philosophers, and scientists**, and addresses a **transversal debate around the theme of matter**, while at the same time activating a dialogue with the history of scientific discoveries and drawing a comparison with the development of aesthetic theories.

The exhibition turns its attention to the work of those artists who, at various times, have investigated **the transformation of matter, drawing inspiration from the lives of the elements to develop a reflection on the reality of things, on change, and on time.**

“Rien ne se perd” (“nothing is lost”) is the opening to the famous maxim attributed to Lavoisier, with which the French chemist explained the general sense of his **law of the conservation of mass**, which stated that over the course of a chemical reaction, the sum of the mass of the reactants is equal to the sum of the masses of the substances. **Matter**, in other words, **cannot be created and cannot be destroyed**. This fundamental principle would set the stage for a number of founding notions of modernity and hence to the progressively more elaborate belief in **matter which is always alive, always present, part of a world in endless transformation.**

Nothing is Lost will occupy all the exhibition spaces of the GAMEc, developing **an itinerary with a strong sensorial impact**, given the material and synesthetic nature of the numerous works on display, on loan from **international collections both public and private.**

With a rich selection of works, the show provides an articulated framework, one capable of highlighting the strong link which has always bound artists to the **chemistry of the elements** and the **transformation of matter**. A field of study and experimentation which in our own era also constitutes a significant declination in terms of a **reflection on the impact of human presence on the natural equilibria** (from the availability of resources to climate change).

The exhibition will bring together **works from various eras**, ranging from **Dada and Surrealist works**, reflecting the interest of various artists—such as **Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Man Ray, or Leonora Carrington**—in the **theme of alchemy**, through to creations by some of the leading **exponents of the neo-avant-gardes**—from **Yves Klein to Otto Piene**, from **Robert Smithson to Hans Haacke**—including compositions by artists akin to the poetics of **Arte Povera**—**Pier Paolo Calzolari and Paolo Icaro**—**sculptural works and installations** by artists who emerged in the **1980s**—from **Rebecca Horn to Liliane Lijn**—right up to the latest research of some of the most important international artists of recent generations, such as **Olafur Eliasson, Wolfgang Tillmans, Cyprien Gaillard, Mika Rottenberg, Otobong Nkanga, Erika Verzutti, and many others.**

The exhibition catalogue will feature **texts by the two curators with analyses of the works on show, carried out by art historians and international curators.** Each section will be introduced by a **text of a scientific nature**, looking at the theme of the exhibition from the points of view of expert researchers.

The exhibition will also draw on the collaboration of the **Fondazione Meru/Medolago Ruggeri for biomedical research**, which between 2013 and 2017—along with the Associazione BergamoScienza and the GAMEc—promoted the prestigious *Meru Art*Science Award*, fostering art projects linked to the development of scientific research. The new research program—**Meru Art*Science Research Program**—will finance the creation of a **site-specific project for the GAMEc's “Spazio Zero.”** As part of *Nothing is Lost*, the Swedish-born artist **Nina Canell** will present a **new environmental installation** designed to investigate the interface between the organic and inorganic dimensions, amid living and inert material.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a rich program of **activities for schools**, and a **cycle of meetings open to the public**, which will witness the participation of **scientists, engineers, chemists, art historians, artists, and philosophers.**

KUB: Fontäne auf Bielerhöhe von Künstler Roman Signer

11 KOMMENTARE

1.07.2021 14:44
(Akt. 1.07.2021 16:04)

Der Schweizer Künstler Roman Signer hat für das Kunsthaus Bregenz (KUB) im hochalpinen Gelände des Montafon, auf der in 2.037 Metern gelegenen Bielerhöhe, eine neue Wasserinstallation geschaffen.

Am kommenden Wochenende wird die Installation "eröffnet" - vor Ort auf der Bielerhöhe, ab Freitag ist das Kunstwerk für alle frei zugänglich. Das Wasser des Bielbachs, der unter einer Brücke in den Silvretta-Stausee fließt, wird für das KUB-Projekt in einer Fontäne - Brücke und Bogen zugleich - über den darunter liegenden Fußweg wieder in den See geleitet.

Der 1938 im Schweizer Appenzell geborene Signer entnimmt dazu oberhalb eines Katarakts Wasser, das über einen Schlauch 60 Meter darunter mit 6 bar Druck über die Straße schießt. Der Wasserstrahl werde so zu einem architektonischen Element, zur Skulptur, erläuterte der Künstler. Der in St. Gallen lebende Signer gilt als einer der wichtigen Gegenwartskünstler, er vertrat etwa 1999 die Schweiz auf der Biennale Venedig und nahm 1987 an der documenta Kassel teil. Als humorvoller Aktionskünstler wurde er mit wasserspeienden Gummistiefeln, explodierenden Chefsesseln und schwebenden Kajaks bekannt. Er befasst sich in seinen Arbeiten häufig mit der Kraft der Elemente.

Signer sei zwar Bildhauer, bei ihm erhalte diese Kunstform aber eine vierte Dimension, nämlich die Zeit, so KUB-Direktor Thomas D. Trummer. Seine Skulpturen seien Ereignisse, die Erlebnisse böten, "oft auch eine Pointe". Ergänzt werde das durch die Elemente Wasser, Wind und Energie. Signer zeigte sich mit der Umsetzung seines Projekts durch die Illwerke-Ingenieure "sehr zufrieden", seine Arbeiten müssten "einfach und elementar" bleiben. Das neue Kunstwerk wird permanent zu sehen sein, nur im Winter wird es aufgrund der Lawinengefahr abgebaut. Das diesjährige KUB-Projekt entstand in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Energieversorger Illwerke/VKW und feiert am 3. und 4. Juli mit mehreren Veranstaltungen sein Eröffnungswochenende.

Über den Sommer gibt es dann jeden Samstag Führungen zu den Kunstinstallationen vor Ort. Weitere Informationen unter: www.kunsthau-bregenz.at

(APA)

Wasserinstallation von Roman Signer in Vorarlberg

Der St. Galler Künstler Roman Signer hat für das Kunsthaus Bregenz (KUB) auf rund 2000 Metern Höhe im Montafon eine Wasserinstallation geschaffen: Das Wasser des Bielbachs wird in einer Fontäne über den darunter liegenden Fussweg in den See geleitet.



Roman Signer - Keystone

Der St. Galler Künstler Roman Signer hat für das Kunsthaus Bregenz (KUB) auf rund 2000 Metern Höhe im Montafon eine Wasserinstallation geschaffen: Das [Wasser](#) des Bielbachs wird in einer Fontäne über den darunter liegenden Fussweg in den See geleitet.

Ort der Kunstinstallation ist im hochalpinen Gelände des Montafon die auf 2037 Metern gelegene Bielerhöhe. Dort fliesst der Bielbach unter einer Brücke in den Silvretta-Stausee.

Für die Wasserskulptur wird oberhalb eines Katarakts [Wasser](#) entnommen, das danach durch einen Schlauch 60 Meter tiefer mit einem Druck von 6 bar über den Fussweg schiesst. Der Wasserstrahl werde so zu einem architektonischen Element, zur Skulptur, erläuterte Signer am Donnerstag an einer Medienorientierung vor Ort.

Signer sei zwar Bildhauer, bei ihm erhalte diese Kunstform aber eine vierte Dimension, nämlich die Zeit, so Thomas D. Trummer, Direktor des Kunsthauses Bregenz. Roman Signers Skulpturen seien Ereignisse, die Erlebnisse böten, «oft auch eine Pointe». Ergänzt werden sie durch die Elemente [Wasser](#), Wind und [Energie](#).

Signer zeigte sich mit der Umsetzung seines Projekts durch die Illwerke-Ingenieure «sehr zufrieden», seine Arbeiten müssten «einfach und elementar» bleiben. Die Installation wird permanent zu sehen sein, nur im Winter wird sie aufgrund der Lawinengefahr abgebaut.

✓ KUB: Fountain on Bielerhöhe by artist Roman Signer – Vorarlberg –

ART Melanie ✓ Lifestyle ⌚ about 21 hours ago 🚫 REPORT



The Swiss artist Roman Signer has created a new water installation for the Kunsthaus Bregenz (KUB) in the high alpine terrain of the Montafon, on the Bielerhöhe at 2,037 meters.

The installation will be “opened” next weekend – on site on the Bielerhöhe, from Friday the work of art will be freely accessible to everyone. For the KUB project, the water of the Bielbach, which flows under a bridge into the Silvretta reservoir, is fed back into the lake in a fountain – bridge and arch at the same time – via the footpath below.

Signer, who was born in 1938 in Appenzell, Switzerland, takes water from above a cataract and shoots it over the street through a hose 60 meters below at 6 bar pressure. In this way, the water jet becomes an architectural element, a sculpture, the artist explained. The Signer, who lives in St. Gallen, is considered one of the most important contemporary artists; he represented Switzerland at the Venice Biennale in 1999 and took part in the 1987 documenta in Kassel. He became known as a humorous action artist with water-spraying rubber boots, exploding executive chairs and floating kayaks. He often deals with the power of the elements in his work.

Signer is a sculptor, but with him this art form has a fourth dimension, namely time, according to KUB director Thomas D. Trummer. His sculptures are events that offer experiences, "often also a punch line". This is supplemented by the elements of water, wind and energy. Signer was "very satisfied" with the implementation of his project by the Illwerke engineers; his work had to remain "simple and elementary". The new work of art will be on permanent display; it will only be dismantled in winter due to the danger of avalanches. This year's KUB project was created in cooperation with the energy supplier Illwerke / VKW and will celebrate its opening weekend with several events on July 3rd and 4th.

Artists: Ignasi Aballí, William Anastasi, Isabelle Andriessen, Davide Balula, Lynda Benglis, Alessandro Biggio, Karla Black, Michel Blazy, Renata Boero, Dove Bradshaw, Victor Brauner, Dora Budor, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Nina Canell, Leonora Carrington, Giulia Cenci, Tony Conrad, Tania Pérez Córdoba, Lisa Dalfino & Sacha Kanah, Giorgio de Chirico, Edith Dekyndt, Marcel Duchamp, Olafur Eliasson, Leandro Erlich, Max Ernst, Joana Escoval, Cerith Wyn Evans, Lars Fredrikson, Loïe Fuller, Cyprien Gaillard, Pinot Gallizio, Hans Haacke, Roger Hiorns, Rebecca Horn, Roni Horn, Paolo Icaro, Bruno Jakob, Yves Klein, Gary Kuehn, Liliane Lijn, Gordon Matta-Clark, David Medalla, Ana Mendieta, Otobong Nkanga, Jorge Peris, Otto Piene, Man Ray, Pamela Rosenkranz, Mika Rottenberg, Namsal Siedlecki, Roman Signer, Robert Smithson, Gerda Steiner & Jörg Lenzlinger, Yves Tanguy, Wolfgang Tillmans, Erika Verzutti, Andy Warhol

GAMeC

ArtReview

Walking on Ice: An Interview with Roman Signer

Ross Simonini Features 13 May 2020 ArtReview



Punkt (production still), 2006, video, 1 min 40 sec. Photo: Aleksandra Signer. Courtesy: Galerie Martin Janda, Vienna

'I wasn't looking for risk, but I obviously needed the risk. There is a certain tension that exists with the risk.'

When I spoke to Roman Signer, he was on vacation in Poland, a place he regularly visits from his home in Switzerland. He called while in his hotel room, accompanied by his wife, Aleksandra, and his daughter, Barbara, who translated between English and Swiss-German, as she often does for her father's interviews. Barbara is also an artist, and I met her four years earlier while staying at Andrea Zittel's Wagon Station Encampment, a kind of artist residency in the California desert. The following year, we began to collaborate on videos for a musical project, and I began to learn about her father's art. I grew fascinated by his singular approach, which draws its inspiration from physics and seems to have few connections to contemporary art movements, a point that Signer himself emphasised several times during our talk.

His work most often resembles the activities of a young amateur scientist: simple experiments with no practical utility. Many of these employ rockets, balloons, fans, barrels, cars, boots, umbrellas, kayaks and bicycles. *Boot Fountain* (2010), for example, uses water pressure to swing a boot into perpetual, Ferris-wheel circles and *Office Chair* (2009) seats Signer in a plain rolling chair, propelling him forward with ignited rockets. In this work, the art lies not in the fetishizing of the objects, but in their activation.

Signer particularly enjoys sending simple things – a small house, table or chair – airborne, casting them briefly against a stark blue sky. He treats explosions like ephemeral sculptures, and documents them as if they were tests with some larger, ongoing purpose. For exhibitions, he shows various media: photographs and films of these actions, and installations of his objects, but his attention remains always focused on the underlying movement of energy. While all artists work, in some form, with the transference of energy, Signer does so explicitly.

Personally, my first reaction to his work is often laughter. Signer's art isn't a joke, but it expresses the absurd futility of human activity with the concision of a good punchline. Even now, at eighty-one, he seems to maintain an open, childlike curiosity to his environment and proclivities.



Schweben, 1995, b/w photograph, 60 x 40 cm. Courtesy: Galerie Martin Janda, Vienna

Nothing to do with my work

Ross Simonini Have the two of you ever collaborated?

Barbara Signer We've never worked together directly. I help translate, or organise, or accompany him on his travels. So in that way, we work together.

Roman Signer She's my secretary.

Barbara I wouldn't call myself that. It's an assistant's job. It's irregular. It's organic. If I have a lot of my own work, I do less with him. I just try to help.

Ross How long have you been doing this?

Barbara Since I was twenty. Almost 15 years. It started after high school. Aleksandra, my mother, also works for Roman.

Ross Is the work a part of your family life?

Barbara Yes. The studio is in the basement. The meeting room is the living room, and Roman's office is in his bedroom. So there's no separation.

Ross Were you engaged with the art when you were young?

Barbara I went to the studio to play. Or with my friends. It was very normal to have art around.

Ross Roman, can you describe your studio?

Roman It's a big space about five metres high. I built it four years ago.

Ross Do you do your thinking in the studio?

Roman No, usually in my office and bedroom or the bathtub. Or when I read.

Ross What are you reading?

Roman I read many things. I am currently reading a book on Venice by a Dutch writer named Cees Nooteboom. I also like to read the Russian writers, like Nabokov and Pasternak. I have a very large library. Books on nature, travel, technical books, art, volcanoes, airplanes. But it's not a work library. It's a pleasure library. And there is no order. If I look for something, I cannot find it. Sometimes I go through the library and discover something I didn't know I had, and I take it up to the bedroom and read it. Collecting books is a passion. An addiction.

Ross Do you write?

Roman Only if I have to. Just short and simple description. A few sentences.

Ross What about your monographs and the books you make documenting the actions – do you see these as part of the art?

Roman Yes. This is a big part of my work. I often spend a large amount of my time designing books we are working on. They are the primary documentation. They are archives. Sometimes I have to look up things in the book myself, to learn about my own history.

Ross When you look back in this way, are you satisfied with your life as an artist?

Roman I am happy to have changed my job, even if it was quite late. I would have been unhappy as a technical draughtsman for architecture. I worked in that field for ten years. After that I went to art school.

Ross At what age?

Roman At twenty-seven, when I stopped working as a draughtsman. I had to work as a draughtsman again for a few years to make money. I didn't really start to do art until I was thirty-two.

Aleksandra Signer The first drawings are from 1969.

Roman I was never a young artist. My first show was at thirty-five.

Ross He gets to watch you be a young artist.

Barbara I feel like a young artist, but I don't know if I am anymore.

Ross Did you discuss art with your father as a child?

Barbara Not so much. But I watched him and I always wanted the freedom. It took me a long time to realise that my father was an artist, that he was doing something different from other people. They took me to exhibitions and openings, but they didn't try to teach me.

Ross You both work with film. Do you watch films together?

Roman We both like the cinema. I go regularly. The last film we saw together was Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* [1957].



Roman Signer in 2009. Photo: Michael Bodenmann. Courtesy: Galerie Martin Janda, Vienna

Leeches on the toe

Ross Do you think about work while on vacation?

Roman I used to make work in the 70s and 80s on vacation. Now it's a retreat from art.

Ross The 70s would have been before Barbara was born. How did having a family change the work?

Roman In the year she was born, 1982, I made a large amount of work. I think it was because I was afraid I wouldn't be able to make work after she was born. Or maybe it was just a very productive year. Either way, it was an exceptional time.

Ross Was the work of better quality?

Roman It was not different from before or after.

Ross Did you, in fact, make less work after Barbara was born?

Roman A little less than 1982, but still enough. We didn't have a lot of money in the 80s, so I was drawing a lot, rather than realising projects.

Ross In general, do you think the quality of your work has fluctuated throughout your career?

Roman I haven't become worse or better. I produce less in general now, because of my health. But it's not worse work. Nowadays it's big exhibitions. Before, it was smaller works. I had more time. Artists should not do too many exhibitions. Artists need time to develop.

Ross Your work is often about the body and features your own body. How has your body's ageing affected the work?

Roman I used to do a lot of actions where I was physical: running and jumping. I can't do this anymore. I had to stop that kind of work.

Ross Did you take less risks with your body once you had a daughter?

Roman Not really. I did the most dangerous things after she was born. But I stopped doing whitewater kayaking after a friend of mine died kayaking in 1981.

Ross What were the most dangerous works you've made?

Roman In one work [*Sinking in Ice*, 1985] I walked onto the ice until it broke and I fell into the water and had to get out. Some works don't look dangerous but are. I once stood inside two barrels stacked on top of each other and then they were covered with a mound of gravel [*Action in a Gravel Quarry*, 1997]. If I was inside for too long, I could have gone unconscious from a lack of oxygen and too much carbon dioxide. But I didn't.

Ross Do you ever have doctors on hand? Or assistants?

Roman No doctors. Just an assistant. My brother is a doctor. He is retired now, though.

Ross Is risk-taking important to the work?

Roman I wasn't looking for risk, but I obviously needed the risk. There is a certain tension that exists with the risk.

Ross Did you ever get hurt?

Roman With fire, yes. I got burnt on the hands and legs and face. But everyday life is much more dangerous. A few years ago, in the middle of the night, I was walking in the dark and banged my toe on the bedpost. I've had problems with that toe for years.

Ross A dark house is a dangerous place.

Roman I just wanted to go to the bathroom but I didn't want to wake up Aleksandra, who was sleeping. I was walking very fast because it was cold and I banged it. My doctor said I have to have an operation. He has to make the toe stiff.

Roman The pain is getting worse and worse. It's going up, into the hips.

Barbara He's walking in a strange way now.

Ross The same thing happened to my father, actually.

Roman Beds have to be constructed in a different way. The leg of the bed should be inside, not in the corner.

Aleksandra There are beds like this!

Roman Maybe I will make a sculpture about this.

Aleksandra I hear that turmeric is very good for these things.

Roman Some doctors will put leeches on the toe. I have considered this.

Watching rivers

Ross Are you still athletic, despite the toe?

Roman No. I'd like to hike more. Nature is a very big inspiration. Nature is still important to the work, but I used to be able to move more. When you hike, you can think more.

Ross What's the nature like where you live?

Roman It's a small town. You can walk 15 minutes and be in nature. Forest, mountains, lakes, rivers. I was born in Appenzell, which has a very beautiful landscape. There is a place there called 'The End of the World', near Kurhaus Weissbad, that is my outdoor studio. It's a hotel and resort but I have printed permission to go there and work. I can show the police the piece of paper, if needed. There is a small road that goes into the back of the resort and into nature. The police cannot go there.

Ross Is the work separate from nature?

Roman I use the term nature-as-studio. I am not a Land artist. I never leave anything in nature. No traces. What remains are photographs, videos, objects.

Ross Why place the work outdoors rather than indoors?

Roman It's just practical. There are many things I cannot do in the studio. I can't light rockets and explosives. Only small ones. I can't use drones indoors.

Ross But the work isn't about nature?

Roman It can be. Sometimes I need the wind, the snow, the rain, the sun for the piece to work. It's not only about space. I like to work with the river, the velocity of it. This is more like the interaction of it. I love to watch rivers.

Ross Is nature purely material for you?

Roman I see nature as energy.

Ross Would you say that energy is your primary material?

Roman Yes, speed, movement. But some works are about something that might happen.

Ross Potential energy.

Roman But I am not a kinetic artist. And I also use motors, fans, water pumps. Not just the wind.

Ross Do you have a definition for energy?

Roman A force that can move something. Push it. Lift it. Every movement is energy.

Ross Albert Einstein defined the magic of quantum entanglement as 'spooky action at a distance'. Do you see your work as magic?

Roman There are some strange things. When you stretch a rubber band and you leave it for ten years, it no longer has its elasticity. Where does the elasticity go? Because energy never goes away.

Ross Do you trust science?

Roman I understand too little to distrust it. I have an emotional approach to science. People think that I calculate the results of my experiments, but it's more intuitive. It's more physical than scientific.

Ross Will you ever retire from making art?

Roman I have no programme. I don't intend to stop at any age. I will make art as long as I am healthy and I enjoy it.

A solo show by Roman Signer is on view at Galerie Martin Janda, Vienna, through 18 April.

Ross Simonini is an artist, writer and musician living in New York and California.

Ross Simonini Features 13 May 2020 ArtReview



Roman Signer, allure sérieuse et regard indéchiffrable, un artiste qui joue avec l'attente, la tension, l'énergie libérée et qui questionne sur l'impermanence des choses. DR

Roman Signer, une explosion de créativité

ART Il est l'artiste contemporain suisse le plus connu autour du monde. Son travail poétique, absurde, profond, ses «sculptures de l'instant» sont présentés au Cube de l'Edhèa au TLH-Sierre jusqu'au 3 novembre.

PAR JEAN-FRANÇOIS ALBELDA@LENOUVELLISTE.CH

Au sol, sur le béton brut des Halles Usego, un kayak rouge attaché à une corde en tension. Sous cette corde, une bougie consume les fibres de nylon jusqu'à ce que les énergies se libèrent et que le kayak s'écrase contre le mur du fond de la pièce avec fracas. L'action marquait l'ouverture d'une exposition consacrée à son œuvre au Cube de l'Edhèa au cœur du TLH-Sierre, là où artistes en devenir ou confirmés présentent le fruit de leur créativité. Artiste confirmé, Roman Signer l'est sans équivoque. Révélé à près de 50 ans au monde de l'art, l'Appenzellois est depuis de toutes les biennales d'art contemporain, subjuguant la Documenta de Kassel

en 1987 ou représentant la Suisse en 1999 à Venise. Jusqu'à devenir l'une des signatures helvétiques les plus connues à l'échelle mondiale. Certains ont dit de lui qu'il était «le Federer de l'art». Il s'en amuse... «Il gagne beaucoup mieux sa vie que moi...»

L'art, un jeu d'enfant

Un kayak projeté contre un mur... Si l'on ne connaît pas la densité de son œuvre, l'empreinte qu'il a laissée dans l'histoire de l'art national, on peut rester interdit devant l'action – il réfute le terme de performance, qui pour lui n'est qu'un simulacre – trouver qu'il s'agit là de jeux d'enfant. Roman Signer s'en amuse. Mieux, il embrasse la remarque comme un



Lors de sa première action siéroise, Roman Signer a mis en scène un kayak, objet très intimement lié à son enfance. DR

compliment. «Je joue comme les enfants, avec sérieux», sourit-il. Enfant, n'ayant pas le droit de faire du vélo ni de la

mobylette, il passait beaucoup de temps à dévaler des talus en canoë-kayak. Et en 2000, l'artiste a réinterprété ce petit bout de sa propre histoire, tracté par une voiture, au grand étonnement des vaches des champs avoisinants. Une vidéo en timelapse, révélant bien le sens aigu de l'absurde, l'étrange poésie et à la fois l'inquiétude qui imprègnent ses «sculptures du moment», comme il nomme ses actions.

L'art de l'explosion

«Je déclenche quelque chose et je fais partie de cette sorte de sculpture du moment. C'est ça, au fond, qui m'intéresse. L'accumulation et la libération d'énergie, l'attente et la résolution. J'aime quand un objet devient autre chose que ce qu'il est supposé être, des skis, des chaises, n'importe quoi... Le changement d'état.»

Le plus radical changement d'état qui puisse être, c'est pour Roman Signer celui qui résulte de l'explosion. Et c'est en maniant les matières explosives qu'il est devenu l'artiste influent qu'il est aujourd'hui. «C'est vrai que j'ai beaucoup travaillé avec les explosifs. Ils ont une image très négative parce qu'on les utilise généralement pour détruire. Moi, je

l'ont souvent perçue et la percevoient encore dans le travail de Roman Signer, dont la démarche a été parfois contrariée par la police. «J'ai un permis d'artificier. J'ai le droit de faire ce que je fais. Je suis en règle. Mais pour la police, je suis une anomalie. Ils se demandent ce que je suis pour un drôle de zigoto... Ça crée une tension, de nouveau. C'est très intéressant... Je suis souvent passé près de l'arrestation...»

L'art de nager contre le courant

Il cite en riant l'une de ses actions les plus spectaculaires, quand il avait littéralement arrêté pour une fraction d'éternité le cours du Rhin en 1977. «J'avais placé en travers du fleuve une corde détonante. Quand on a déclenché l'explosion, un rideau d'eau s'est élevé et on a pris la photo. A cet instant, le cours du Rhin s'était arrêté. Un policier m'a dit récemment: «Si vous faisiez ça aujourd'hui, vous seriez arrêté tout de suite». J'ai répondu: «J'ai de la chance de l'avoir déjà fait alors...» Les normes de sécurité s'étant beaucoup rigidifiées, Roman Signer a dû depuis trouver d'autres canaux pour libérer sa créativité. «Je n'ai plus l'énergie de me battre contre l'administration pour avoir le droit de créer. Je continue autrement. Les voies à explorer sont infinies.»

Jusqu'au dimanche 3 novembre de 18 à 23 heures, les soirs de spectacle. Entrée libre. www.edhea.ch

«Pour la police, je suis une anomalie. Ils se demandent ce que je suis pour un drôle de zigoto.»
ROMAN SIGNER
ARTISTE

trouve qu'ils ont un pouvoir de création. La mèche se consume lentement et tout à coup, en une fraction de seconde, ce qui était masse devient énergie. C'est incroyable, pour moi.»

L'art de la subversion

Cette fascination de Roman Signer pour les explosifs remonte là encore à l'enfance, quand, durant la guerre, l'armée avait piégé le pont devant sa maison pour éventuellement le faire sauter devant l'avancée ennemie. «C'était comme une menace qui était toujours là, prête à éclater.» La menace, les autorités fédérales

LE TEMPS



LIVRES

Roman Signer, le boom de l'art

Il est l'un des artistes suisses les plus connus du monde. Ses actions sont des féeries artificielles sur le temps qui passe. La maison d'édition lausannoise art&fiction publie en version francophone une manière d'autobiographie

Pendant la guerre, l'armée avait piégé le pont devant sa maison. En cas d'invasion, elle l'aurait fait exploser. «Il était là, comme une panthère prête à bondir à n'importe quel moment. Il faisait peur aux gens. Moi, je regardais avec fascination les soldats qui amenaient et enlevaient régulièrement la dynamite. Peut-être que cela a influencé mon activité postérieure.»

On cherche toujours dans une vie d'artiste, obsédés que nous sommes par la biographie, le moment décisif où se noue un destin; par exemple quand le père de Picasso, peintre médiocre, tend ses pinceaux à son fils. Roman Signer, artiste appenzellois de 80 ans, maître de la tension et du temps dilaté, livre d'emblée une clé dans ce livre qui vient de paraître en version française augmentée. Il ne goûte rien tant que la menace qui pèse.

Hélicoptères télécommandés

Samedi dernier, à la Galerie Locus Solus de Prilly, on avale des soupes aux légumes devant les poules du jardin tandis que les actions de Roman Signer sont projetées sur un écran rétractable. Une petite camionnette sur une rampe immense de contreplaqué se retourne et explose les barils qui lui servent de cargaison. Des hélicoptères télécommandés, synchronisés, finissent à force de collisions comme de grands insectes mourants sur le sol.

Les enfants des visiteurs semblent happés, subjugués, par ces saynètes qui relèvent autant des vidéos de «fails» sur YouTube que du film d'action ou de la poésie dada. La fille de l'artiste, Barbara Signer, artiste elle-même, n'est pas surprise. «Quand j'étais petite, j'ignorais que mon père faisait de l'art. Le mot n'était même jamais utilisé dans la famille. Mais j'étais captivée.»

Faire corps avec la sculpture

Un soir, lors d'un dîner dans leur appartement de Saint-Gall, Barbara se cache sous la table. Elle étale patiemment des pages de journaux sur le parquet. Son père lui demande ce qu'elle trafique. «Je fais une action», répond-elle. Comme papa. Signer n'a jamais utilisé le mot «performance» qui, selon lui, relève de la théâtralité, du simulacre. «Je ne suis pas un acteur. Je fais partie de la sculpture. L'action, je la déclenche et je la subis. Dans le meilleur des cas, j'y survis.»

Dans l'action Punkt de 2006, Roman Signer se trouve dans une prairie, en bordure d'une forêt. Il est assis face à un chevalet, un pinceau à la main. Dans son dos, une mèche fait exploser une boîte. L'artiste sursaute. Il se lève lentement et quitte le champ. Un fragment s'est lové au cœur de la toile vierge. Signer aurait pu y rester.



Utilité vs excentricité

Avec sa veste de cuir propre, ses cheveux gris trop bien coiffés, le petit appareil fiché dans son oreille qui lui permet de faire croire qu'il n'entend pas, Roman Signer donne l'impression d'un monsieur qui ne veut pas déranger. Le journaliste David Signer, qui a commenté l'œuvre, compilé les textes et mené les entretiens pour ce Roman Signer par lui-même, explique que l'artiste a pourtant fait profession d'émeutier.

Sa famille était remplie d'artificiers, de tonitruants: un oncle spécialiste de la dynamite, un arrière-grand-père serrurier qui a un jour bouté le feu à un coffre pour en prouver la résistance, un père directeur de fanfare. Mais tous avaient une bonne raison de faire du bruit. Leur vacarme était utile. Lorsque Roman Signer, pour signifier son déménagement, a l'idée d'allumer une mèche de plusieurs dizaines de kilomètres entre Appenzell et Saint-Gall, il se fait insulter, menacer même, par des habitants qui n'entendent pas ses excentricités.

Boulots alimentaires

L'œuvre de Roman Signer encourage peut-être au malentendu. L'essentiel de sa vie, il a été boudé par les milieux de l'art. Pour survivre, il a été successivement Securitas, aide géomètre, manutentionnaire à l'aéroport de Kloten, conducteur de chariot élévateur, mais aussi homme d'entretien à l'EPA: «Un boulot, explique-t-il, qui a pris abruptement fin un beau matin alors que, en conduisant la machine de nettoyage, je suis entré en collision avec un miroir.»

Ce n'est qu'en 1987 qu'il s'impose, grâce au mur éphémère de feuilles de papier qu'il fait surgir dans le ciel de la Documenta de Kassel. Il a presque 50 ans. Depuis, il ne quitte plus les institutions et les biennales internationales, représente la Suisse à Venise, dynamite des bottes qui posent leur empreinte sur le plafond du Centre Pompidou et trône en tête du palmarès annuel des artistes helvétiques dans le magazine Bilanz. Et pourtant, il reste souvent décrit comme un professeur Tournesol de la TNT, un amuseur.

Ski sur sable

«Je n'aime pas qu'on dise de moi que je suis l'artiste des explosions, que je fais du spectacle. Quand je propose des choses très sobres, il arrive que les gens rient. Cela m'étonne.» Même dans les scènes les plus saugrenues, lorsqu'il fait du ski de fond sur une bande de sable au milieu d'un musée, qu'il se laisse tracter sur un kayak crissant le long des chemins de campagne ou qu'il court sur du papier à bulles armé d'une lampe de poche, il ne sourit jamais. Il y a du Buster Keaton chez Roman Signer, une mélancolie défilée par l'effet.

«Je suis certain que je reproduis adulte des expériences de ma jeunesse. Je joue comme les enfants. Avec sérieux.» Le mérite de ce livre, édité par David Signer et Peter Zimmerman, réside dans la mise en perspective d'une œuvre qui repose davantage sur l'anxiété, la peur, le souci de saisir les forces à l'œuvre dans le monde que sur le spectaculaire. Il est aussi magnifiquement traduit par Mariette Althaus, qui a su restituer la voix roulante de l'artiste et sa drôlerie tragique.

Lit d'enfant estropié

«Si j'étais devenu célèbre à 20 ans, dit-il, j'aurais peut-être fait n'importe quelle imbécillité et serais devenu le clown de la nation.» Directeur de l'Ecole cantonale d'art du Valais, Jean-Paul Felley a souvent travaillé avec Roman Signer: «Il est désormais inscrit dans l'histoire de l'art. Ses actions sont marrantes, bien sûr. Elles témoignent surtout d'une obsession pour la mort.»

Et Felley de raconter une action organisée par le Centre culturel suisse au Théâtre Nanterre-Amandiers. Signer avait amené son petit lit d'enfant à barreaux, celui où sa fille elle-même avait dormi; il en a fait exploser les pieds, sur scène. Les œuvres de Signer agissent parce qu'elles le mettent en jeu; c'est ce que ce livre de retour sur soi ne cesse d'explorer.

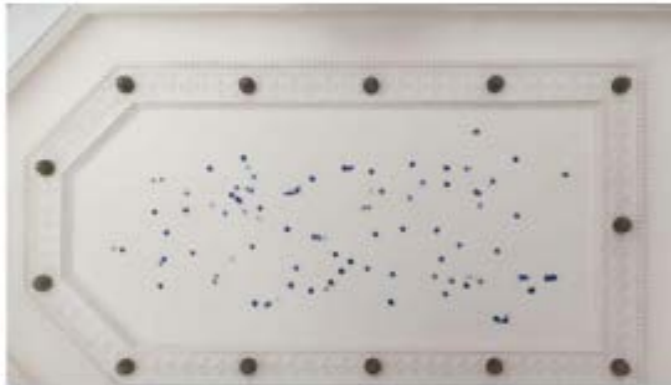


Fotografie e impronte. Roman Signer a Roma

By [Giorgia Basili](#) - 25 maggio 2018

Istituto Svizzero, Roma - fino al 1° luglio 2018. La figura estremamente affascinante di Roman Signer alle spalle un lavoro cinquantennale, si distingue per la sua attualità.

1 of 10



Roman Signer, Deckenbemalung (particolare). Courtesy l'artista & Istituto Svizzero, Roma. Photo © OKNO studio

Nelle sale di Villa Maraini, un fulgore di marmi e rivestimenti policromi, a colpo d'occhio un kayak rosso scarlatto, un tappeto con gobba centrale, un fucile che mira all'obiettivo dall'parte del tunnel di stoffa e all'esterno una piscina gonfiabile per bambini colma di braccioli. Azioni dal 1972 al 1989 sono immortalate in una galleria di scatti inediti, salvate nel frangere stasi dopo la dinamica performativa. Roman Signer (Appenzell, 1938) lascia il brulichio dopo scoppio della polvere da sparo, una nostalgia del movimento e una testimonianza dal potere poetico. Esperimenti che coinvolgono la natura prima che l'uomo e si tingono di tonalità romantiche. Come se l'artista imprigionasse nella quarta dimensione il respiro e il battito al dopo la corsa, in una sospensione carica di attesa. In *Deckenbemalung*, un drone "quadricoptero" come una falena in trappola, lascia impronte Blue Klein (IKB) sul soffitto algido. La meccanizzazione delle *Antropometrie*.

ROMAN SIGNER, « SPUREN », KUNSTMUSEUM, SAINT-GALL

Posted by [inferno:redaction](#) on 25 mai 2018 · [Laisser un commentaire](#)



ROMAN SIGNER – SPUREN – May 26th – August 12th 2018, Kunstmuseum – Saint-Gall (CH).

Roman Signer (*1938, Appenzell), a world-renowned artist who happens to live in St. Gallen, hardly needs any introduction. His performance works are legendary, and his international exhibitions now fill volumes. After a first retrospective in 1993 and a major presentation in 2014, which focused more on cross-references to politics and reality, now an extensive donation from the collection of Ursula Hauser—one of the early patrons of Roman Signer, among others—is the occasion for the first presentation of a fantastic series of drawings and the installation that was created for the Venice Biennale in 1999. New interventions by Roman Signer will give the presentation the unmistakable dynamism and immediate contemporaneity that one can expect from the artist at any moment.

Despite his worldwide renown, Roman Signer has always kept his ties to St. Gallen and the Appenzell region, and has left traces behind here, too. These traces are the topic of the exhibition, since Signer used the prominent building by Christoph Kunkler in the Stadtpark as a studio while the Kunstmuseum St. Gallen was closed between 1970 and 1987. He created fantastic Super 8 films and series of photographs, and at the opening of the renovated art and natural history museum in 1987 he realized an extensive performance.

Signer has revolutionized sculpture and created a singular concept of the medium, for which his work is emblematic: the visualization of processes and the dematerialization of form. His simple objects such as tables, chairs, or kayaks are distinguished by their archaic character. However, he does not use them in their usual function, but exposes them to multiple transformations that reveal a potential of diverse layers of meaning unique in the world of things: the familiar becomes foreign, the functioning appears absurd. In this way, exhilarating and abysmal elements become visible in the everyday.

Curator: Roland Wäspe



ROME

Roman Signer

ISTITUTO SVIZZERO DI ROMA - VILLA MARAINI

via Ludovisi, 48

March 23 - July 1

This survey of Swiss artist Roman Signer comprises thirty-four works that highlight the artist's concept of "action sculpture," a mode that combines empirical creation with the intrinsic potential of the object's nature. The show begins on the villa's exterior porch. *Planschbecken mit Schwimmflügeln* (Wading Pool with Water Wings), 2018, an inflatable pool full of water and floating plastic water wings—starkly superimposed against the circular geometry of the mosaic floor paving—establishes an immediate relationship with the architecture of the site. This piece opens up a central sequence that involves two other works: *Teppich* (Carpet), 2002, consists of a rifle resting on the ground, aimed at a target positioned beyond a raised-up red carpet. In *Kayak Spitze* (Kayak Tip), 2010, half a canoe is positioned vertically, similar to one outside that functioned as a spuming "volcano" during the opening performance.

In large adjacent rooms, black-and-white photographs with identical gray frames, made between 1973 and 1986, reveal the enchanting and experimental qualities in Signer's work. The artist uses man and nature to describe a world hovering between artifice and physical forces, preferring to capture on film the crystallization of experimental processes. This is evidenced by *Tisch*, 1986, in which a table balances on buckets brimming with liquid, as if to illustrate Archimedes's principle—or in *Krater und Kegel* (Crater and Cone), 1973, where, due to the force of gravity, a parallelepiped containing sand creates a cone and its corresponding void. Always products of their time, Signer's works often make use of new technologies. *Deckenbemalung* (Ceiling painting), 2018, a constellation of blue dots painted onto the ceiling, was made using a drone equipped with a shaving brush.

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

— Maria Chiara Valacchi

Samedi 7 avril

ROMAN SIGNER - PERFORMANCE

Nanterre-Amandiers
Centre dramatique national

Performance/Spectacle

Dans le cadre du *Festival Extraball* (avec le Centre Culturel Suisse - Paris)

Depuis le début des années 1970, les œuvres du Suisse Roman Signer activent et réactivent des paradoxes. Les micro-spectacles ou non événements qui résultent de chacune de ses œuvres interrogent l'économie du spectacle, l'idée du rendement, l'obsession de l'efficacité et notre enracinement profond dans le fonctionnalisme. Principalement connu pour ses « actions » et régulièrement étiqueté comme artiste pyrotechnicien ou « artiste de l'explosion », Signer refuse cependant de se laisser circonscrire par l'abondante littérature et les commentaires gravitant autour de son œuvre. Le format même qu'il a inventé englobe indifféremment la performance, la sculpture, le dessin, l'installation, la photographie et la vidéo. Il s'agit de révéler, voire de suspendre le processus de création afin de structurer le temps, d'attirer le regard sur l'« à peine » visible. Signer s'évertue ainsi à reproduire ce moment magique, devenu quasi rituel dans son travail : celui où la furtive transformation de la forme et de la matière est rendue possible. Il combine la simplicité des gestes ou des objets à la complexité de dispositifs techniques et de phénomènes physiques qu'il déclenche sans pour autant vouloir les contrôler. Roman Signer invente pour *Mondes possibles* et Nanterre-Amandiers une nouvelle performance.

Nanterre-Amandiers
Centre dramatique national
7 avenue Pablo-Picasso
92022 nanterre

TARIFS
Accès libre

Artists & faculty 2018

We are delighted to announce the invited artists for Art Safiental 2018, as well as the faculty for Alps Art Academy 2018:



Artist list 2018:

Lita Albuquerque (USA), Ueli Alder (CH), Aram Bartholl (D), Paul Barsch / Tilman Hornig (D), Bildstein / Glatz (CH/A), Mirja Busch (D), Com&Com (CH), DIG Collective (UK), HR Fricker (CH), Gabriela Gerber & Lukas Bardill (CH), Bob Gramsma (CH/NL), Ingeborg Lüscher (CH), Marianne Halter & Mario Marchisella (CH), Steve Rowell (USA), Analia Saban (ARG/USA), Roman Signer (CH) u.a.

Faculty 2018:

Matthias Bildstein (A), Mirja Busch (D), DIG Collective (UK), Bill Fox (USA), Gabriela Gerber/Lukas Bardill (CH), Johannes M. Hedinger (CH), Hanna Hölling (UK), Steve Rowell (USA), Analia Saban (USA), Konstanze Schütze (D), Chris Taylor (USA), u.a.



AUSSTELLUNGEN

Roman Signer

Die Kestner Gesellschaft zeigt vom 24. august bis 4. November Skulpturen, Installationen und Videos des Schweizer Künstlers.



Roman Signer | Unter dem Wasserfall | 2013 Fujiflex, aufgezogen auf Polystyrol | 40 x 60 cm | Foto: Aleksandra Signer

Ein automatischer Rasenmäher läutet an einer Glocke, ein Luftballon zieht eine Spur im Sand, ein Boot fährt auf Fässern: Alles ist in Bewegung bei Roman Signer (*1938, Appenzell, Schweiz), dessen Werke mit einer umfangreichen Einzelausstellung in der Kestner Gesellschaft präsentiert werden. Das vielseitige Oeuvre des namhaften schweizer Künstler wird mit Skulpturen, Installationen und Videos auf beiden Ausstellungsebenen vorgestellt. Signer begreift Skulptur als etwas Prozessuales. Die drei Dimensionen einer Skulptur erweitert der Bildhauer durch eine vierte: die Zeit. So werden seine Arbeiten oft als »Zeitskulpturen« bezeichnet. Die Verwandlung der Materialien und Formen sowie die daran beteiligten Kräfte – Sprengstoff, Wasserkraft oder Motoren – rücken in den Fokus und ermöglichen den Betrachtern die Erfahrung von Geschwindigkeit und Kraft. Sie entfalten sich oftmals auf humorvolle Weise zu Metaphern für Veränderung, Flüchtigkeit oder Vergänglichkeit. Immer wiederkehrende einfache Elemente wie Tische und Stühle, Schirme oder Eimer geraten so aus den Fugen. In der Hinwendung zum Absurden werden Poesie und Größe von Alltag und Existenz sichtbar.

Für die Ausstellung in der Kestner Gesellschaft entstehen zwei neue Werke. Signers Werke waren sowohl auf der documenta 8 (1987), den Skulptur Projekten Münster (1997) und der Biennale Venedig (1999) zu sehen. In Hannover war er unter anderem an der Expo 2000 und in den Herrenhäuser Gärten (2010) mit einem Projekt vertreten. Die Ausstellung in der Kestner Gesellschaft bietet einen Überblick über unterschiedliche Schaffensphasen, darüber hinaus entsteht eine neue, groß angelegte Installation.



Roman Signer

Roman Signer "Flaschenpost" Century Pictures



Roman Signer "Flasche (Bottle)" (2007)]

Ends in 59 days

Century Pictures presents an exhibition featuring 2 distinct works by Roman Signer alongside a continuously running film documenting many of the artist's performances and experiments.

Roman Signer is an artist who, on the surface, is interested in the kinetic influence of physics on the real world. Known for referring to his studio as a Lab, Signer often falls into the category of "engineer artists" such as Jean Tinguely, and Peter Fischli & David Weiss. His practice has no doubt been influenced by a background as an architect's draughtsman, radio engineer, and a stint in a pressure cooker factory before studying at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, Poland.

Signer's works often document his attempts to capture certain experiments, sometimes spectacular, sometimes mundane, predominately with the backdrop of the natural world. In his documentations, Signer seems intent on quantifying surroundings, allocating resources to fit one's needs, or forcing energy to flow in a predetermined direction, compelled by pyrotechnics or some other mechanical means. More often than not however, Signer, along with the viewer, learns the lesson that in the end, Nature writes the script and we adapt to its changes.

In Peter Liechti's film, Signer's Koffer- Unterwegs mit Roman Signer (Signer's Suitcase: On The Road with Roman Signer), the director has set out to capture Signer in his environment; documenting the artist's experiments within them. A fairly comprehensive mélange of Signer's allegorical investigations, Signer's Suitcase runs the gamut from oddly poignant to hilarious, all the while remaining steadfastly unpredictable.

In other work, unpredictability intersects with the constant of time. In *Läuten auf dem Fluss*, we see an alarm clock floating on a wood raft on a river. Farcically conveying man's attempts to quantify that which is fleeting, the scene conflates all clichés about time and its passing. Yet the image suggests a more profound reading than that of the most obvious comic intent.

In *Flasche (Bottle)*, a bottle miraculously floats midair, seemingly suspended by an ordinary household fan. Can the bottle be rescued? And if so, who will take the prize? Will the contents crash onto the floor and be lost? The drama inherent in this simple slight of hand cues Signer's entire body of work. Simplicity, farce, trial and error, all work against a backdrop of frailty throughout Signer's performances and images. The message, underpinned with a dose of slapstick, laughs both with and at the human condition.

Roman Signer (born 1938 Appenzell, Switzerland) is best known for his sculptural installations and experimental performances. He has exhibited in numerous international museums, galleries, and institutions. Some of his major projects include: Häusler Contemporary München, Munich (2016), High Line Channel 22, New York (2013); Aargauer Kunsthau, Aarau (2012); Kunsthalle Hamburg (2009); Rochester Art Center, Minneapolis (2008); Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin (2007); The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh (2007); Kunstpreis Aachen, Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2006); Camden Arts Centre, London (2001); Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht (2000); Secession, Vienna (1999); Venice Biennale (Swiss Pavilion) (1999); Kunstmuseum St. Gallen (1998); Skulptur Projekte, Münster (1997); documenta 8, Kassel (1987). Roman Signer is represented by Hauser & Wirth.

Alchetron

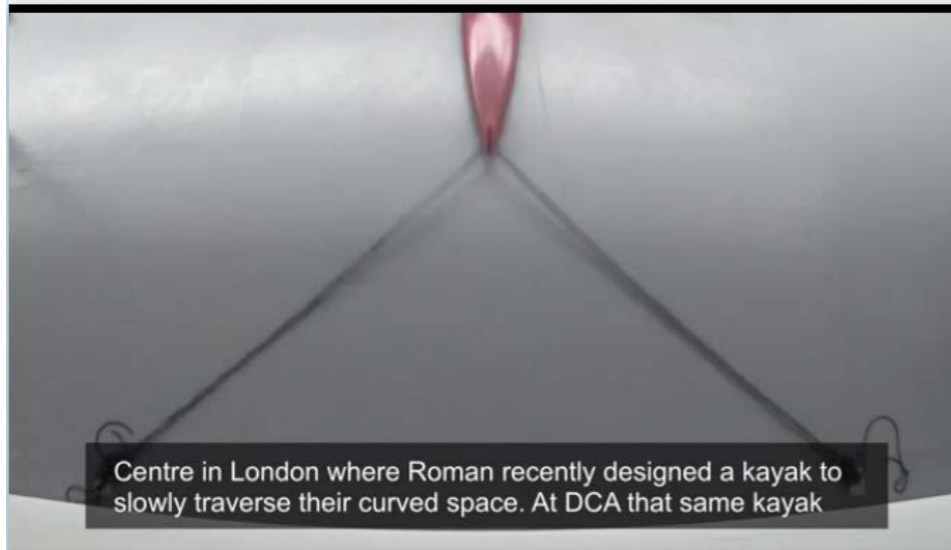
Free Social Encyclopedia for the World

Roman Signer



Artwork Wasser Stiefel, 56 Kleine Helikopter

Installations by roman signer artist video



Centre in London where Roman recently designed a kayak to slowly traverse their curved space. At DCA that same kayak

Sponsored Links

Roman Signer (born 1938 in Appenzell, Switzerland) is principally a visual artist who works in sculpture, installations photography, and video.

Roman Signer (born 1938 in Appenzell, Switzerland) is principally a visual artist who works in sculpture, installations photography, and video.



Roman signer installation 1 2



Early life and career



Born in Appenzell, Switzerland, Signer started his career as an artist later in life at the age of 28, after working as an architect's draughtsman, a radio engineer apprentice, and a short stint in a pressure cooker factory. He holds degrees from arts institutions in Switzerland and Poland. He studied at the Schule für Gestaltung in Zurich and Lucerne between 1966 and 1971. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, Poland from 1971-1972.

Work



Signer's work has grown out of, and has affinities with both land art and performance art, but they are not typically representative of either category. It is often being described as following the tradition of the Swiss engineer-artist, such as Jean Tinguely and Peter Fischli & David Weiss.



Signer's "action sculptures" involve setting up, carrying out, and recording "experiments" or events that bear aesthetic results. Day-to-day objects such as umbrellas, tables, boots, containers, hats and bicycles are part of Signer's working vocabulary. Following carefully planned and strictly executed and documented procedures, the artist enacts and records such acts as explosions, collisions, and the projection of objects through space. Signer advocates 'controlled destruction, not destruction for its own sake'. *Action Kurhaus Weissbad* (1992) saw chairs catapulted out of a hotel's windows; *Table* (1994) launched a table into the sea on four buckets; *Kayak* (2000) featured the artist being towed down a road in a canoe. In *documenta 8* (1987), he catapulted thousands of sheets of paper into the air to create an ephemeral wall in the room for a brief, but all the more intense moment. As the Swiss representative at the Venice Biennale in 1999, he made 117 steel balls fall from the ceiling on to lumps of clay lying on the ground. Many of his happenings are not for public viewing, and are only documented in photos and film. Video works like *Stiefel mit Rakete* (Boot with Rocket) are integral to Signer's performances, capturing the original setup of materials that self-destruct in the process of creating an emotionally and visually compelling event.



Signer gives a humorous twist to the concept of cause and effect and to the traditional scientific method of experimentation and discovery, taking on the self-evidence of scientific logic as an artistic challenge. As well as working in his studio, which he calls his lab, Signer often takes off to the Swiss mountains to conduct larger experiments. A recent example of his installation work was "Accident as sculpture" (*Unfall als Skulptur*) (2008) in which Signer had a three-wheeled delivery car, loaded with water barrels, roll down an 11 m high ramp and up the other side. At the apex, the vehicle overturned and crashed to the ground. The resulting chaotic arrangement constituted the exhibition at de:Kunstraum Dornbirn. Another example, the video *56 Small Helicopters* (*56 Kleine Helikopter*) (2008) shows a squadron of 56 remote-controlled toy helicopters as they rise into the air, collide with each other, carom off the ceiling and walls, and finally die in mechanical spasms on the floor.

In 2011, Signer showed *Restenfilme* or *film leftovers*, always presented in a darkened room furnished with several rows of wooden chairs, one of which rocks unassisted on its back legs. The projection gathers actions, which Signer never constituted as full artworks, as well as shots of locations that were possible staging grounds for potential works.

A collaborative film from 1996 with director Peter Liechti titled "Signer's Koffer" (English: "Signer's Suitcase") documents a series of his "action sculptures" along with interviews of Roman Signer and other characters encountered during his travels performing the work.

Exhibitions

Signer's work has been shown at galleries and museums in Europe, North America and Asia over the last thirty years. It was featured in 37th Venice Biennale (1976), *documenta 8*, Kassel (1987), and *Skulptur Projekte Münster* (1997)

In 2016 the Kunstmuseum Basel acquired 205 films of Roman Signer in Super 8 format. These films are among the most important works that make Signer's early performative work accessible. From April 1, 2017, 24 films from this collection will be presented to the public on 12 screens connecting the main building and the new building. The films shown were all produced between 1975 and 1989 and show the partial spectacular actions for which the artist has become known. No movie is longer than three minutes. Without sound, they show themes that are drawn by Signer's entire oeuvre: explosions and poetic moments, nature and its elements, staging and coincidence. Not infrequently the artist himself appears in it. They are sculptures on time, which sometimes offer a surprise effect and often reveal a humorous, almost slapstick side.

Selected solo shows

- 2012 Kunsthalle Mainz
- 2009 Kunsthaus Zug, *Roman Signer - Werke 1975-2007*
- 2009 Hamburger Kunsthalle, *Roman Signer - Projektionen. Filme und Videos 1975 - 2008*
- 2008 Helmhaus Zürich, *Roman Signer: Projektionen. Filme und Videos 1975 - 2008*
- 2008 Kunstraum Dornbirn, *Installation. Unfall als Skulptur*
- 2008 Rochester Art Center, *Roman Signer: Works*
- 2008 Hauser & Wirth London
- 2007 Hamburger Bahnhof, *Roman Signer – Werke aus der Friedrich Christian Flick Collection - Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin*
- 2007 The Fruitmarket Gallery, *Roman Signer – Works*
- 2006 Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, *Roman Signer. Kunstpreis Aachen 2006*
- 2006 Aargauer Kunsthaus, *Roman Signer – Reisefotos*
- 2006 Galician Centre of Contemporary Art, *Roman Signer. Esculturas e instalaci6ns, Santiago de Compostela*

Awards

- 2010 Prix Meret Oppenheim
- 2008 Finalist for the Hugo Boss Prize
- 2008 Ernst-Franz-Vogelmann-Preis für Skulptur, Heilbronn
- 2006 Kunstpreis Aachen
- 2004 Kulturpreis der Stadt St. Gallen
- 1998 Konstanzer Kunstpreis
- 1998 Kulturpreis St. Gallen
- 1998 Kulturpreis Konstanz
- 1995 Kulturpreis Bregenz
- 1977 Eidgenössisches Kunststipendium
- 1974 Eidgenössisches Kunststipendium
- 1972 Eidgenössisches Kunststipendium
- 1972 Kiefer-Hablitzel Stipendium

Influences

A photo of Signer's "Wasser Stiefel" serves as the cover art of *Upgrade & Afterlife* (1996), an album by American experimental music group Gastr del Sol.

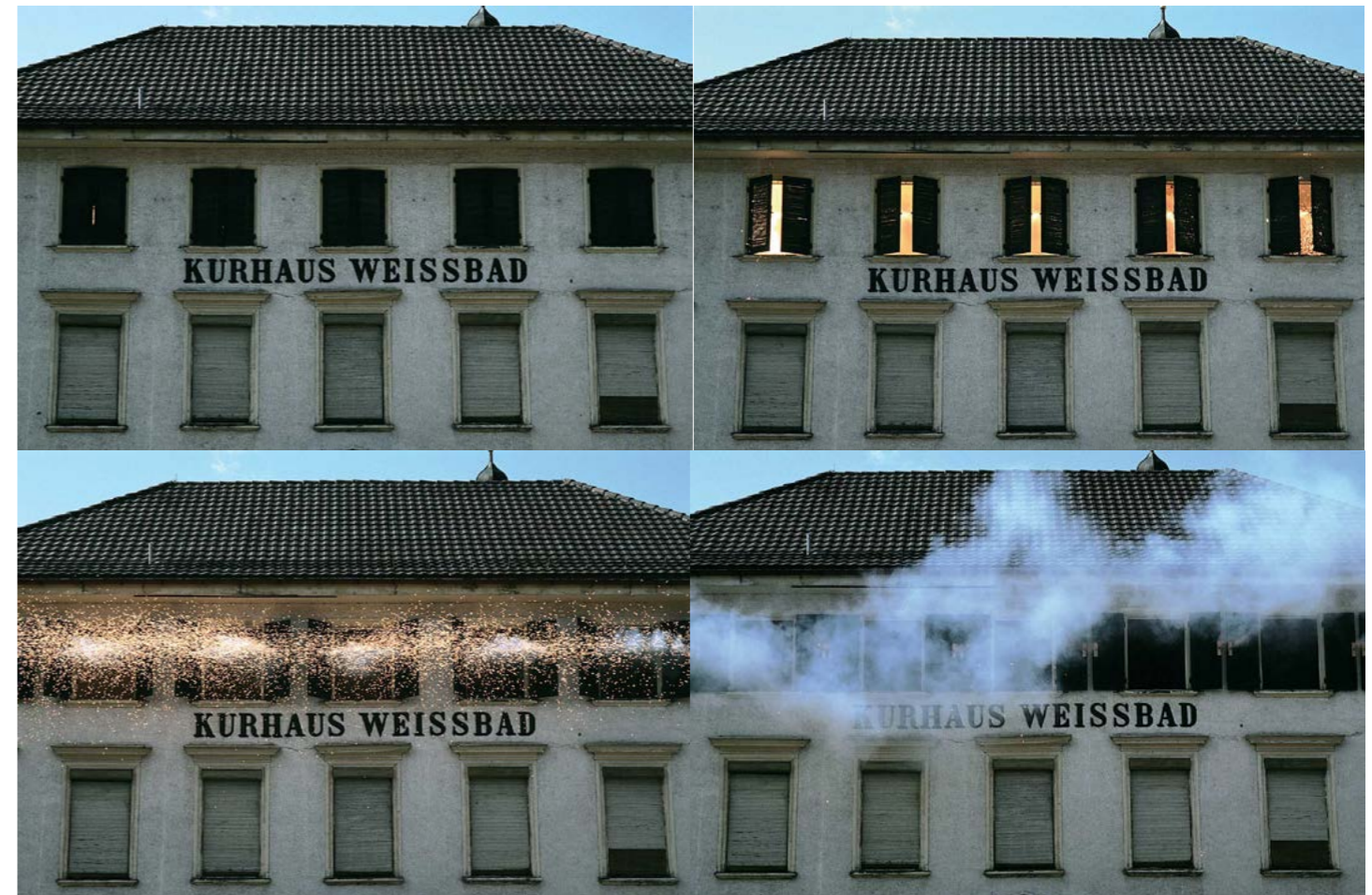
?!9 le point d'ironie

Roman Signer

n°61

Né en 1938 à Appenzell (Suisse), Roman Signer vit et travaille à Saint-Gall. « A l'instar de la sculpture traditionnelle, la pratique artistique de Roman Signer s'attache non seulement à l'élaboration d'objets matériels en trois dimensions mais explore aussi une quatrième dimension : celle du temps. Ainsi, ses œuvres, véritables « sculptures-temps », combinent la sculpture, la performance, la photographie et la documentation filmique. Elles étudient la transformation des objets à travers le temps, attirant l'attention du regardeur sur l'expérience de l'événement, les changements provoqués et les forces impliquées. Ces épisodes de maîtrise et de libération d'énergie sont riches d'ingéniosité, saisissants, acerbes et d'un humour irrésistible. » (Rachel Withers)

Connu pour ses performances « explosives », il évoque ainsi la création de son point d'ironie : « J'ai longtemps porté en moi cette idée jusqu'à ce que j'en prenne conscience... c'est ici, dans cette maison que cela va arriver. »



© agnès b.

Roman Signer – Mein Alphabet



Mit seinen «Explosionsskulpturen» hat Roman Signer die Kunstwelt elektrisiert. Er gehört zu den bedeutendsten Künstlern der Schweiz, seine Arbeiten befinden sich in den wichtigsten Sammlungen und Museen der Welt. In einem filmischen Rundumblick zeigt der Filmemacher Laurin Merz Signers Schaffen.

Der Film «Roman Signer – Mein Alphabet» zeigt aktuelle Arbeiten, blickt aber auch auf das Schaffen des Künstlers in dessen Vergangenheit zurück. Ein wichtiges Zeugnis dieser Zeit ist der Film «Signers Koffer» von Peter Liechti aus dem Jahre 1995. Die darin festgehaltenen Arbeiten wirken noch heute so frisch, frech und unverbraucht wie am ersten Tag.

Gekonnt verwebt Laurin Merz Ausschnitte aus dem Filmdokument mit aktuellen Aufnahmen. So entsteht ein filmischer Rundumblick auf Signers Schaffen der vergangenen vierzig Jahre.

Die Kamera begleitet den Künstler beim Ausstellungsaufbau, durch Glücksmomente und Ärgernisse. Die Kamera ist dabei, wenn er an der «Arte Albigna» an der Staumauer seine witzig-mutige Installation aufbaut. Roman Signer erzählt von seiner Kindheit, seiner Familie, seinem nicht einfachen und geradlinigen Werdegang zum Künstler.

Im nächsten Jahr feiert Roman Signer seinen 80. Geburtstag. Gedanken über das Älterwerden tauchen auf, der Körper mag nicht mehr so wie früher. Doch zum Glück sind da ja stets noch seine Frau, seine Familie und sein unverwüstlicher Assistent Tomek, die ihn auch weiterhin tatkräftig unterstützen.

TRANSART, LA CULTURA CONTEMPORANEA AD ALTA QUOTA



Dal 7 al 27 settembre ritorna la nuova edizione del festival che attraverserà i luoghi più singolari del Trentino-Alto Adige tra baite e parchi tecnologici. Tra gli eventi l'omaggio musicale e visivo a David Lynch

SULLO STESSO ARGOMENTO

David Lynch raccontato al Loop Festival di Bari

Marilyn Monroe e Buddy Holly, miti in mostra

Lindsay Kemp: il carisma e la grazia di un maestro

Dal 7 al 27 settembre ritorna il festival di cultura contemporanea *Transart*. La rassegna, giunta alla 17esima edizione, attraverserà i luoghi più singolari del Trentino-Alto Adige: fabbriche e baite, vallate, innovativi parchi tecnologici e caserme abbandonate, giardini segreti, strade, case private e aule studio universitarie. Il lungo filo rosso del festival unisce punti sorprendenti della geografia della regione e invita il pubblico a vivere esperienze dilatate nel tempo, in una danza senza sosta nell'arco di un mese: dentro un'immaginaria Torre di Babele, sdraiati su un

prato in alta quota con più di 70 percussionisti, davanti a cubi di luce pulsanti, in ascolto dei suoni dell'aurora boreale, a contatto con le esperienze artistiche germinate a Ouagadougou, capitale del Burkina Faso, o nel cuore, ancora dolente, della nostra nazione, con un requiem musicale dedicato alle vittime del terremoto nel centro Italia.

Fra gli appuntamenti da non perdere: un focus sulla scena artistica canadese, il format *CULT.night* che attraverserà tutti gli spazi – anche quelli più inaspettati – del *Teatro Comunale* di Bolzano, un omaggio musicale e visivo a **David Lynch**, il clubbing di **The Italian New Wave** con l'acclamato *Club To Club Festival*, il ritorno del genio di **Roman Signer** e **John Luther Adams** e tante prime assolute, fra cui quella di **Ingrid Hora**, dedicata ad antichi e neri rituali della fertilità in Val Venosta.



Roman Signer

UN HUB PER TRANSART

La carovana di *Transart* prende il via al Museo Civico di Bolzano che per tutto il festival ne sarà l'hub creativo. Le stanze meno utilizzate, gli angoli più nascosti e inaccessibili, come le cantine e i sotterranei, si trasformeranno nelle mani di giovani e talentuosi artisti. Gli esperimenti elettroacustici di **Nicolas Perret** e **Silvia Ploner**, al secolo *Island Songs*, muoveranno le fondamenta e illumineranno le sale del museo della luce del nord con i due progetti complementari *Nýey* e *All depends on the Sun*. Durante l'opening del festival presenteranno in prima mondiale la performance *Stellar surf*: un viaggio sonoro e visivo fra i bagliori dell'aurora boreale.

Il performer e videomaker canadese **Martin Messier**, da sempre affascinato dalla ridefinizione del concetto di musica attraverso oggetti della vita quotidiana, porta a *Transart* l'audio-installazione *Boîte noire*, una grande teca di vetro sospesa a mezz'aria, riempita di fumo e attraversata da raggi luminosi. Messier ritornerà nuovamente con **Anne Thériault (26.9)** per presentare nel piccolo Teatro di San Giacomo *Con grazia*. (Qui di seguito le foto).

Il Museo Civico ospiterà anche l'incredibile *Operndorf Afrika*, ultima visionaria idea di **Christoph Schlingensief** (1960-2010) attraverso il quale l'artista tedesco desiderava modificare l'immagine che abbiamo dell'Africa, creando una piattaforma di scambio artistico internazionale.

INAUDITO – LA TORRE DI BABELE E' A BOLZANO

Con il formato *INAUDITO (9/9)* *Transart* crea 9 ore di performance, occupa un edificio di 6 piani, mobilita 3 ensemble, attiva 21 postazioni musicali per colpire l'immaginazione e la creatività del pubblico, stimolandolo a creare la propria playlist performativa. La facoltà di Design e Arti della Libera Università di Bolzano diventa per un giorno una contemporanea Torre di Babele: il pubblico vi potrà accedere in ogni momento e creare il proprio percorso, attraverso una ricerca che potrà durare da 1 secondo a 9 ore.

Lo sforzo sarà inaudito, la musica udita, inaudita. Fra gli ospiti di questa prestazione musicale titanica e dilatata nel tempo la **Blackpage Orchestra** (sopra le foto), l'ensemble **chromoson** e il quartetto di percussionisti **conTakt**. Concerti per Ensemble, selfie musicali, confessioni dei musicisti, luoghi in cui vivere un'esperienza 1:1 saranno gli elementi costitutivi di **INAUDITO / UNGEHÖRT**.

DUE GIORNI CON DAVID LYNCH

E' uno dei più enigmatici e controversi registi del cinema contemporaneo. Cinquant'anni di carriera e solo dieci film, amati dal pubblico e dalla critica mondiale e snobbati dall'*Academy* e dai *Golden Globes*, che gli hanno sempre preferito registi più prolifici e mainstream. Il *Festival Transart* rende omaggio al genio di **David Lynch** con due appuntamenti sospesi fra arte e musica.

Farà da preludio il lungometraggio *David Lynch: The Art Life (11.9.)* che accompagnerà lo spettatore in un viaggio intimo, dall'infanzia nella tranquilla provincia americana, all'arrivo a Philadelphia, dagli anni della formazione artistica, fino alle colline di Hollywood. Gli spazi della fabbrica di Alpewa (**15.09**) saranno invece l'involucro metallico per un pianoforte, punto di attrazione del recital *The augmented piano* con la pianista canadese **Eve Egoyan**.

Al centro della performance la prima italiana di **David Lynch Etudes** della compositrice **Nicole Lizée**. Sono le sue stesse parole a offrire la migliore descrizione del progetto: "I suoni e le immagini dei film di Lynch vengono corrotti e mischiati con il piano, così da formare un viaggio immersivo e psichedelico. La scrittura per pianoforte è uno specchio musicale dell'assurdo, surreale, a volte violento e disturbante lavoro di questo regista". Alcune clip di vari film, da *Twin Peaks* a *Cuore selvaggio*, da *Mulholland Drive* a *Strade perdute*, vengono manipolate, ripetute, compresse. Lizée dirige i nostri occhi verso il vetro di una finestra, ricordandoci che siamo tutti voyeurs che sbirciano dentro relazioni estremamente complicate.

IL SILENZIO DELLA MONTAGNA SI SPEZZA: E' IL RITMO DEL CONTEMPORANEO

ROMAN SIGNER, JOHN LUTHER ADAMS, INGRID HORA

Ha fatto danzare sulla facciata mediale di Museion un gruppo di anziane signore, cuffia bianca e costume blu, impegnate in una coreografia di nuoto sincronizzato. Per *Transart* l'artista **Ingrid Hora** si confronta con l'antica tradizione dello *Scheibenschlagen* (16.09), rituale di fertilità e di benvenuto alla primavera, che ogni anno viene messo in scena dagli uomini della Val Venosta. La "strega" viene bruciata, dei dischi infuocati lanciati nell'aria. L'artista rivisita questi simboli atavici inventando insolite costellazioni di movimenti e, insieme alle donne del villaggio di Silandro, intreccia l'antico e il nuovo, per creare un nuovo rito. Il luogo scelto per far rivivere questa antica tradizione è la Caserma Druso di Silandro, abbandonata dal 1995. ((Le foto di seguito di Gregor Kuhlen Belasi per *Inuksuit*)).

Non sarà il crepitio del fuoco a rompere il silenzio del Monte San Vigilio sopra Lana, ma il suono di un ensemble di 70 percussionisti, raccolti attorno alla partitura di *Inuksuit* (10.09), opera musicale del compositore americano **John Luther Adams**.

Anche solo 1 secondo di ritardo potrebbe invece essere fatale. A due anni di distanza ritorna a *Transart* l'artista svizzero **Roman Signer** con *Una valanga dal tetto* (23.09), opera esplosiva (in tutti i sensi), scultura effimera con la scadenza di 11 secondi. Questa volta l'artista focalizzerà l'attenzione del pubblico sulla scoscesa parete del tetto della stalla Hilber di San Lorenzo in Val Pusteria. *Una valanga dal tetto* racchiude tutta la potenza delle sue opere più visionarie.



Roman Signer

MUSICA FINO ALL'ALBA CON IL TRANSART CLUBBING

La traiettoria di *Transart* si incrocia quest'anno con **MUTEK**, prestigioso festival di arti digitali e musica elettronica canadese, dedicato allo sviluppo e alla divulgazione della creatività digitale nel suono, musica e arte audiovisiva (9.09). Per *Transart*, MUTEK cura una serata che racchiude il carattere più festoso della rassegna e celebra la creatività canadese con una line-up di artisti internazionali del calibro di **Woulg & Push One Stop**, **Alicia Hush**, **Mathew Jonson**, **Mike Shannon** (DJ). (Sopra le foto di Sébastien Roy).

Di grande respiro la selezione degli artisti: **Lorenzo Senni**, **Ninos Du Brasil**, alias **Nico Vascellari** e **Nicolò Fortuni**, **Petit Singe**, **Bienoise**, produttori piemontesi fra techno a forma libera, sperimentazione digitale e improvvisazione jazz, e **XIII**, misterioso membro del collettivo torinese **Gang of Ducks**.

CULT.night > PERFORMANCE, MUSIC, FILM, THEATRE

Fuori, a lato, di fronte, attraverso il teatro: il confine fra palcoscenico e platea si dissolve per un evento lungo una notte fra musica, performance, teatro e cinema (8.09). **CULT.night** avrà luogo in tutte le sale del Teatro Comunale di Bolzano, nella piazza antistante e nel giardino dei Capuccini. Nel corso della serata si potrà assistere alla prima italiana dello spettacolo interattivo *In Many Hands* di **Kate McIntosh**, all'installazione *Squares do not (normally) appear in nature* di **OHT**, ispirato da **Josef Albers**, al progetto *JUST ACT*, con performance di innumerevoli associazioni culturali e sportive di Bolzano. La serata include inoltre la musica live del gruppo finalista di *Upload* e si concluderà sulle note del DJ Set di **Luca Fronza**.

TEATRO DA 5 A 99 ANNI!

Nel cubo di vetro di Museion, il Museo d'arte contemporanea di Bolzano arriva la carica dirompente dell'**Aktionstheater Ensemble (20.09)** con lo spettacolo *Pension Europa*, nominato per il Nestroy beste Off-Produktion. Una serata fra sei donne alla disperata ricerca di una visione. Puro, nudo, talvolta poetico, ma estremamente potente, il quotidiano viene analizzato e discusso senza timore. Fra confessioni veritiere, bizzarre, scurrili, tragiche e direttamente ispirate alla vita di tutti i giorni. A *Transart* il teatro sarà anche per i più piccoli, dai 5 anni in su, con *Villa Wunder (25.09)* di **Manuela Kerer**.

UN REQUIEM PER IL TERREMOTO: SILVIA COLASANTI DA' VOCE ALLE PICCOLE GRANDI OMBRE DEL NOSTRO PAESE

Presentato in anteprima a luglio al Festival di Spoleto, conclude magnificamente il festival *Transart (26.09)* il *Requiem per Soli, Coro e Orchestra, Stringeranno nei pugni una cometa* di **Silvia Colasanti**. Un momento di riflessione e raccoglimento dedicato al terremoto che ha colpito il centro Italia – lontano da ogni retorica e pietismo – come solo musica e poesia possono fare.

Nel Requiem, i testi latini dialogano con nuove parti, scritte per l'occasione dalla poetessa **Mariangela Gualtieri**. Sarà un canto di congedo ai morti del terremoto, alle piccole e grandi ombre, il rifiuto di un'idea lugubre di un Dio autoritario e punitivo. Ma anche un canto di speranza e di ringraziamento. La cantante e la recitante – qui la poetessa stessa – dialogano con Coro e con l'**Orchestra Haydn**, o disegnano momenti intimi e lirici, che si alternano a situazioni corali e magmatiche. *Stringeranno nei pugni una cometa* è un verso di **Dylan Thomas**, verrà eseguito in una rimessa dei treni, in un luogo dove i gesti quotidiani del lavoro riportano al presente: "Spesso il compositore in epoca moderna si è dimenticato di dialogare con il pubblico – suggerisce Colasanti – la musica deve avere un valore sociale, di riconoscibilità collettiva".

Ai fiati, agli ottoni, alle percussioni e all'arpa e agli archi si associano alcune pietre di fiume suonate all'inizio, buttate o strofinate, mescolate al bisbiglio della preghiera, come elementi teatrali. Un omaggio alla vita che scorre, nonostante tutto.

“ Il programma completo e maggiori info di TRANSART 2017



EXPOSITION Tout le Valais dans un kilomètre carré

Comment créer les conditions d'une attention nouvelle à l'art? Sur le site du Relais du Saint-Bernard, au bord de l'autoroute à la sortie de Martigny, la quatrième édition de la Triennale du Valais joue le jeu de la modestie et du dépaysement

Il n'y a peut-être pas de lieu moins approprié pour une exposition d'art qu'un relais autoroutier. Les visiteurs souvent pressés n'ont pas la disponibilité mentale qu'exige la rencontre avec des œuvres d'art. Quant aux espaces, ils sont aux antipodes des grands cubes blancs que l'on trouve dans les musées, et il peut s'avérer difficile d'y exposer des œuvres dans des conditions satisfaisantes.

Pourtant, le choix des commissaires de cette quatrième édition de la Triennale du Valais d'investir le Relais du Saint-Bernard n'a rien d'absurde. D'abord parce que le motif de la station-service a intéressé durablement les artistes depuis les années 1960. En 2014, l'artiste suisse Olivier Mosset a, par exemple, réalisé **un ambitieux projet** sur plusieurs stations de la route nationale 6, en Bourgogne. Ensuite parce que la mythologie américaine de la route résonne tout particulièrement en Valais. Enfin parce qu'un relais autoroutier constitue une excellente métaphore d'un monde de l'art de plus en plus avide d'événements artistiques comme les biennales, et autres triennales, visitées à la vitesse de l'éclair.

Club nautique et téléphérique

Malgré son étendue, avec seize lieux partenaires de Brigue à Monthey, cette triennale fait le choix de la modestie, et se veut ancrée dans la réalité locale. L'expérience qu'elle offre aux visiteurs est donc tout autre que celle des grands événements qui rythment les saisons artistiques.

Sous les pylônes,
«Comfort #16», par Lang
Baumann. Annik Wetter



L'intelligence des commissaires est d'avoir utilisé le site tout entier. Une trentaine d'œuvres d'artistes suisses et internationaux ont ainsi été installées au relais et en extérieur, dans les proches alentours. Bien connu des Valaisans, le site offre un paysage atypique, et curieusement photogénique, dont l'inventaire prête à sourire: une station, deux étangs, des plages, un club nautique, un téléphérique, un parc d'attractions, des montagnes, une autoroute, des pylônes électriques, une éolienne, des vergers, un élevage industriel de poulets, et même un fort militaire.

Simon Lamunière, l'un des trois commissaires, le décrit d'ailleurs comme emblématique: «En 1 km², il y a tout le Valais.» Il condense également, comme il l'explique encore, toutes les questions d'une société en plein changement, et notamment le rapport au loisir, à la nature, au commerce et au tourisme. Quelle peut être la place de l'art dans ces transformations? Doit-il devenir toujours plus événementiel? Plus commercial? Peut-il toucher tout le monde?



«Speed Limit», par
François Curlet. Annik
Wetter

Réalité anxieuse

En forme de réponse, un ensemble d'œuvres offre une vision sarcastique de la société du tourisme accéléré. Sur le parking, la Mitsubishi brûlée-vernée de Laurent Faulon trône au milieu de voitures en état de marche, tandis qu'un ensemble de tentes, installées par Jérôme Leuba (*#battlefield*, 2017), ébauchent une fiction dystopique.

Dans l'entrée du marché-relais, au sein de l'espace habituellement dévolu aux expositions du service de promotion du Valais, on retrouve une Jaguar customisée en corbillard par François Curlet. Cette même voiture est mise en scène dans le film qui complète l'installation, une reprise de la comédie loufoque *Harold et Maude* (Hal Ashby, 1971), dans lequel un jeune homme suicidaire s'éprend d'une octogénaire.

Les allumettes et les sucres d'Alexia Turlin, distribués dans les magasins du relais, et le Générateur d'ondes vibratoires positives infinies de Vidya Gastaldon évoquent de même une réalité anxieuse, faite de dépression généralisée, dont il faudrait s'échapper.

Les bottes esseulées du «Surveillant» par Delphine Reist. Annik Wetter



Jeu de piste

Si l'on peut apprécier la douce ironie qu'il y a à détourner un espace de commerce et de loisirs pour y faire une exposition, il faut reconnaître que l'activité quotidienne du relais parasite souvent l'accès aux œuvres qui y sont installées, pas toujours mises en valeur, ou visibles. Et c'est vraiment en extérieur que la triennale est la plus convaincante.

La déambulation d'une pièce à l'autre est pensée pour conduire les visiteurs aux confins du site. On longe d'abord une œuvre gonflable de Lang et Baumann qui flotte sur l'étang (*Comfort #16*, 2017), comme un écho abstrait aux bouées géantes qui amusent tant les visiteurs de parcs d'attractions. Il a d'ailleurs fallu renforcer la structure de l'œuvre car les baigneurs l'escaladaient allègrement. Puis la promenade mène au bord des étangs, le long de vergers, et enfin dans une réserve naturelle, à la jonction de la Dranse et du Rhône, dans ce qui s'apparente à un jeu de piste.



«Les Louves», de Céline Peruzzo Annik Wetter

Le corps absent

Certaines œuvres sont littéralement cachées, comme *Les Louves*, de Céline Peruzzo, une étrange et élégante sculpture faite de tréteaux de bois recouverts de fourrures, qui semble rendue à la nature, au milieu des roseaux du bord de l'étang. D'autres sont furtives, comme la très belle installation de Roman Signer. D'autres, enfin, semblent quasiment à l'abandon.

Vers la fin du parcours, une série d'œuvres mettent en scène l'image d'un corps absent, comme ces bottes de Delphine Reist (*Surveillant*, 2017) ou l'*Autoportrait* de Fabrice Gygi en randonneur de montagnes, qui semble se reposer, à l'abri des regards.

Il est rare de passer plus de vingt minutes dans un relais routier. L'expérience du site en elle-même vaut le détour. Si le bruit de l'autoroute ne faiblit jamais, on passe, en s'éloignant progressivement de la civilisation, du commerce à la contemplation, de la mécanisation automobile à la libre circulation promise par la marche.

Triennale d'art contemporain Valais, Relais autoroutier du Saint-Bernard ainsi que dans seize institutions partenaires entre Brigue et Monthey, jusqu'au 22 octobre.



SALTO RETURN

#250917

In Salto Return geht es nicht direkt um Rechtsruck. Es geht vor allem darum, wie man ihn verhindern kann: Etwa mit guter Musik, Literatur und künstlerischer Sprengkraft.

Fassungslos

„Den Brenner sperren, von Norden her, damit die Horden dieser rechten Musik-Touristen nicht mehr nach Südtirol anreisen“ war heute Morgen eine vielleicht etwas überzogene Reaktion eines Zeitungslesers an der Theke meiner Stammbar. Ich vernahm seine Worte, nahm einen vorzüglichen Happen meines Marmelade-Cornettochens und rührte meinen Caffè corretto noch drei, vier Runden mit dem kleinen Löffelchen. Dann erhob ich den Zeigefinger und mahnte den Herrn: „Sie können doch nicht allen Ernstes den Südtiroler Schlagerkapellen mit ihren dümmlichen Texten, die Schuld für das beängstigende Wahlergebnis in Deutschland geben? Dieses Vorurteil ist sehr gefährlich. Da machen sie nun ein Fass auf...“



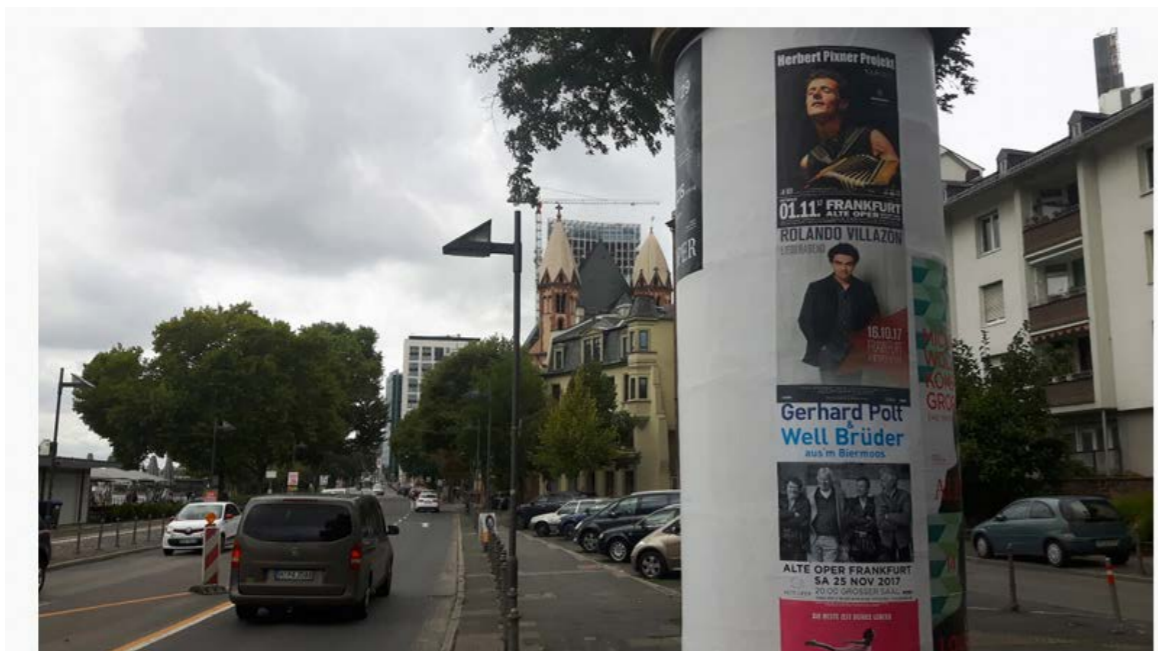
Fassöffnen vom Feinsten: Der Künstler Roman Signer hat im Rahmen des Festivals Transart am Samstag seine Sprengkünste am Hilberhof im Pustertal gezeigt. Ein Hauch Zabriskie Point! / Foto: Gregor Khuen Belasi

*...denn so würden auch andere Musikgruppen aus der norditalienischen Deutsch-Gegend, die in den Rankings „draußen“ gut mitmischen, mit ihrem Rechtsrock, Schuld am Rechtsruck haben“ entgegnete ich. „Sie haben nicht direkt Schuld, nein, aber indirekt schon“ meinte der Herr und fuhr lautstark fort: „Die einen singen im lächerlichen Volkskostüm von einer ewig heilen Welt, die anderen von Feinden, die an jeder Ecke lauern und für alle eine Gefahr im Alltag sind. Das gefällt den Deutschen, die kaufen diese bescheuerten Südtirol-Tonträger und hören dieses konservative Liedgut auf und ab. Ist es nicht so. Ich **fass** es nicht...“ [Bandnamen der Redaktion bekannt]*



Roman Signers Fässer fallen vom Dach des Hilberhofes. Es entstand kein Dachschaden. Der ist leider woanders zu suchen... / Foto: Gregor Khuen Belasi

*Ich nickte zustimmend, holte eilig mein Smartphone aus der Hosentasche und zeigte dem Herrn ein Foto: „Schau mal hier, der Pixner Herbert auf einer Litfaß-Säule in Frankfurt, dem gelingt es **retro** zu spielen und in der Gegenwart dennoch weltoffen **in the future** zu sein.“ In dem Gesicht des Herrn sah ich zum ersten Mal ein zufriedenes Lächeln. Ich war am Ende meines Cornettochens angelangt und mit dem Herrn neben mir einig: Es darf nur mehr richtig feines Liedgut von hier über den Brenner gelangen, sonst verblöden die Deutschen vollkommen. Und was wählen sie dann?*



Litfaß statt Fass: Werbung für feines Liedgut aus Südtirol an einer Litfaß-Säule in Frankfurt / Foto: Salto.bz

Kaser los!

»Südtirol wird eine Literatur haben. Wie gut, daß es niemand weiß. Amen.« polterte der Dichter N.C. Kaser 1969 in ein Brixner Mikrofon. Mittlerweile gibt es sie reichlich und Kaser hätte seine Freude. Oder sonst eben seinen Ärger.

Was mich immer wieder ärgert, dass Südtirol keine große Übersetzungs-Kultur hat, vor allem wenn es um literarische Werke geht. Nun *finalmente* wurden N. C. Kasers Gedichte vom Lyrikenner und Übersetzungskönner Werner Menapace ins Italienische übertragen. Bislang gab es lediglich eine Übersetzung von Kaser-Texten, sie liegt Jahrzehnte zurück und ist vergriffen.



Werner Menapace: Südtirols Vorzeige-Lyrik-Übersetzer ins Italienische / Foto: Salto.bz

Nach der Buchvorstellung folgte in der vollbesetzten Brunecker Militärkaserne ein zeitgenössisches Opernfragment für eine große Kaser-Oper. Die Komposition stammte aus der Feder des jungen Lokalmatadors Alexander Kaiser.

Nicht Kaiser, nicht Kaser, sondern Kerer heißt Südtirols bekannteste Komponistin. Für Transart/Klangspuren hat sie eine "Kehrer"-Oper komponiert, die am heutigen Montag, ab 10 Uhr, als Kinderoper **Villa Wunder** über die Bühne ging.

Da hab ich mir beim Zusehen eingebildet, dass ich den Besen in die Hand nehmend, in Windeseile den ganzen braunen Politik-Dreck der weltweiten Erwachsenenwelt aus dem Weg kehre.

Nur mit einer Prise Fantasie. Es gelang.



Villa Wunder wirkte Wunder / Foto: Salto.bz

Sei in: [HOME](#) > [TEMPO LIBERO](#) > [ROMAN SIGNER PROTAGONISTA OGGI A SAN...](#)

Roman Signer protagonista oggi a San Lorenzo

Anche quest'anno l'artista svizzero Roman Signer è ospite di Transart con due performance/installazioni presso il maso della famiglia Hilber a San Lorenzo di Sebato, a cui il pubblico potrà...

Anche quest'anno l'artista svizzero Roman Signer è ospite di Transart con due performance/installazioni presso il maso della famiglia Hilber a San Lorenzo di Sebato, a cui il pubblico potrà assistere oggi alle ore 16.30: "Dach Lawine" e "Kreis Sprengung". Roman Signer è un artista atipico, le sue opere seguono principi entropici, concretizzandosi nei resti di un'esplosione, di una frana, qualcosa di simile alla land art.

Transart Doppel in Bruneck und St.Lorenzen

Am letzten Wochenende von Transart 17 verlagert das Festival seinen Schauplatz ins Pustertal und wartet am Samstag, 23. September in und um Bruneck mit zwei absoluten Höhepunkten auf – dem Schweizer Künstler Roman Signer und dem gefeierten Klangforum Wien.



Explosiver Auftakt mit Roman Signers "Dachlawine" auf dem Stadeldach des Hilber Bauer in St.Lorenzen und "Kreissprengung" ab 16.30 Uhr, Abends um 19.30 in Bruneck dann Klangforum Wien in der Federico Kaserne in Bruneck

Signers spektakuläre Installationen

Für das Museum ist Roman Signer zu schnell. Es knallt und raucht, doch nach ein paar Sekunden hat sich das Kunstwerk wieder verflüchtigt. Denn seine häufig mit dem Etikett „Zeitskulptur“ versehenen Werke sind nicht für die Ewigkeit gedacht, seine Kunst allerdings schon. Und so flüchtig Signers Installationen meist sind, so spektakulär sind sie: Sie rennen davon, laufen aus, spucken Feuer oder explodieren.

Mit der traditionellen Skulptur teilt er die handwerkliche Gestaltung physischer Materialien in drei Dimensionen; doch Signer erweitert sie um das, was man als vierte Dimension bezeichnen könnte, die Dimension der Zeit. 2014 ließ Roman Signer bei Transart den isländischen Pianisten Víkingur Ólafsson auf einem Floß auf dem Vernagter Stausee treibend gegen einen Hubschrauber antreten.

Bereits 2016 sollte von einem Stadeldach in Reischach die Dachlawine abgehen, jedoch stellte sich kurzfristig heraus, dass das gewählte Dach nicht über die notwendige statische Resistenz für diese explosiven Performances verfügte. Ein Jahr später ist ein neues Dach, diesmal beim Hilberbauern in St. Lorenzen gefunden und die Dachlawine kann starten.

[Weitere Informationen zu Roman Signers Installationen auf der Transart 2017 gibt es hier.](#)

Klangforum Wien in der Kaserne in Bruneck

Abends kehrt das Klangforum Wien zu Transart zurück und führt in seinem dreiteiligen Programm mit Hannes Kerschbaumer und Alexander Kaiser gleich zwei Südtiroler Komponisten der jüngeren Generation: *Schraffur* ist eine Technik, bei der durch das Überlagern und Anordnen von Linien Plastizität entsteht. Im gleichnamigen Stück überträgt Hannes Kerschbaumer dieses Prinzip auf die Musik. Für das Stück *Schraffur* hat er den renommierten Erste Bank Kompositionspreis 2017 erhalten.

Eine karge Berglandschaft, eine fiktive Liebesgeschichte, ein junger halluzinierender Kaser sieht sich als „schwanger“ Sterbender. Der Südtiroler Komponist Alexander Kaiser erzählt in seinem Opernfragment *Schwarzes Licht* die Geschichte des Schriftstellers, der heuer seinen 70. Geburtstag gefeiert hätte und zitiert dabei Prosa, Gedichte und Briefe N.C. Kasers. Der aus Udine stammende Komponist Simone Movio hat 2014 den Komponisten-Förderpreis der renommierten Ernst von Siemens Musikstiftung erhalten. Sein neues Werk *Logos III* schließt diesen hochkarätigen Abend ab.

[Weitere Informationen zum Klangforum Wien auf der Transart 2017 erhalten Sie hier.](#)

stol

Wallpaper*

Beyond belief: nothing is as it seems in the MSU Broad's latest exhibition



Beyond belief: nothing is as it seems in the MSU Broad's latest exhibition Installation view of 'The Transported Man' at the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum in Michigan. Courtesy of The Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at MSU

INFORMATION

'The Transported Man' is on view until 22 October. For more information, visit the [the Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum website](#)

ADDRESS

MSU Broad College
632 Bogue Street
East Lansing

'I needed a new challenge – you have to take risks,' says Marc-Olivier Wahler of his decision to become director of the five-year-old Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University, following stints at Palais de Tokyo in Paris and the Swiss Institute in New York. The Swiss-born curator, scholar, and critic makes his debut at the MSU Broad with 'The Transported Man', a dazzling opening act of a show that fills the museum's Zaha Hadid-designed home in East Lansing with the work of 40 artists. True to his word, Wahler observed the opening from a precarious perch: inside the belly of a giant alligator named Freddy.

The enormous reptile shuffles deliberately along the museum's gleaming blonde-wood floors in Christian Jankowski's *What Could Possibly Go Wrong?* (2017), an opening-day performance that lives on in the exhibition as a short video. When a breathless reporter aims his microphone at the creature's belly to procure an 'exclusive' interview with the imperiled director, Wahler calmly explains the theme of the show. 'When you see an illusion, a trick, you have to believe it's something magic,' he says, in a voice muffled slightly by his predicament. 'But at the same time, you know it's not. Both are equally important.'

The notion of belief — and just how far it can be stretched — animates and unites the 52 works of the exhibition, on view through 22 October. The title is borrowed from a trick depicted in the 1995 novel *The Prestige*, Christopher Priest's tale of dueling magicians in *fin-de-siècle* London (the exhibition includes a newly discovered George Méliès film from 1904 that chronicles a similar battle of prestidigitators, both played by Méliès himself).



The exhibition examines the power of interpretation and the systems of belief at stake when facing objects. Courtesy of The Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at MSU

Alluring illusions float throughout the show, gaining further dimension from an abundance of mirrors, including a looking glass autographed by Marcel Duchamp and Ugo Rondinone's rainbow wilderness of mirrored windows arrayed on a wall plastered with pages from recent editions of the *Detroit Free Press*. The disembodied cast hands of Urs Fischer and Jonathan Monk allude to sleight-of-hand finesse; a trio of large weeds that have taken root beneath Hadid's pleated steel walls reveal themselves to be the painted bronzes of Tony Matelli; and Roman Signer's wooden *Table* (2009) hovers several inches above the floor.

'The idea of levitation carries through this exhibition in different ways,' says Steven Bridges, assistant curator at MSU Broad. 'The overall tension of the show is that these encounters between what you see in front of you and what you know is physically possible don't boil down to singular points. If anything, they expand into greater moments and explorations.'

Which brings us to the (900lb) elephant in the room. Daniel Firman's *Loxodonta* (2017) is an extraordinarily realistic simulation of a life-sized elephant hanging — with all of the acrobatic elegance a pachyderm can muster — from the soaring double-height ceiling of the largest ground-floor gallery. Firman has managed to evoke a determined energy in the animal's splayed limbs; this is a performer, not a corpse. The work, which was completed on site, is also indicative of Wahler's grand ambitions for the Broad Museum MSU. 'We're interested in broadening the conversation around art rather than narrowing it down,' adds Bridges. 'There really is the sense that anything is possible.'

RELATED TOPICS: [SCULPTURE](#), [INSTALLATIONS](#)



Les soulèvements, une chaîne de citations

Au Jeu de Paume, à Paris, le philosophe et historien de l'art Georges Didi-Huberman saisit les éléments, les gestes, les mots et les images des mouvements populaires. Comment naissent-ils? Et meurent-ils vraiment?

Imprimées dans notre mémoire depuis la visite de *Soulèvements*, exposition du Jeu de Paume, ces deux images, un sachet rouge, un ruban rouge. Chacun virevolte, tourbillonne. Le sachet en plastique a été photographié dans le ciel bleu de Manhattan durant les mois qui ont suivi l'attentat contre les tours jumelles. Le cliché appartient à la série *Airborne* de Dennis Adams, faite de pages de journaux, de déchets, tous dans les airs, évoquant sans doute l'actualité traumatisante du 11-Septembre, mais aussi la grâce, le souffle de l'envol. Le ruban s'enfuit – mais la pièce est fermée –, se déroule en arabesques depuis un rouleau au centre d'une pièce dans une vidéo de **Roman Signer** (*Rotes Band*, 2005). Ce sont là deux œuvres dans une exposition qui en appelle aux documents, au témoignage des photographes, qui déjà impriment leur subjectivité, mais aussi aux artistes, peintres, vidéastes, qui subliment le moment historique, ou lui offrent leur clairvoyance.

Lancer le poing

Dans *Soulèvements*, on voit donc des œuvres d'art, souvent parsemées de ce rouge, couleur de sang et de colère, de drame et d'énergie tout à la fois. On y voit aussi beaucoup de photographies. Dont celles de Gilles Carron. En 1967, deux paysans bretons le corps tendu, renversé, pour lancer une pierre, pour lancer le poing simplement, et sur eux les regards d'autres manifestants sur cette place de Redon où la révolte gronde. Deux ans plus tard, on retrouve la même position du corps, le même mouvement du lancer, mais Gilles Carron saisit les manifestants anti-catholiques de Londonderry de dos, dans un décor de désolation, une rue jonchée de débris. Une de ses images de Derry sert d'ailleurs d'affiche à l'exposition. Les images de Gilles Carron évoquent une Histoire récente et pourtant déjà oubliée. A Redon, en 1967, des dizaines de blessés, à Londonderry, la bataille de Bogside fit neuf morts et des centaines de blessés...

Saisir un peu des mécanismes à l'oeuvre

A-t-on parlé de soulèvements? D'émeutes? Ces violences sont-elles légitimes? Ont-elles été légitimées par leurs contemporains? Et par l'Histoire? C'est moins une réponse à ces questions qu'une mise à plat des images – et des mots qui font images – que propose *Soulèvements* pour saisir un peu des mécanismes à l'oeuvre. Plutôt une ébauche de classement, comme sur la grande table où Georges Didi-Huberman a lui-même l'habitude de disperser les documents qui viennent nourrir sa pensée. La philosophie et l'histoire le disputent à l'esthétique et à la poésie dans cette répartition. Et c'est bien grâce à cette simple confrontation aux documents proposés, rassemblés en quatre groupes, plutôt que dans une scénographie minimaliste, que l'exposition devient source de raison et d'émotion. D'abord, il y a l'idée même, physique, du soulèvement. Le sachet d'Adams et le ruban de Signer cités ci-dessus appartiennent à cette section. Dans l'ouvrage, qui accompagne l'exposition, les philosophes appelés à dissenter développent tous cette partie. Jacques Rancière demande: «Qu'y a-t-il au monde qui ne se soulève? C'est à cela que la vie se reconnaît: le battement sous la peau, la respiration qui soulève imperceptiblement un drap, le vent qui meut également la poussière qui est le symbole du rien et la vague qui sert de symbole au tout, figurant aussi bien le calme de son mouvement régulier ou le déchaînement de ses tempêtes.»

«Les murs prennent la parole»

Puis il y a, plus précisément, le geste, section à laquelle appartiennent les photographies de Carron. Le bras, le poing sont mis à contribution, mais aussi la bouche. «Dans le geste de se soulever, chaque corps proteste de tous ses membres, chaque bouche s'ouvre et s'exclame dans le non-refus et dans le oui-désir», résume Georges Didi-Huberman. Pour l'illustrer, le philosophe convoque notamment La Montserrat, cette paysanne en foulard que Julio González sculpte et peint dans les années 1930 et jusqu'à sa mort en 1942, tour à tour réaliste ou cubiste, mais toujours hurlant, de douleur, de colère, de révolte, de frayeur aussi.

Du cri, l'on passe aux mots, dans la troisième section. Les mots qui font textes, chansons, images, qui font cris. Dans les tracts, et en particulier les «ciné-tracts» de 1968, dans les journaux, et jusque dans les réseaux sociaux, Georges Didi-Huberman capte une «intelligence particulière – attentive à la forme – qui est inhérente aux livres de résistance ou de soulèvements. Jusqu'à ce que les murs eux-mêmes prennent la parole.» Il s'intéresse au «Dada soulève tout» de Soupault en 1921, aux surréalistes, mais aussi aux tracts de la résistance gaulliste. Parmi les œuvres exposées, ces pages de journaux qu'en 1976 Sigmar Polke, peintre d'histoire contemporain, utilisant les moyens de la rue, spraye en bleu et rouge. Sur les textes du Tages-Anzeiger, sur les publicités s'imprime une foule de manifestants portant une banderole dont l'inscription est aussi le titre de l'œuvre: «Contre les deux superpuissances, pour une Suisse rouge».

Un souvenir qui n'éteint pas le désir

Polke que l'on retrouve dans la section suivante, celle des conflits et de l'embrasement, avec A Versailles, A Versailles, réalisé pour les commémorations de la Révolution française à partir d'une gravure où l'on voit hommes et femmes brandissant des piques. L'artiste a aussi peint la suite, c'est-à-dire la tête sur la pique, mais là, ce n'est plus le soulèvement, juste sa sanglante échéance – son échec peut-être –, et elle n'est pas présente au Jeu de Paume.

Pourtant, l'exposition n'éluide ni la violence ni les morts. Les cercueils des insurgés de la Commune, des fusillés des troupes zapatistes, ce gréviste assassiné photographié par Manuel Alvarez Bravo en 1934, ou encore ces morts lors d'une manifestation du Front de libération grec entourés de leurs camarades à Athènes, en 1944, tous ces cadavres lestent la mémoire des soulèvements.

«Les soulèvements sont donc une suite d'échecs qui réussissent»

Mais ce souvenir des victimes n'éteint pas le désir. C'est ce que dit la cinquième et dernière partie de l'exposition, où l'on trouve le triptyque de Miró L'Espoir du condamné à mort (1974). On a beaucoup reproché à cette exposition de ne pas prendre en compte le combat féministe et c'est en effet un vrai manque. Les femmes y sont pourtant présentes, figures des combats, comme La Pasionaria Dolores Ibárruri, et en tant qu'artistes. L'ouvrage donne aussi la parole à autant de femmes que d'hommes, et notamment à Judith Butler, avec qui nous concluons: «Les soulèvements sont donc une suite d'échecs qui réussissent en complétant la série et se transforment en révolution. En 1831, en Jamaïque, des esclaves se sont mis en grève, réclamant d'être payés pour leur travail [...] quoiqu'ils aient finis par être maîtrisés, emprisonnés et, pour beaucoup, exécutés, on estime que ce soulèvement a contribué à mettre fin, en 1834, à l'esclavage pratiqué par les Britanniques. Tous les soulèvements ont échoué, mais, pris ensemble, ils ont réussi.»

A voir

«Soulèvements», exposition au Jeu de Paume, Paris, jusqu'au 15 janvier.

www.jeudepaume.org

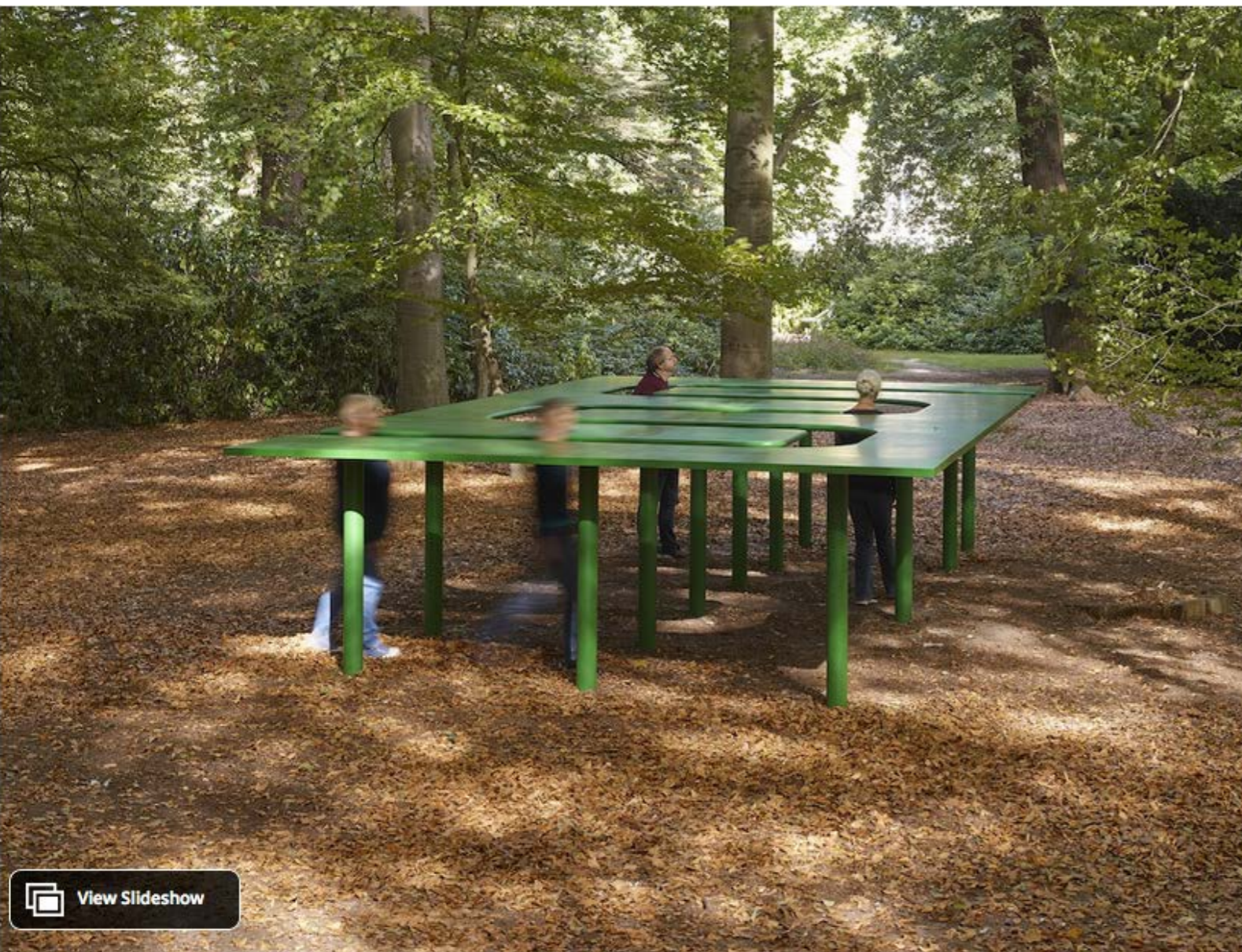
Accompagnée de la riche plateforme

soulevements.jeudepaume.org et de «Soulèvements», catalogue en coédition Jeu de Paume/Gallimard, 420 p.

A lire

Georges Didi-Huberman, «Peuples en larmes, peuples en armes», L'Œil de l'histoire, 6, Editions de Minuit, 464 p.

Roman Signer's 'Projet pour un jardin' at Middelheim Museum, Antwerp



Roman Signer, *Projet pour un jardin*, 2016 / Permanent work Middelheim Museum - Courtesy of the artist / Photo: Simon Vogel.

RELATED

VENUES

Middelheim Museum

ARTISTS

Roman Signer


Middelheim Museum is playing host to Roman Signer with two actions and new work specially created for the museum. The exhibition is on display until April 2, 2017.

Through "Projet pour un jardin," the museum offers a chance to be acquainted with the idiosyncratic works of the Swiss artist Roman Signer, a sculptor who combines poetry, science and action in his work in his own unique manner. "Projet pour un jardin" links Roman Signer's international career with his love of Sankt Gallen in Switzerland, where he has lived and worked since 1971. 'Jardin' is about something homely, something personal, and something familiar. Signer combines natural elements such as water, wind, earth and fire with simple props such as rockets and balloons. The result is often surprising, absurd and poetic.

The exhibition is on view at Middelheim Museum, Middelheimlaan 61, 2020 Antwerp, Belgium.

For details, visit: <https://pers.middelheimmuseum.be/roman-signer-brprojet-pour-un-jardin#>

Click on the slideshow for a sneak peek at the exhibition.

 View Slideshow

Reviews

Georges Didi-Huberman Curates the Most Important Show of this Tumultuous Year

The time is ripe for an exhibition titled 'Uprisings.'

Emily Nathan, November 26, 2016



Dennis Adams, *Patriot* (2002). Image courtesy Galerie Gabrielle Maubrie, ©Dennis Adams.

Ah, Paris: home of the philosopher-artist and the artist-philosopher; land of the cobblestones that birthed the *flâneur*, that most ruminative of wanderers, and inspired the likes of Gustave Caillebotte and Edouard Manet to pick up their paintbrushes. Given the city's history, it comes as no surprise that one of its most esteemed institutions for contemporary art, the Jeu de Paume, has now devoted two of its three floors to a multi-media exhibition curated by French philosopher-art historian Georges Didi-Huberman.

On view through January 15, 2017, "Soulèvements" (Uprisings) is a thought experiment conducted through images. As its title suggests, the show's theme is the notion of "rising up," and Didi-Huberman tackles the many facets of that broad concept through paintings, drawings, films, sculptures, videos, installations, and archival documents, made across centuries and geographies.

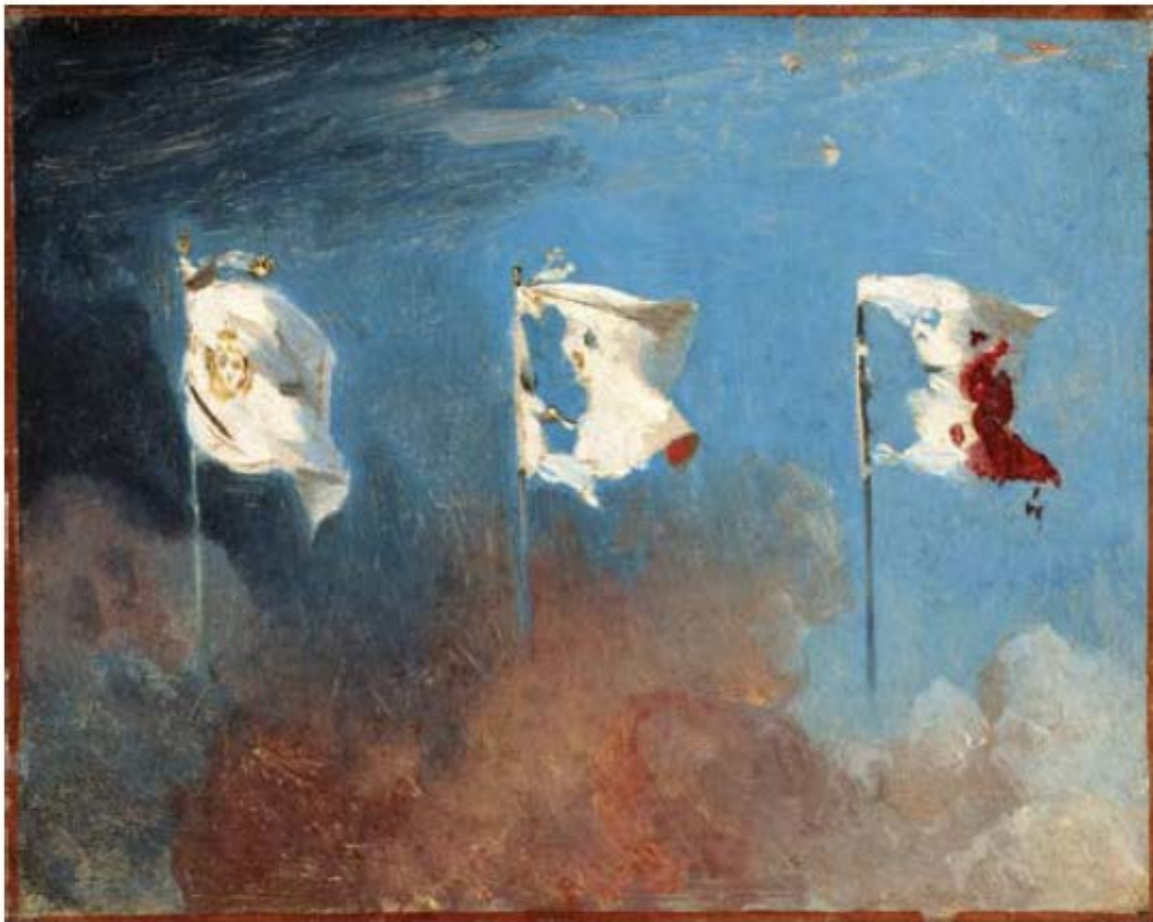
Some of the works on view are anonymous, including a number of fascinating satirical cartoons and illustrations, but the majority are by renowned artists, writers, and thinkers, historic and contemporary alike: Harun Farocki, Francisco de Goya, Nietzsche, Roman Signer, Joseph Beuys, Victor Hugo, Alan Sekula, and Sergei Eisenstein make appearances, among many others.

EXPOSITION

SOULÈVEMENTS – Jeu de Paume, Paris 8^e
Jusqu'au 15 janvier 2017

« Soulèvements » : une exposition qui a du souffle au Jeu de Paume

Les musées ont longtemps été des lieux dédiés à la conservation. Ils sont désormais ceux de la contestation. Au Jeu de Paume, une exposition du philosophe et historien de l'art Georges Didi-Huberman met en scène la thématique des soulèvements. À quelques encablures, à l'espace de l'image-document du BAL, Diane Dufour revient sur les mouvements insurrectionnels du Japon des années 1960. À Cherbourg, le centre d'art du Point du jour remet en lumière la fameuse révolte de la prison d'Attica dans l'État de New York en 1971. Le fil rouge de l'insubordination court d'un accrochage l'autre, effet sans doute d'une époque qui souffre d'inertie et manifeste le besoin pressant de soulever le couvercle. *Par Natacha Wolinski*



Léon Cogniet,
Les Drapeaux, 1830,
huile sur toile.
Musée des beaux-arts,
Orléans.
Photo : François
Lauginie.

L'IMAGERIE
FOISONNANTE
ET TELLURIQUE
CONVOQUÉE
PAR GEORGES
DIDI-HUBERMAN
PUISE AUTANT
DANS L'HISTOIRE
DE LA PEINTURE
QUE DANS CELLE
DU CINÉMA, DE
LA VIDÉO, DE LA
PHOTOGRAPHIE
OU DE
L'INSTALLATION

Roman Signer,
Rotes Band / Red Tape,
2005, vidéo couleur,
son, 2'07".
Caméra : Aleksandra
Signer. Courtesies de
l'artiste
et Art : Concept,
Paris.



Raymond Hains,
*OAS. Fusillez les
plastiqueurs*, 1961,
affiche déchirée et
marouflée. Collection
particulière.
© ADAGP, Paris,
2016. Photo : Michel
Marcuzzi.

■ Au Jeu de Paume donc, une exposition euphorisante qui repose sur le pari que se soulever, « *c'est retrouver la divine énergie du désir* », pour reprendre les mots de Marie-José Mondzain, l'une des six auteures du catalogue. L'imagerie foisonnante et tellurique convoquée par Georges Didi-Huberman – près de 105 prêteurs – puise autant dans l'histoire de la peinture que dans celle du cinéma, de la vidéo, de la photographie ou de l'installation. De Goya à Tina Modotti, de Victor Hugo à Eisenstein, de Dada à Annette Messager, 282 œuvres attestent d'une persistance de gestes immémoriaux nés de l'effroi, de l'émotion et du refus, gestes qui constituent la première étape d'actions qui vont de la manifestation à la grève en passant par le *hacking*. Le corps est le vecteur premier de cette dynamique irrépressible, relayé par la parole. « *Les éléments se déchainent, les bras se lèvent, les bouches s'ouvrent, les corps s'animent, les mots s'affichent aux murs, les tracts et les poèmes fusent, les*

SUITE DE LA PAGE 18 *barricades s'élèvent, les révoltes s'expriment et, par-delà l'échec parfois des insurrections, le désir de résistance perdure* » : c'est avec ce tempo crescendo que Georges Didi-Huberman a construit un accrochage qui se déploie sur les deux étages du Jeu de Paume. Dans la lignée d'Aby Warburg, il souligne la circulation des mêmes motifs à travers l'histoire et laisse les œuvres dialoguer entre elles, activant au passage l'imaginaire du visiteur. Il croise les époques et les frontières, les drapeaux de la monarchie tachés de sang peints par Léon Cogniet et les drapeaux de la place Tahrir filmés par Jasmina Metwaly, l'ouvrier gréviste assassiné à Mexico photographié par Manuel Alvarez-Bravo et les morts de la Commune dessinés par Manet. Il libère une danse universelle, une sorte de transe qui fait des manifestants cadrés par Gilles Caron de magnifiques funambules, des tables et rubans filmés par Roman Signer des objets délivrés de la pesanteur, du mot « *mierda* » calligraphié par Federico García Lorca une boucle d'encre hypnotique. L'exposition, portée par un formidable lyrisme des formes, est ouvertement politique même si Georges Didi-Huberman précise qu'« *il s'agit (pour lui) de prendre position sans pour autant prendre parti* ». Difficile pourtant de ne pas voir dans sa proposition une forme de réponse aux temps présents, surtout lorsqu'il aborde, en fin de parcours, la question des migrations et rejoint ainsi l'actualité la plus brûlante. Le film poignant de Maria Kourkouta sur la marche des migrants à la frontière gréco-macédonienne laisse peu d'espoir quant à des jours meilleurs. Mais le

Roman Signer voyage au pays de ses obsessions

Photo Le Centre de la photographie Genève pose la question de la trace en faisant dialoguer clichés et sculptures de l'artiste saint-gallois.



1 | 5 Reisetfotos, «2015, UK/London» Image: Roman Signer - Courtesy Häusler Contemporary (5 Images) < >

Par Irène Languin

@Gazonee

18.10.2016

Vienne, 1990. Une dame en blouse de ménage fait les vitres, debout dans l'encadrement d'une fenêtre d'un haut immeuble bourgeois. L'éventualité d'une chute vertigineuse contraste avec l'insouciance banalité de la tâche. Tirée d'une série d'instantanés pris durant ses voyages (*Reisetfotos*), l'image dit l'une des obsessions récurrentes de Roman Signer, notamment connu pour ses performances à la dynamite: l'exposition d'un corps humain au danger.

Une quarantaine de photos de l'artiste né à Appenzell en 1938, actuellement présentées au Centre de la photographie Genève (CPG), mettent en exergue les motifs récurrents qui parcourent son travail – la neige, le vent, les explosions, les fumées et vapeurs, les maisons à l'architecture simple. Intitulée *Le temps gelé/die gefrorene Zeit*, l'exposition met en regard les clichés avec trois œuvres sculpturales évoquant la trace.

La plus emblématique d'entre elles consiste en un Autoportrait constitué du poids et de la hauteur de la chute, soit l'empreinte des pieds nus de Signer, obtenue par un saut dans une caisse en bois remplie de glaise humide. « Cette pièce, réalisée en 1972, est importante car elle fonctionne comme une déclaration d'intention pour toute l'œuvre à venir », souligne Joerg Bader, directeur du CPG. On peut aussi y voir une métaphore de ce qu'est la photographie, soit une trace lumineuse sur un support photosensible, qui fige un instant dans l'éternité.

Ce moment « gelé » sur la pellicule révèle au spectateur des situations qui, usuellement, lui échappent et participent d'un enjeu essentiel pour Roman Signer: l'artiste procède comme un sculpteur du temps. Pour preuve, *Explosion*, une photo prise dans son atelier en 1975, montre une multitude de bouts de bois suspendus à des fils de nylon, figurant la fraction de seconde d'après la déflagration. Ou encore l'image de ce réveil disposé sur un petit radeau de bois voguant sur un fleuve: « Il était programmé pour sonner six heures après sa mise à l'eau, raconte Joerg Bader. Dans l'espoir de sortir un pêcheur de sa paix... »

Roman Signer. Le temps gelé Centre de la photographie Genève, 20, rue des Bains. Jusqu'au 23 novembre.

(TDG)

(Créé: 17.10.2016, 18h25)



REGARD

Roman Signer fige les accidents du paysage

Le Centre de la photographie de Genève expose ses clichés de voyage, qui n'ont rien de ceux d'un touriste ordinaire

3 minutes de lecture

Arts plastiques Expositions

Elisabeth Chardon
Publié lundi 17 octobre 2016 à 19:32

Partager Tweeter in Partager

Le nom de Roman Signer est synonyme de performance explosive, le genre de rendez-vous où chacun tente d'être à la meilleure place, l'œil et l'oreille aux aguets, et depuis quelques années, avec de quoi témoigner qu'on y était, puisqu'on a tout bien vu dans le cadre de son smartphone. Voir, capter le moment, c'est le défi de l'artiste à ceux qui le suivent. Lui se débrouille plutôt bien en la matière. En regardant ses clichés de voyage pris en Pologne, ou en Ukraine, en Islande ou en Suisse, exposés au Centre de la photographie à Genève, on se dit que tous ces instantanés qu'il a fabriqués pour nous depuis des décennies, qui nous semblent si inattendus et artificiels, il les avait en fait lui-même entraperçus une fois ou l'autre dans le réel. Les choses sont plus étranges et passionnantes que ne le prétendent les ennuyeux, les blasés, et il faut des Roman Signer pour nous le rappeler.

Il y a par exemple cette bouche d'égout d'où surgissent quatre jets de vapeur, ces grandes couvertures sur un étendage au milieu de la campagne avec sur l'une un tigre géant et sur l'autre un ballet de dauphins, cette cascade de glace tombant d'un toit jusqu'au trottoir, ce vélo dont les roues sont posées comme en miroir au-dessus de deux pavages arrondis de même diamètre. Ou encore, cette paysanne en jaquette rose accrochée à l'arrière d'un tracteur ou cette laveuse de vitres en blouse ciel debout dans l'embrasure d'une fenêtre élevée

Roman Signer, Suisse,
1995. Roman Signer



ROMAN SIGNER : «MON TRAVAIL PARLE DU DANGER, DU RISQUE»

Par [Clémentine Mercier](#)
— 15 octobre 2016 à 19:35

A l'occasion d'une son exposition à Genève, l'artiste suisse parle de son regard photographique. Un déclenchement tout aussi nécessaire que ses célèbres explosions.

Le paysage comme laboratoire

Toutes ces situations qui prêtent à sourire, à s'étonner, à philosopher parfois, le jardinier et paysagiste Gilles Clément en collectionne aussi les clichés et ils lui ont d'ailleurs permis de développer un *Traité succinct de l'art involontaire* (Sens & Tonka, 2014). Roman Signer et Gilles Clément en frères d'observation et de création? Ils ont en tout cas en partage le même atelier, le même laboratoire de prédilection, le paysage. Depuis 2009, ils font d'ailleurs partie des artistes intervenus dans l'estuaire nantais de façon plus ou moins pérenne, le paysagiste avec un Jardin du tiers-paysage, l'artiste avec un long pendule de sept mètres qui bat le temps, inexorablement, sur la façade d'une ancienne centrale à béton. L'un s'absente presque de sa création quand l'autre semble s'y imposer, l'un observe et modèle le temps qui passe et l'accident qui le bouscule, quand l'autre les sculpte, les provoque.

Dans l'exposition genevoise, quelques sculptures mettent ainsi en lien le travail d'observation et de création de Roman Signer. Dont cet *Autoportrait par le poids et la hauteur de chute*, posé au milieu de la salle, au risque qu'on s'y prenne les pieds. Justement, il s'agit en fait d'une empreinte des pieds de l'artiste dans la glaise. Mais c'est aussi la trace d'une action. Nous pouvons peser sur le monde, et le regarder, c'est déjà s'impliquer, nous dit l'artiste, c'est vivre vraiment, ne pas passer à côté de tout.

Roman Signer, le temps gelé. Centre de la photographie, rue des Bains 28, Genève. Ma-di 11-18h, jusqu'au 13 novembre.
www.centrephotogeneve.ch



Roman Signer : «Mon travail parle du danger, du risque»



Rencontré lors de l'inauguration de sa belle exposition au Centre de la photographie de Genève, où il montre ses clichés méconnus réalisés lors de voyages ou au cours de performances, l'artiste suisse revient sur la spécificité de ses photographies. Légendaire pour ses interventions sur la matière qu'il transforme très souvent avec des explosifs, il loue aussi

Quand sortez-vous votre appareil photo ?

«

Je ne suis qu'un amateur. Je le sors quand je vais en voyage ou alors quand je dois faire une explosion. A l'étranger, quand je vois quelque chose d'intéressant, je fais une photo. Je vois tout en sculpture, ma vue est « sculpturale ». Et cela devient une sculpture quand il y a des couleurs, comme ce tas jaune dans un port, ou alors quand il y a une situation. Ici à Vienne, (il montre la photo de la femme qui nettoie les carreaux sur un rebord de fenêtre), j'ai trouvé cela extrêmement dangereux. C'était au cinquième étage.

Quelle est la part d'improvisation ?

«

Pour la photo du vélo, il était là, je n'ai rien bougé. Ce sont des situations trouvées, rien n'est mis en scène. Comme ces lampes tordues en Islande dans un village où il y a eu beaucoup de morts après une avalanche. Ce n'est pas toujours rigolo ce que je fais.

Vos explosions, c'est dangereux ?

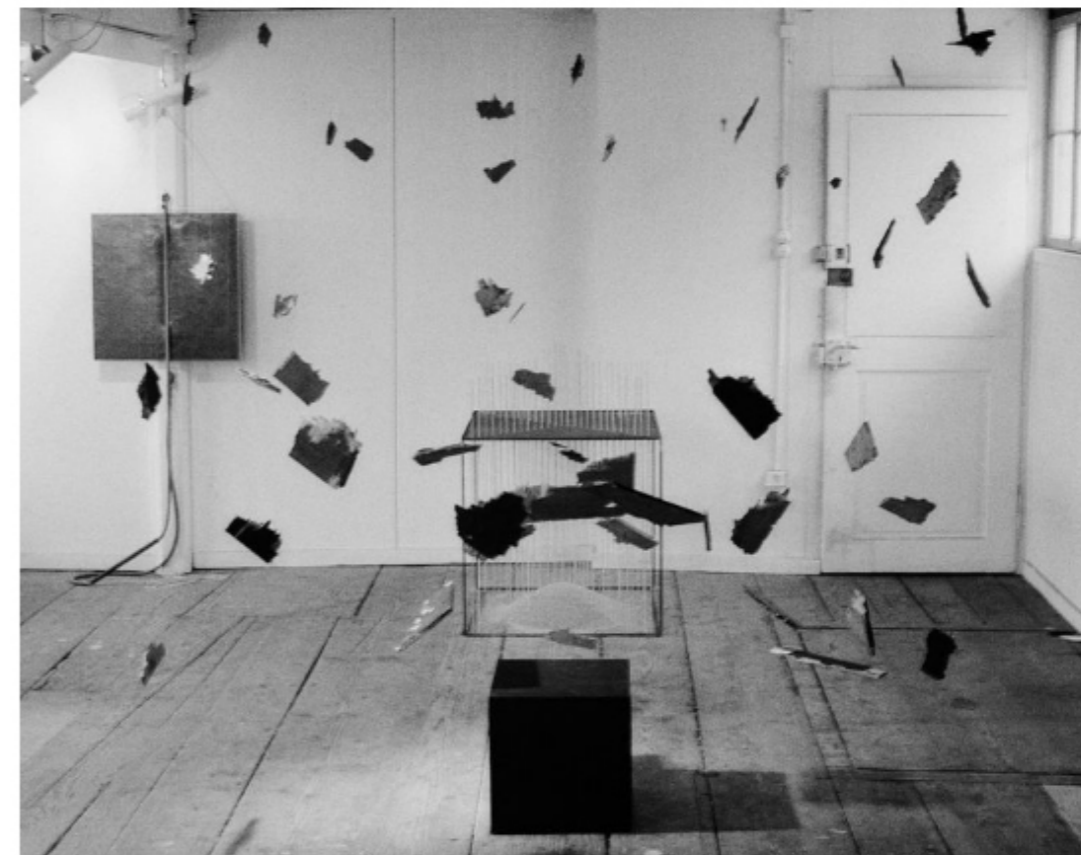
«

Mes explosions sont moins dangereuses que ce que fait cette femme sur la fenêtre car, moi, je me tiens à distance, avec des fils électriques. Le plus dangereux dans les explosifs, c'est la poudre noire. Parce qu'il faut une toute petite flamme. Je ne suis pas un expert mais je comprends bien les explosifs, j'ai fait beaucoup de tests. J'en connais bien les dangers.

Vous venez d'une famille de bricoleurs ?

«

Non, mon père était musicien. Il donnait des cours de violon et de clarinette. Mon grand-père était serrurier. J'ai fait beaucoup d'essais dans ma jeunesse car mon oncle avait une quincaillerie qui vendait des explosifs pour les paysans qui les utilisaient dans la forêt. Quand j'ai commencé à faire des essais, ce n'était pas dans un but artistique, c'était pour le plaisir mais cela m'intéressait aussi beaucoup de voir comment le bois était découpé par une explosion. J'ai commencé en 1975 à travailler avec. On pouvait encore en acheter librement, bien sur, si l'on avait 18 ans et si l'on avait pas fait de prison. Ensuite, mon oncle n'a plus pu m'en vendre. J'ai pris des cours et j'ai obtenu mon permis en 1985. Il y a différentes catégories: j'ai le B qui permet d'utiliser des choses électriques. Le permis C, c'est pour les maîtres. Moi, je ne peux pas démolir une maison avec de la dynamite. Le permis B, cela me suffit, car je peux tout acheter – c'est très important- mais il y a des règles, mais je ne peux pas démolir des maisons, alors je fais des petites choses, je fais des petites choses pyrotechniques. On dit toujours ça de moi pour faire un peu rigolo. Aujourd'hui, on voit d'autres artistes qui font des explosions.



«

Dans l'explosion, il y a quelque chose qui rappelle l'acte photographique.

Quand j'ai commencé à faire des explosions, j'ai commencé à filmer aussi. J'ai regardé ensuite mes films au ralenti pour les étudier. Pour moi, le « bang » n'est pas intéressant, ce sont les mouvements qui sont intéressants. Il se passe beaucoup de choses que l'on ne voit pas à l'œil nu.

«

Pour cette sculpture, vous avez sauté à pieds joints sur de la terre glaise.

Oui, d'une hauteur de 45 centimètres. J'étais plus léger à l'époque (!). Je n'aime pas que l'on dise le « Spreng Kunstler ». Je ne veux pas qu'on me fixe dans ce domaine. Les gens qui disent ça, ils ne comprennent pas grand-chose. L'explosion pour moi est fascinante, non pas pour sa force terrible mais pour tous les éléments que ça déclenche. L'explosif est beaucoup plus compliqué qu'on ne pense. Il y a beaucoup d'usages. Par exemple, dans les voitures, les air bags marchent à l'explosion. Les fusées aussi. Il y a beaucoup de choses qui reposent sur cette technique. Cela se déclenche si vite, en un millième de seconde.

«

Un air bag, c'est comme le big bang ?

Oui, et ça sauve des vies. Dans les air bag, ce sont des pilules qui explosent et qui libèrent un gaz. Et les moteurs, c'est aussi des explosions. Dans une voiture, imaginez, nous sommes assis sur des explosions : pouf, pouf, pouf, pouf. On ne pense pas assez à cela. Ce sont des moteurs à explosion : c'est simple, c'est clair, ça fait brrrr, mais ça marche. Cela ne m'intéresse pas seulement techniquement mais culturellement. Car cela a changé notre vie. Au commencement, on a essayé de faire des moteurs avec de la poudre ou avec de la vapeur, mais cela n'a pas marché. On peut tout faire avec de la dynamite même des diamants, en creusant des tunnels.

«

Votre travail parle de l'absurdité du monde contemporain ?

C'est complètement absurde que le prix Nobel de la Paix soit financé par les explosifs, avec l'argent de la dynamite ! Oui, cela me fait un peu rire, car c'est absurde. Moi, ce qui m'intéresse aussi, c'est la culture que cela entraîne. Alfred Nobel avait une villa à San Remo. Il avait un bateau et il a été sur la mer faire des explosions. Bang. A l'époque, c'était encore possible et les gens ont pensé qu'il était fou, cet Alfred Nobel. Aujourd'hui, ce serait impossible.

«

Surtout en France...

Oui, c'est déjà dangereux de se promener avec un sac à dos car c'est l'image même du terroriste d'avoir un sac sur le dos. Mais il y a d'autres possibilités de faire du terrorisme que les explosifs. Les voitures, le poison...



En Suisse, pourtant, il n'y a pas l'air d'avoir de danger...

«

Aujourd'hui, en Suisse, presque tout est protégé. Tout est réglé. Alors, moi, je fais quand même des choses illégales. J'ai un terrain dans le canton d'Appenzell et là, je peux faire ce que je veux. Près d'un hôtel, le directeur m'a fait des papiers pour m'autoriser à faire des choses, pas trop fortes quand même. Je fais attention aux hôtes de l'hôtel, alors je ne fais pas toujours exploser des choses mais je lance plutôt des fusées. J'ai le droit officiellement de le faire et la police ne peut pas entrer. C'est privé et c'est très bien. Chaque année, un policier vient contrôler ce que j'ai, mon trésor. J'ai un cahier où je note tout ce que j'achète et tout ce que j'utilise. Mais le policier est gentil, il m'appelle toujours avant de venir. Il est venu d'ailleurs en septembre et il m'a fait une signature et un tampon. Il m'a dit « es stimmt alles, wie befurtet » (tout est parfait, comme je le craignais).

Vous aimez les explosifs mais aussi les matériaux pauvres...

«

J'ai toujours travaillé avec des choses qui existent déjà : les sceaux, les parapluies. J'aime les choses qui ont une histoire. Non je ne pense pas à Magritte, avec le parapluie. Mon travail n'est pas surréaliste. Moi, c'est absurde, pas surréaliste. Ce que je fais n'est pas calculé, je suis mes envies. S'il y a de l'humour dans mon travail, ce n'est pas forcé ni recherché. Cela vient. C'est naturel. On me compare toujours à Buster Keaton. C'est un grand artiste mais lui voulait faire rire les gens et moi je ne veux pas les faire rire. Je n'attends pas cela d'eux. Je cherche à ce qu'ils gardent les yeux ouverts. C'est une autre démarche. On peut bien sûr rire, mais ce n'est pas le but.



Vous photographiez ou utilisez dans vos installations une paire de bottes noires ?

«

J'aime les bottes car c'est une part de ma jeunesse. Mon grand-père avait une serrurerie au bord d'une rivière et il avait de grandes bottes. J'allais souvent dans la rivière elles. Je trouvais cela fantastique, on sentait le froid de l'eau et on était au sec. Il avait un atelier de métal et de construction. Lui était bricoleur mais mon père non. Il n'était pas doué. Chaque année, avant Noël il fallait poser le sapin et faire un trou. C'était une catastrophe. Je viens d'une famille d'artisans. Mais mon père était musicien, son père était fromager. Et avant, c'était des paysans.

CRITIQUE

Roman Signer, le doigt sur le déclencheur

Par Clémentine Mercier — 14 octobre 2016 à 17:31



Photo tirée de la série «Reisefoto», «2015,UK/London». Photo Roman Signer.
Courtesy Haüsler Contemporary



A Genève, une exposition réunit les œuvres du Suisse, célèbre pour son art de manier la dynamite et sa capacité à capter les situations absurdes de la vie, quitte à les provoquer.

➔ Roman Signer, le doigt sur le déclencheur

Un réveille-matin est posé sur un radeau en bois. Drôle d'idée que cette installation qui flotte comme une bouteille à la mer avec, pour seul passager, une horloge. «*Ce jour-là, j'avais réglé la sonnerie afin qu'elle sonne six heures plus tard. Puis j'ai laissé dériver le radeau. Le réveil a dû sonner et je pense que cela a effrayé un pêcheur. Mais peut-être qu'il ne s'est rien passé non plus...*» explique Roman Signer.

Pourquoi les artistes suisses utilisent-ils tant l'humour ?

«

Parce que c'est nécessaire. Parce qu'ici, tout est sérieux. Les artistes ont ce pouvoir. Cela a une fonction de soupape. Moi, je n'appartiens à aucune direction de l'art. Je n'appartiens pas au land art, pas au surréalisme, ni au minimalisme. Je n'appartiens à aucun « isme ».

Au «Roman Signerisme», peut-être ?

«

Oui.

A LIRE AUSSI

Roman Signer, le doigt sur le déclencheur ➔

Accrochée à la fin de l'exposition que lui consacre le Centre de la photographie à Genève - lové au sein du Mamco, le Musée d'art contemporain - et intitulée *Sonner sur le fleuve*, l'œuvre date de 1986. Déjà, l'artiste suisse né à Saint-Gall avait l'âme farceuse, mais une farce à l'esprit sérieux. «*C'est un homme de paradoxes*, suggère Joerg Bader, directeur du Centre. *Roman Signer dit toujours "il faut garder les pieds sur terre", mais il a la tête dans les nuages.*» Plus connu pour ses installations, performances et vidéos, Roman Signer présente à Genève 38 photographies, dont les plus anciennes remontent à 1972. Souvent, il les a prises au cours de ses voyages, à l'affût de ready-made ou de situations absurdes. Son art pourrait d'ailleurs être résumé dans le fragile dispositif du radeau à sonnette : compte à rebours et déclenchement (n'est-ce pas aussi le processus de la photographie ?). Il faut imaginer la tête du pêcheur surpris par la sonnerie du réveil. D'apparence innocente, l'objet quotidien se transforme en machine tueuse pour pêcheurs fragiles du cœur.

Rouages.

«*Mon travail parle du danger, du risque*», confie l'artiste. A 78 ans, il est encore l'enfant terrible qui glisse des grains de sable dans l'horlogerie huilée de son pays. Pour en gripper les rouages et y introduire des trous noirs. Le titre de l'exposition, «le Temps gelé», s'inspire de plusieurs photos, dont une réalisée en Pologne. Une nuit glacée, Signer pose des textiles humides sur des fils à étendre le linge. Le lendemain, les tissus, loin d'être secs, ont pris la forme de la corde. L'artiste prend la photo : «*On dirait un tunnel.*» Dans la même veine, il y a cette photographie, en hiver toujours, de la façade d'un immeuble avec une gouttière défectueuse : l'eau a coulé et forme une énorme stalactite, menaçante pour les piétons. Il y a aussi cette image d'une mamie qui s'accroche à un tracteur en marche sur une autoroute, ou celle d'une femme de ménage qui nettoie des vitres debout sur un rebord de fenêtre sans aucun filet de sécurité. «*C'était à Vienne, la dame était au cinquième étage*, précise l'artiste. *J'ai trouvé cela extrêmement dangereux. En comparaison, mes explosions le sont beaucoup moins car, moi, j'utilise des fils, je mets une distance entre le danger et moi.*»



Photo tirée de la série «Reisefoto», 1997, USA/Detroit. Photo Roman Signer. Courtesy Häusler Contemporary

Cocasses.

Roman Signer s'est rendu célèbre pour son art de manier la dynamite. Il a d'ailleurs un permis spécial (le B) délivré par les autorités, renouvelé chaque année. Jeune homme, en forêt, il faisait péter les bâtons de dynamite que son oncle lui fournissait. Fasciné par l'effet de la déflagration sur la matière, il a voulu en étudier les détails. La photo *Explosion* (1975) reconstitue ce processus : des morceaux déchiquetés flottent en apesanteur. Il est souvent appelé «*l'artiste artificier*» ou même «*le diable du feu*», comme s'il était un Buster Keaton pyrotechnique. «*Ce que je fais n'est pas rigolo*», assène-t-il. Si l'aspect purement plastique de l'explosion le fascine, c'est la signification culturelle des explosifs qu'il souligne en s'interrogeant sur cette schizophrénie : «*C'est complètement absurde que le prix Nobel de la paix soit financé par les explosifs, avec l'argent de la dynamite ! Oui, cela me fait rire, car c'est absurde.*»

L'exposition met en perspective photographie et sculpture en ponctuant le parcours d'installations: des pots de peinture blanche explosés projettent des ombres noires. A côté, les photographies captent des instants cocasses : un labrador blanc devant un ours polaire empaillé, des bottes vides dans l'eau. «*Je vois tout en sculpture, ma vue est sculpturale.*» Avec la photographie, il est un sculpteur en quatre dimensions, puisqu'il tranche dans le temps. Dans ses images, le fiasco, dérivé absurde du chaos, menace : des chaises longues gonflées par le vent ont propulsé leurs propriétaires en l'air, un jet de vapeur jaillit du sol comme si la terre était une cocotte-minute. Le monde est sous pression et Roman Signer ouvre les soupapes.

A lire sur Libération.fr une interview de [Roman Signer](#). ◀

[Clémentine Mercier](#)

Artiste de mèche

Vendredi 07 octobre 2016 **Samuel Schellenberg**

Figure de l'art contemporain suisse, Roman Signer expose d'étonnants clichés de voyage au Centre de la photo, à Genève.



Dans les photos de voyage de Roman Signer, le banal côtoie l'insolite.
JEAN-PATRICK DI SILVESTRO

La situation est passablement signerienne, somme toute: alors que l'artiste et l'auteur de ces lignes tentent d'avoir une conversation, au Centre de la photographie de Genève, l'interview est régulièrement interrompue par des bruits assourdissants. Ce pourrait être les explosions et autres carambolages qui émaillent tout l'œuvre de Roman Signer, à l'exemple de la déflagration d'innombrables feuilles de papier qu'il orchestre à la Documenta de Kassel en 1987; ou du suicide d'un triporteur Piaggio qu'il met en scène dans un centre d'art autrichien, en le faisant dévaler une rampe chargée de lourds barils d'eau. A moins qu'il ne s'agisse de la détonation qui a donné sa forme à la silhouette de *Yeti Figur* (1975), installée au Centre de la photo?

Rien de tout cela: le tintamarre vient des murs qu'on abat énergiquement un étage plus haut, au Mamco. C'était il y a trois semaines, juste avant le vernissage du «Temps gelé», exposition dans laquelle on suit l'artiste au fil de ses voyages autour du monde. Pas vraiment des souvenirs de vacances: «Lorsque je suis invité pour une exposition à l'étranger, j'en profite pour regarder autour de moi. J'ai immortalisé des moments qui m'intéressent, qui ont parfois une relation avec mes sculptures», explique Roman Signer dans son français aux intonations suisses-orientales – il est né à Appenzell en 1938 –, jambes croisées sur son siège dans la première salle de l'exposition. Rien de pittoresque, aucune tour Eiffel au coucher du soleil, pas un seul selfie. Juste des bouts de nature dans lesquels se sont perdus des objets, maisons, poussette, ours, humains ou chien – du banal comme de l'insolite, les deux concepts étant ici interchangeables. «Regardez ces habits qui sèchent dans une maison sans murs ni toit, n'est-ce pas un peu absurde?»

Canoë à la Jonction

Difficile de suivre Roman Signer, il est partout. Rien qu'en ce moment, on peut voir ses œuvres – des sculptures et captations de performances dans lesquelles il transforme des matières, parfois en se mettant en scène, souvent avec humour – à la Biennale de Busan (Corée du Sud), à Shanghai ou dans une exposition intitulée «Capital» au Hamburger Bahnhof de Berlin.

Plus proche de nous, au-delà de pièces à voir dans l'espace public – une table à réaction à Appenzell, par exemple – ou dans plusieurs collections permanentes qui incluent le Centre Pompidou, il est aussi au menu du nouveau Musée d'art des Grisons, à Coire: quatre clichés racontent *Einbruch im Eis* (1985), perfo durant laquelle l'artiste frise la mort après avoir délibérément brisé la glace d'un lac – il s'en sort, mais par miracle. «L'eau était tellement noire!» Quant à l'an prochain, il poursuivra sur le même rythme: «Hier j'ai reçu une lettre qui m'invite à participer à la grande exposition de sculptures en plein air de Münster (D), qui a lieu tous les dix ans – j'y étais déjà en 1987.»

Roman Signer est venu à l'art sur le tard, après divers jobs et formations, dont celle de dessinateur en bâtiment. «J'ai notamment travaillé dans un bureau d'architectes genevois, j'habitais au boulevard Carl-Vogt – j'assistais souvent aux concerts du Studio Ansermet.» Et il faisait partie du canoë-club local, situé à la pointe de la Jonction, avec lequel il effectue de nombreuses courses, sur l'Allondon ou même l'Isère, en passant par la Versoix «et sa chute de Niagara, comme on l'appelait». Pas étonnant que canoës et kayaks soient souvent des protagonistes de l'art de Roman Signer.

«Sculpteur» avant tout

Intéressé par la création qui émerge dans les années 1960, il décide d'étudier les beaux-arts, d'abord à Zurich dès 1966, puis à Lucerne, avant une année à Varsovie entre 1971 et 1972. «Je n'avais pas d'argent, or j'ai appris qu'il y avait des échanges d'étudiants – artistes et scientifiques – entre la Suisse et la Pologne. C'était très intéressant, le pays n'était pas encore américanisé.» Il revient en Helvétie la «tête pleine d'idées, avec l'envie de [se] mettre immédiatement au travail. A Appenzell, c'était inimaginable: je suis allé à Saint-Gall, où j'ai loué un petit espace. La galerie Wilma Lock, assez célèbre, m'a proposé une exposition dès 1973.»

L'artiste vise du provisoire, pense qu'il ira vivre dans «plein d'autres endroits», mais reste finalement à Saint-Gall, où il se marie – sa femme vient de Pologne – et devient papa. Et si à l'époque il se sentait un peu seul en tant qu'artiste, il constate que la scène locale est aujourd'hui vivace – plus besoin de s'exiler sur les bord de la Limmat. «Au fait, votre nom est originaire de Zurich, n'est-ce pas?»

Alors que ces années marquent la fin de l'art moderne et le passage au contemporain, Roman Signer est au clair: il s'intéresse aux propositions du présent, mais sans pour autant choisir la voie du minimalisme, en vogue outre-Atlantique. «J'ai commencé avec des objets, dans mon atelier.» Il fait de la sculpture, insiste-t-il, qui prendra vite des voies de traverse et s'enrichira des apports d'autres médiums, comme la performance, la vidéo, la photographie. «Mais c'est le même œil qui fait tout, quelle que soit l'œuvre. Un œil de sculpteur.» Une description qui sied particulièrement bien à la magnifique photo Wasserstiefel (1986), avec son explosion d'eau sortant d'une paire de bottes en caoutchouc, fantôme aquatique d'un propriétaire absent.

Artiste à vie

Parmi les trois sculptures à voir entre les clichés du Centre de la photographie, *Selbstbildnis aus Gewicht und Fallhöhe* (1972) est l'une des premières œuvres plastiques de Roman Signer. Un «autoportrait par le poids et la hauteur de chute», comme l'indique le titre de la pièce: il s'agit d'une empreinte de ses pieds dans de la glaise. Une matière que l'artiste a également utilisée à la Biennale de Venise de 1999, où il représente la Suisse: retenues par des ficelles auxquelles il met le feu, 117 boules de fer tombent (presque) simultanément et s'immobilisent sur des blocs d'argile, qu'elles déforment. Comme souvent chez Roman Signer, l'installation vénitienne crie son propre processus de fabrication, qui est aussi filmé et photographié. Les clichés captant les sphères en plein vol sont d'ailleurs splendides.

Initialement, c'est tout un groupe d'artistes qui devait exposer au pavillon suisse, mais à trois mois de l'ouverture la Confédération propose le job au seul Roman Signer, par un coup de fil qui prend l'artiste de court: «J'ai demandé à pouvoir dormir sur la proposition. Et j'ai très mal dormi!» Pour l'anecdote, c'est pendant la préparation de l'expo qu'il s'achète son premier téléphone portable, si peu intelligent qu'il ne connaît pas le concept d'obsolescence programmée – il l'utilise encore.

A 78 ans, pense-t-il parfois à la retraite? On évoque l'artiste belge Panamarenko, qui a officiellement raccroché les pinceaux en 2005, à 65 ans. «C'est clair, on n'est pas obligé de créer toute sa vie. Mais quand on est artiste, on l'est pour toujours.»

Centre de la photographie, 28 rue des Bains, Genève, jusqu'au 13 novembre, ma-di 11h-18h,
www.centrephotogeneve.ch

L'artiste Roman Signer expose d'étranges photographies à Genève



Signer, beau comme un Roman Nectar / 27 min. / le 04 octobre 2016

Le célèbre artiste suisse Roman Signer présente au Centre pour la photographie de Genève une série d'images étranges et poétiques sous le titre "Le temps gelé", prises lors de différents voyages. Florence Grivel a adoré et s'en fait l'écho dans "Nectar".

Le Centre pour la photographie de Genève présente jusqu'au 13 novembre une série de photographies réunies sous le titre "Le temps gelé / Die gefrorene Zeit", prises lors de voyages en Islande, en Pologne et en Ukraine. Ces images figent un moment de quotidien étrange et poétique, comme ces deux chaises longues dont la toile de tissu se gonfle à l'envers, comme un spi, par une rafale de vent. Instant fugitif qui raconte les rébus absurdes, parfois comiques et surtout poétiques du réel.

Si elles révèlent beaucoup du regard et de l'univers de l'artiste sur le monde, elles sont comme des échos gelés, alors que tout l'art de Roman Signer se situe dans un rapport au temps où tension et catharsis sont au cœur du processus.

Un remède contre l'efficacité, la maîtrise

Roman Signer est l'un des artistes suisses les plus étonnants. Depuis les années 70, il explore le monde au travers d'explosions, de tirs de fusées à roulettes, fait voler les tables ou encore chorégraphie un bal d'hélicoptères jouets qui petit à petit s'écrasent au sol et agonisent comme des bestioles étranges.

Dans son oeuvre, l'artiste offre un remède contre l'efficacité, la maîtrise, l'arrogance de notre période toute puissante et intoxiquée par l'efficacité du tout tout de suite. Chacune des "actions" de Roman Signer perturbe pour un petit moment l'équilibre naturel des choses, ainsi que la vision rationnelle et cartésienne que l'on en a. C'est un spécialiste de la transformation d'un état à un autre.

Exposition : « Le temps gelé / Die gefrorene Zeit » de Roman Signer

Jeu 18 Août 2016 15:02:21 par Emilie Lemoine dans Expositions

Voir une oeuvre de Roman Signer en vidéo:



Roman Signer, London, 2014

Mondialement connu pour ses performances et ses installations basées sur des processus interrogeant la transformation de matières, le travail de Signer est directement lié au temps qui s'écoule. N'ayant été réalisés qu'une seule fois et souvent hors des espaces d'art, les travaux de Signer sont la plupart du temps soumis à l'enregistrement photographique et vidéographique pour une réception ultérieure. Le titre de l'exposition se réfère autant aux enregistrements obtenus par la trace lumineuse sur des supports variés, qu'aux traces de fumée, de matière brûlée, d'écoulements de liquides solidifiés qui témoignent de ses actions. La référence au temps gelé peut aussi être comprise de façon littérale, au vu de l'affinité de l'artiste pour des procédés de congélations, et pour des cadrans de montres et d'horloges arrêtés dans leur mouvement.

Présentée à la Documenta 8 en 1987 à Kassel et représentant la Suisse à la Biennale de Venise en 1999, l'œuvre de Roman Signer est en majeure partie immatérielle et fait se dissoudre les genres et les catégories de l'art tout comme il fait littéralement exploser maints objets de nos sociétés marchandes. Dans les expositions d'artistes parmi les plus importants de notre temps, le CPG a fait, ces dernières années, découvrir des aspects peu ou pas connus d'artistes allant de Boris Mikhailov à Cindy Sherman, de Manon à Gerhard Richter, ou de Bernd et Hilla Becher à Carsten Höller. Ainsi Le temps gelé / Die gefrorene Zeit mettra en avant par la photographie un aspect méconnu de l'œuvre de Roman Signer. L'exposition est conçue en collaboration avec la curatrice indépendante Carmen del Valle.

Communiqué de presse Centre de la photographie Genève



Emilie Lemoine

La mostra di Roman Signer a Nuoro

Fino al 3 luglio il museo MAN ospiterà filmati e installazioni dell'artista svizzero conosciuto per i processi di "distruzione controllata"

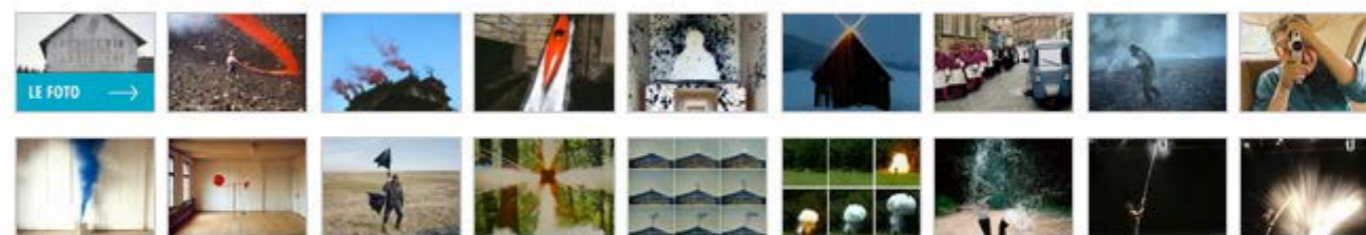


© Roman Signer (Michael Bodenmann)

Fino al 3 luglio il museo MAN di Nuoro ospiterà la mostra *Roman Signer. Films and Installations*, con duecento filmati e una serie di installazioni realizzati dall'artista svizzero Roman Signer.

Signer è conosciuto per mettere in atto azioni di "distruzione controllata": prende oggetti d'uso comune – ombrelli, tavoli, stivali, contenitori, cappelli, biciclette – e li fa esplodere con polveri da sparo oppure li sottopone all'azione degli elementi naturali, come il vento o l'acqua. In *Action Kurhaus Weissbad* (1992), per esempio, Signer ha lanciato delle sedie dalla finestra di un hotel, mentre in *Unfall als Skulptur* (2008) ha messo in moto una specie di Apecar carico di barili d'acqua su una rampa (tipo quelle da skate) alta 11 metri, lasciando che una volta arrivato all'estremità opposta si ribaltasse e si schiantasse al suolo.

La mostra si divide in due progetti: uno presenta la produzione di filmati in **Super 8**, la pellicola creata da Kodak nel 1965, e realizzati da Signer tra il 1975 e il 1988; l'altro è legato a tre nuovi lavori creati appositamente per la mostra.



Roman Signer è nato a Appenzell, in Svizzera, nel 1938: ha iniziato a lavorare come artista nella seconda metà degli anni Sessanta, dopo avere lavorato come disegnatore, come ingegnere radio apprendista e per un breve periodo come tecnico in una fabbrica di pentole a pressione.



PARIS

Roman Signer

Galerie Art : Concept / 30 octobre - 23 décembre 2015

La phrase de Roman Signer, « J'ai éternué très fort et ça a déclenché une explosion dans la glaise fraîche », pourrait être considérée, pour sa dimension performative, comme un bon prélude ou même comme une synthèse à cette exposition, puisqu'elle la clôture en quelque sorte.

On y repère en effet des réminiscences sonores, un émiettement de la matière et la recomposition de formes, autant d'éléments caractéristiques de son œuvre (y compris les vidéos, absentes ici) et de ses expositions. Une de leurs particularités est leur dimension sonore ; celle-ci n'échappe pas à ce principe. Bruits de ventilateurs divers et de claquement de pieds de chaises provoquent une sourde cacophonie sonore. Celle-ci ne se contente pas d'être la résultante de l'animation des objets concernés, dans la mesure où des éléments mobiles sont entraînés par le souffle produit – leur déplacement même contingenté produisant un son secondaire au premier –, mais elle conduit le regard du visiteur, comme s'il se disait : « mais d'où vient tout ce bruit ? ».

Ces sonorités sont autant synonyme de déplacements, ou de légers mouvements, de ces objets ou des éléments qu'ils contiennent, même si ceux-ci sont parfois bridés dans leur élan, comme cette partie centrale d'un kayak enfermée dans une malle, ce sablier gigantesque, cette vitrine bloquant le déploiement de parapluies qui y sont enfermés. Pour chacun d'entre eux peut se poser la question de leur

identification à la notion de sculpture, titre de l'exposition (*Sculptures*).

Inanimés ou non, tous ces objets appartiennent à la même « famille » et sont emblématiques de la pratique de l'artiste suisse. De leurs mécanismes visibles et élémentaires se dégage une grande poésie visuelle, un peu comme si Signer se plaçait au croisement minimaliste du double héritage de Jean Tinguely et des adeptes de la poésie sonore, héritage qu'il appliquerait à une sculpture indéfinissable, dont le sens de l'ellipse et de l'économie de moyens lui octroie une dimension conceptuelle.

Adeptes de la mise en boîte plutôt qu'en abîme, l'œuvre de Signer ne cesse d'interroger les conditions de son apparition et de son existence : le point d'équilibre est-il synonyme de point de rupture ? L'humour défie la raison comme le contenu défie le contenant, dans un exercice d'équilibre qui rend ses constructions en bois plus fragiles et surtout plus vulnérables qu'il n'y paraît.

Cet effet de mise en boîte est élargi à l'ensemble de l'espace de la galerie, qu'il s'approprie par une œuvre in fine, *Pommery*, façon pour lui de baptiser les lieux avec le même humour distancié qui se mesure aux traces colorées laissées par un geste circonstancié.

Bernard Marcelis

Roman Signer a en outre bénéficié d'un focus dans le cadre du 30^e anniversaire du centre culturel suisse à Paris (28 octobre - 1^{er} novembre 2015).



Roman Signer says, "I sneezed very loud and that set off an explosion in the unhardened clay." Because of its performative dimension, that sentence could be considered a good prelude or even an encapsulation of this exhibition because, in a way, those words encompass it. In them we glimpse remembered sounds, a shattering of matter and the recomposition of forms, all signature elements of his work (including in video, a medium not represented here) and shows. One of his shows' particularities is their audio dimension, and this show is no exception. The noise of various kinds of fans and the clatter of chair legs—both the movement of objects and the gusts of air that carries them along—produce a dull cacophony. This sound actively draws our gaze as if someone were saying, "Where is all this noise coming from?"

These sounds are synonyms of the shifts and slight movements of these objects or the elements they contain, even if sometimes their momentum is hindered. Take, for example, the cockpit of a kayak enclosed in a suitcase, or the gigantic hourglass, or the showcase that blocks the unfolding of the umbrellas entrapped within it. Each piece poses the question of their identification as *Sculptures*, which is the title of this exhibition.

Whether inanimate or not, all of these objects belong to the same

category as emblematic of the practice of this Swiss artist. Their visible and elementary mechanisms secrete a powerful visual poetry, almost as if Signer positioned himself at the minimalist crossroads of the double heritage of Jean Tinguely and the adepts of sound poetry to make his indefinable sculpture whose elliptical quality and economy gives it a conceptual dimension. Preferring to put things in boxes rather than mirrors, Signer constantly interrogates the conditions of his work's existence and appearance: is the balancing point also the breaking point? His humor defies reason just as content defies its container, in an exercise in equilibrium that makes his wooden sculpture more fragile and especially more vulnerable than appearances would lead us to believe. This effect of putting things into boxes is expanded to include the whole of the gallery's space, which he appropriates to make it an artwork in itself, baptizing it with *Pommery* champagne with the same distanced humor measured by colored traces left by a circumstantial gesture.

Translation, L-S Torgoff

Roman Signer's work was also highlighted as part of the Paris Centre Culturel Suisse's celebration of its thirtieth birthday (October 28-November 1, 2015).

« Sculptures ». Vue de l'exposition (© Dorine Potel). Exhibition view

Roman Signer *Sculptures*

Art: Concept, Paris 30 October – 23 December

Among the ten sculptures in Roman Signer's fifth exhibition at Art: Concept is *Stiefel Rot-Blau* (2015), a pair of rubber boots displayed in a poorly lit, glass-fronted wooden box. In his studio, the seventy-seven-year old Swiss artist had ignited blue and red smoke-bombs inside the right and left shoes respectively, soiling the case internally with soot and dyes. With its burnt blue and red hues – colours that, since the terrorist attacks in Paris, have never felt so patriotic – the dim ensemble on a table in a back corner now conjures, however involuntarily, the horror and desolation that overtook the city at nightfall on 13 November. Yet to be fair, the first time I saw Signer's grimy boots, prior to the deadly attacks, I was absolutely thrilled at the prospect of ironising explosive art. My digression about the sorrow they convey to me in the aftermath is only to demonstrate the evocative and cathartic power of the artist's unconventional aesthetics, which are concerned with completely nonsensical yet meticulously orchestrated engineering experiments that propel trifling forms into high art.

On the opening night, for example, Signer set off *Pommery* (2015), cautiously inserting a half-opened bottle of champagne – whose cork he'd just painted blue – into a curved metallic tube fixed on a metre-high post at the entrance. Pressure popped the cork out of the other end

like a bullet: it hit the opposite wall, leaving a dribbly stain. Signer then proceeded *not* to serve the champagne and left the full bottle on the floor as part of his sculpture, thus keeping all subsequent visitors thirsty upon entering. While creating suspense out of ordinary objects, diverting their purpose absurdly, he certainly enjoys teasing us as much as he likes to play with fire. *Kabine* (2015), the remains of an explosive charge in a cratered piece of clay, which was detonated outside, is no exception: Signer blew it up from a wooden booth by sneezing into a microphone connected to the payload through an amplifier (a wall text informs us), then moved the entire apparatus into the gallery, leaving the microphone on for the curious to cough into, should they so wish.

Any sympathetic sneezing would be drowned out by the cacophony produced by three other sculptures. While *Stuhl* (2014), in which the front legs of a motorised chair rocking up and down on its back legs plunge in and out of a basin filled with water, damply beats time throughout the gallery, the remainder truly makes a terrific racket. *Kamin* (2012) resembles a chimney pierced at eye-level by a hole: visitors are invited to throw in red crumpled sheets of paper, metaphorical flames that are quickly expelled by a hidden fan, sparkling around until they fall and somebody else picks them up to repeat

the gesture. *Ventilator mit Brett* (2015) simply consists of a sheet of hardboard, its base aligned with a wall, blown continually back and forth by the gusts of another fan, which faces it. Contrary to the other artworks, these three don't crystallise any past explosion or action, but are meant to be in perpetual motion during opening hours (if, that is, they don't drive the staff insane).

A tension between the finite and the infinite thus informs the exhibition as a whole, further symbolised by *Uhr* (2008), a shallow wooden box that supports a stopped clock next to a cut-out hole of the same shape, which confronts an instant – the frozen hands – against eternity – the void. Between these two poles, some of Signer's actions are purposely constrained. For *Drei Regenschirme gleichzeitig geöffnet* (2014), he had electrically triggered in his studio the simultaneous opening of three umbrellas within a vitrine too narrow to contain their full extension, therefore ending up displaying them neither completely put up nor down. Finally *Kajak* (2014) offers another paradox: here, the artist cut a kayak – his signature form – into three sections, confined the middle one with the cockpit in a trunk, which he left opened for view, and threw out the others. Forever amputated, yet ready to ship.

Violaine Boutet de Monvel



Stiefel Rot-Blau, 2015, mixed media, dimensions variable.
Photo: Dorine Potel. Courtesy the artist and Art: Concept, Paris

ArtReview



Roman Signer



ROMAN SIGNER- GALERIE ART CONCEPT

30/10/2015 - 23/12/2015

1 395 vues

A PROPOS DE **PARTAGER**

ROMAN SIGNER- GALERIE ART CONCEPT

La galerie Art: Concept présente l'exposition « Sculptures » de Roman Signer à l'occasion de l'ouverture de ses nouveaux locaux. Cela fait déjà 20 ans que la Galerie Art: Concept et l'artiste Suisse travaillent ensemble.

L'exposition se poursuivra jusqu'au 23 décembre 2015.



Roman Signer, "Sculptures", galerie Art:Concept

L'artiste suisse Roman Signer représente l'antithèse de tous les clichés que l'on pourrait avoir sur son pays d'origine. Ou plutôt, la subversion méthodique de tous ceux-là. Car si ses œuvres mettent généralement en scène des mécaniques, nulle précision d'horlogerie n'est à l'œuvre : comme chez ses compatriotes (et complices en destruction) Jean Tinguely ou Fischli & Weiss, ça suinte, ça explose et ça s'autodétruit. Entre land art et performance, ses "action sculptures" mettent en danger des objets du quotidien : parapluies, bottes en caoutchouc, ventilateurs ou encore kayaks se retrouvent défenestrés, suspendus, électrocutés, propulsés au milieu d'un lac. Pour sa cinquième expo solo à la galerie Art:Concept, l'artiste délaisse un temps la turbulence pour faire place à une poésie tout en retenue, offrant à ses objets de prédilection tant maltraités un sanctuaire éphémère, ceux-ci venant ponctuer délicatement l'espace de la galerie pour en révéler les interstices de vides, et faire se confondre absence et absurde.

Jusqu'au 23 décembre à la **galerie Art:Concept** à Paris



Above **Roman Signer** installation view, Cham, Kanton Zug, 1991. Photo: Stefan Rohner.

Opposite **Artificial Nature** installation views, DESTE Foundation, House of Cyprus, Athens, 1990. Curated by Jeffrey Deitch. Courtesy: DESTE Foundation, Athens.

Clockwise from top, left Martin Kippenberger, *Memorial of the Good Old Time*, 1987; Ashley Bickerton, *Wall Wall 4*, 1986, and Ashley Bickerton, *Seascape: Transporter for the Waste of Its Own Construction #3*, 1990; Jeff Koons, *String of Puppies*, 1988.

L'ŒIL SURRÉALISTE DE ROMAN SIGNER

Il y a chez Roman Signer un esprit purement surréaliste ou néo-dada, qui donne à ses œuvres une présence unique et une force poétique indéniable. Pour sa cinquième exposition personnelle chez Art: Concept, dans les nouveaux espaces de la galerie

dans le Marais, l'artiste suisse présente un ensemble de nouvelles sculptures souvent énigmatiques (de 35 000 € à 50 000 €), assemblage inattendu de ses objets fétiches que sont le parapluie, les bottes, l'horloge, le kayak ou le ventilateur, et mis en scène sur un mode expérimental. Roman Signer, qui aime à se définir comme un « *physicien émotionnel* », donne à voir de façon tangible et déroutante l'aspiration humaine au constant dépassement des réalités terrestres, à la transfiguration du quotidien. V. DE M.



Roman Signer, *Stiefel Rot-Blau*, 2015, technique mixte, dimensions variables (COURTESY DE L'ARTISTE ET GALERIE ART: CONCEPT, PARIS).

« **ROMAN SIGNER, SCULPTURES** »,
galerie Art: Concept,
4, passage Saint-Avoye,
75003 Paris, 01 53 60 90 30,
www.galerieartconcept.com
du 30 octobre au 21 novembre.



Roman Signer "Sculptures" at Art : Concept, Paris

November 22~2015



Celebrating over twenty years of collaboration, Art:Concept gallery is pleased to present its fifth solo exhibition by Roman Signer. Through a set of new evocative sculptures, the exhibition summons the most iconic objects of the Swiss artist's work: umbrella, rubber boots, clock, canoe, fan and more.

The object's status is crucial in Roman Signer's work. Whatever it may be, often a rather banal and functional object, it becomes the support of his overflowing imagination. Coupled with an uncontrollable urge to make his own experience, such imaginative power disregards any risks or hazards that it could bring about. Roman Signer's experiments often exceed the wildest dreams of the most imaginative children; tables taking off, defenestrated chairs, games played with explosives or even a plane suspended four meters above the ground, as in his recent installation at Berlin's KINDL (*Kitfox Experimental*, 2014). The choice of 'medium' is never trivial. It rises from a memory, happy or traumatic. For *Kitfox Experimental*, the artist recalled an episode from his youth when a terrifying airplane-pilot simulated the plunge of his aircraft in his direction.

Childhood reminiscences though they may be, his contrivances have nothing childish about them. The mechanisms behind Roman Signer's pieces are complex and their success depends on a high level of execution precision. Decomposed, exposed and fully laid bare, it is they who implement the work. In some respects conceptual, Roman Signer's work is more that of an "emotional physicist" as he likes to define himself. In a process that evokes Gaston Bachelard's philosophic poetry or "chemistry of reverie" (*La Psychanalyse du feu*, 1938; *L'Eau et les rêves*, 1942; *L'Air et les songes*, 1943), he has always been fascinated by the study of elements—air, water and fire in particular—and their tensions with the technological world. For the artist as well as for the philosopher, there is an urge to go beyond the opposition between science and nature, unveiling and relying on the emotional charges and poetic evocations that these natural elements convey.

But here, nothing spectacular, quite the contrary: the elements are summoned with very great sobriety: a cigarette that burns in a cabin or handkerchiefs propelled from a metal tube, in both cases with the help of a fan. Sensationalism has given way to a gentle melancholy-tinged poetry. Formerly suspended in the air and projected from flying helicopters, the artist's most loyal companions find themselves strangely packed as precious memories: a trio of umbrellas which seem constrained in their opening by the box that contains them, a piece of cut-up canoe placed in an aluminum case. Facing this canning process, analytical temptations are strong.

Are these retrospective and nostalgic reflections? Ironic winks? The artist manages with as much brio to shift our attention from the main action. Like a machine to travel through time and space, this small fragment of kayak propels our gaze into both past and present. Because let's face it: how can we avoid wondering what happened to the rest of it?

Julia Mossé // translation Frieda Schumann

at Art : Concept, Paris
until 23 December 2015



Retour de flamme

Éclater, exploser, désintégrer, malmener, chahuter...
l'artiste Roman Signer s'en donne à cœur joie.

— Par Rachel Withers

■ Roman Signer adore les anomalies ; depuis le début des années 1970, il réalise des sculptures qui étudient la transformation de son sujet sur la durée et sous l'action des forces de la nature. Quand le résultat ne correspond pas tout à fait à ce qu'il attend, il y puise un plaisir et une fascination toute particulière. Les matériaux qu'il utilise sont simples, des objets du quotidien : tables, chaises, seaux, fûts, vélos, valises, ballons, cordes, élastiques et tuyaux, par exemple. Le processus auquel il les expose est tout aussi simple : il les propulse, en utilisant des courants d'air ou d'eau. Les objets flottent, coulent, volent, tombent, gèlent, brûlent et quelquefois, grâce aux compétences pyrotechniques de Signer, ils explosent. Au CCS, il jouera notamment avec des ballons de manière très différente lors de deux performances et présentera une sculpture qui restera en suspens le temps de l'exposition. L'hélicoptère constitue son outil de travail préféré, avec lequel il « fait ses gammes » dans son atelier, avant de l'utiliser dans des projets en public.

Il ne pouvait pas se permettre la moindre erreur technique dans la réalisation de *Vers la flamme - Ein Konzert mit Störung* (un concert avec interruption) sur les bords du lac de Vernago (Italie), l'année dernière. Ce jour-là, le modèle réduit cédait la place à un vrai hélicoptère, et l'objet chahuté était un radeau d'une taille impressionnante, transportant un piano à queue. Au clavier, le jeune et téméraire virtuose islandais, Víkingur Ólafsson, revêtu d'une queue-de-pie très formelle et équipé d'un casque antibruit. Il jouait un morceau d'Alexandre Scriabine composé en 1914, *Vers la flamme*. Cette performance ne doit pas être comprise uniquement comme un amusant numéro d'équilibriste. Elle est basée sur une idée originale de Peter Paul Kainrath, le directeur artistique du festival Transart de Bolzano. La vidéo de *Vers la flamme* commence avec un long plan uniquement sur le piano et le radeau qui semblent dériver, abandonnés, devant l'époustouflante coulisse des Alpes : une énigme visuelle insolite et grandiose. Les premières notes du poème de Scriabine résonnent dans cet amphithéâtre naturel. À l'apogée du morceau, l'hélicoptère surgit dans le champ visuel de la caméra, puis il s'éloigne au loin sous les applaudissements du petit groupe de spectateurs installé sur les berges.

La limpidité de la méthode employée est en cohérence avec les tout premiers travaux de Signer : création d'un jet d'eau éphémère en faisant



exploser une charge dans le lit d'une rivière peu profonde (*Wassersäule*, 1976/77) ou vidéo d'un sac en plastique explosant au-dessus d'un champ enneigé (*Windsack*, 1980), par exemple. Or ces images plutôt complexes, avec des références historiques, culturelles, environnementales, autobiographiques, font écho à ses œuvres plus récentes et montrent toute l'évolution de son art. La pièce de Scriabine, écrite au début de la Première Guerre mondiale et un an avant sa mort, illustre le romantisme mystique du compositeur et semble refléter sa conviction que le monde allait périr par le feu. La vision crûment apocalyptique de Scriabine choque avec l'attitude teintée d'absurde et d'humour noir, clairement anti-romantique de Signer, fasciné par la brièveté de la vie et la violence des forces de la nature. Cette œuvre nous rappelle également l'importance de la musique dans la vie de Signer. Son père était d'ailleurs musicien professionnel. Elle évoque un souvenir d'enfance où il rencontra deux voyageurs dans une forêt qui écoutaient de la musique classique sur un vieux gramophone. Cette situation l'a inspiré ensuite dans sa propre conception de la nature comme studio. En écho à cet intérêt pour la musique, le CCS a proposé à Roman Signer de projeter *Restenfilme XX* sous forme de ciné-concert. Ce film se compose d'un montage de chutes, suppléments, ratés d'actions et autres repérages. Comme l'action, à proprement parler, en est absente, la musique est libre de créer une présence stimulante. Signer a accepté et délégué le choix du musicien au CCS, qui a proposé le pianiste virtuose Yaron Herman. Une rencontre artistique explosive en perspective! ■

RW

FOCUS 06 • du 27 octobre au 1^{er} novembre

• vernissage mardi 27 octobre de 18h à 21h

Roman Signer

• projection (en boucle)

> *Vers la flamme - Ein Konzert mit Störung* (2014, 8'40")

mercredi 28 octobre / 20h

• performance

Ballon mit rotem Band (création)

• ciné-concert

Restenfilme XX (1975-1989, 53')

films mis en musique par le pianiste Yaron Herman (création)

Collectif Inventaire des petits riens

Le Centre de recherche, d'échange et de diffusion pour l'art contemporain déroule un inventaire du quotidien à partir de 22 propositions simples dans la forme et le fond

IVRY-SUR-SEINE ■ Le film est ancien et le grain renvoie à l'imagerie si particulière des années 1970. Sous un pont de Brooklyn, alors zone pauvre et délaissée, un homme s'active à échafauder une sculpture avec du plâtre, tandis qu'un autre fait brûler tout et n'importe quoi dans un brasier improvisé à même la rue ; entre les deux, un enfant se mêle alternativement aux activités de l'un et de l'autre. Le premier homme est Gordon Matta-Clark, qui avec *Fire Child* et cette action à l'humble apparence, s'immisce en 1971 dans une banale vie de quartier et laisse s'inviter la sculpture dans l'espace public, manière de l'offrir à tout le monde, même si elle peut susciter de l'indifférence. « Tout le monde », tel est le titre de la nouvelle exposition imaginée par Claire Le Restif, la directrice du Centre de recherche, d'échange et de diffusion pour l'art contemporain (Crédac), à Ivry-sur-Seine. L'idée d'approcher des œuvres émergées de gestes simples, dérisoires

parfois, et offertes à tout le monde – tout en lui appartenant, puisque la plupart d'entre elles proviennent de collections publiques françaises – s'est imposée à la vue des panneaux d'affichage municipaux qui, entre deux campagnes, sont recouverts de bleu, offrant à ces espaces d'expression une pause ou un temps de flottement avant une nouvelle surenchère communicationnelle. De tels panneaux rythment d'ailleurs les espaces d'exposition, servant de support à des écrans vidéo.

22 réflexions sur le « peu »

Cette proposition s'intéresse de manière fine et sensible à des œuvres de vingt-deux artistes qui, dans leur forme même ou leur protocole, abordent des questions relatives à une appartenance commune, au rituel, au soin, à l'écologie, à la préservation et réalisées avec économie. L'accrochage de la première salle est très réussi. Outre Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-1978), sont

très à leur aise les avocats que Michel Blazy couve depuis près de vingt ans pour certains, avec une constance d'esprit et une banalité du geste (*Collection d'avocats*, 1997). Sur une table de Marie Cool et Fabio Balducci s'étale une économie



du geste improductif, lorsque des dizaines de crayons de couleur parfaitement alignés sont délicatement mis en mouvement par un intervenant à qui a été confié un strict protocole (*Sans titre (crayons de couleur, table)*, 2010).

Roman Signer, *Papierblätter*, 1991, photographie de « Action avec une bicyclette et papier », réalisée le 20 octobre 1991 dans la vallée du Rhin, canton de Saint-Gall, 21 x 29,7 cm. © Photo : Stefan Rohner. Courtesy de l'artiste et Art : Concept, Paris.

TOUT LE MONDE, jusqu'au 6 décembre, Centre d'art contemporain d'Ivry – Le Crédac, La Manufacture des œillets, 25-29, rue Raspail, 94200 Ivry-sur-Seine, tél. 01 49 60 25 06, www.credac.fr, tjlj sauf lundi 14h-18h, samedi-dimanche 14h-19h.

Ailleurs Roman Signer roule à vélo sur des feuilles de papier qui ont conservé la trace de son passage, tandis que Gina Pane jette dans la rivière quatre dessins, comme pour signifier qu'elle mettait fin à cette pratique (*Action autocritique*, 1969). Mais c'est le Japonais Koji Enokura, membre du mouvement Mono-ha, qui réalise l'une des plus belles actions de cet ensemble, en se couchant sur la plage à la lisière des vagues, comme pour embrasser la mer et en stopper la progression qu'il sait pourtant inéluctable.

Frédéric Bonnet

Roman Signer: Slow Movement



Roman Signer, 'Kajak', 1987. Photo: Peter Hunkeler. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth

The Swiss artists will transform the Barbican's Curve with his site-specific sculptural installation of a moving kayak.

Towed by a rope, a kayak will travel through the 90-metre long gallery as if on water. Joined by two other canoes placed around the centre in bizarre ways and early films featuring the kayak, Signer transforms an ordinary scenario into something absurd. An avid kayaker for many years, Signer has used boats in his practice since the 1980s to explore the experience of landscape and time.

Roman Signer interview

Roman Signer is the Professor Branestawm of contemporary art. He's also very into kayaks. As a new show launches at the Barbican, he tells Time Out about a career on, beside and beneath the water



Roman Signer photographed at the Barbican. Portrait: Tristan Fewings/Getty Images

1/11

Before 'Jackass', 'Rude Tube' and pretty much everything on the internet that isn't porn, Swiss artist Roman Signer made pratfalls, mishaps and minor explosions into fine art. Revealing unexpected beauty and sometimes a new kind of logic in things we take for granted, the sprightly 76-year-old is best known for experimental works in which dynamite is used to propel objects like wellington boots and chairs through the Swiss countryside. He's also the world's foremost (okay, only) kayak artist, synonymous with the boat as both sculptural form and method of unconventional travel. Discussing some of the works dotted around the Barbican for his new show, he tells us how art floats his boat.

'Kayak with Fountain' (2015)

'I was a technical draughtsman in an architect's studio. After about ten years I had to stop because otherwise I would have died of boredom. Art always interested me, but at the time I didn't have the courage to become an artist. I was sporty: I liked athletics, swimming, hiking, skiing... So, my works were inspired by my everyday life. There is an entire series of kayak works starting from the 1980s. I was an avid kayaker until a friend died in a kayak accident and I felt I couldn't do the sport anymore. I needed some time to find distance from this event, then the kayak found a new space. So, in a sculpture like "Fountain" the kayak doesn't have a practical use or meaning anymore. It enters a poetic space and finds its place there.'

'Eskimo Roll' (1995)

'I see myself as a sculptor and action artist (*Aktionskünstler*). What I am not is a surrealist or a land artist. It's true that I like to keep it simple but I am not a minimalist in a classical sense either, as my works have a content and are not only about form. The Eskimo Roll is a vital technique for kayaking. Eskimo kayakers have jackets [anoraks] that are sewn on to the kayak and if they should turn upside down, they have to right themselves using the paddle. This action, in which I "roll" a kayak by attaching it to a length of rope at one end and a bicycle at the other, was carefully planned, because I wanted to disappear in the woods in the distance at the moment when the kayak was still moving. But things rarely happen quite the way they are planned.'

'Kayak' (2000)

'I was commissioned to make a work for the Reykjavik Museum responding to the nature and landscape of Iceland. My proposal was that I would be pulled along a street in a kayak, and I decided to test this in Switzerland first. Quite unintentionally, this became a very beautiful film that also became famous because of the cows running alongside me. The cows were not planned, they were a surprise. The bottom of the boat wore out but I didn't wear padded trousers. In Iceland it was much worse, I was pulled for almost 20 kilometres and the seat completely eroded. Eventually I was sitting on the kayak like on a surfboard. At the end, on the side of the street there were four ornithologists who looked at me with their serious faces, shaking their heads. They were looking for solitude to observe the birds and this loud evil machine came by. But, I respect nature very much, and I always collect up everything I leave behind.'

'Slow Movement' (2015)

'I was invited to Curve and I thought of the video with the cows (there, the kayak is pulled by a car, here, by a motor). The Curve Gallery is basically a tunnel and I wanted a kayak to be pulled back and forth by a motor on the ceiling. The kayak is empty: it's an installation, not an action. Climbing inside is prohibited; the motor would not be able to pull the weight of the kayak with someone inside. There's a relationship to a kayak sculpture which hangs in the foyer, which is vertical. And the fountain kayak outside can be seen through the hanging kayak. It's difficult to prove that what I make is art. It's like if you asked a poet to describe where the poetry is in their work. My works are both intellectual and out of the belly. I always ask my belly. And I don't worry at all if people call me madcap or crazy. I am mentally completely healthy.'



Il Taipei 101, progettato da Frank Gehry. L'edificio è stato progettato in modo da sembrare un oggetto di design. È stato progettato in modo da sembrare un oggetto di design. È stato progettato in modo da sembrare un oggetto di design.

Leiter
1995
Foto: J.M. Parisien
Courtesy of the
artist and
Art: Concept, Paris

Quanto ci piace
perdere tempo con
Twitter e le serie tv,
con la lettura di IL e
l'arte contemporanea.
La leggerezza è lo
spirito del tempo e non
è detto che ci allontani
dalle cose essenziali

SUPERFLUO
L'egemonia del

Opere di Roman Signer



Annalena Benini p.86

Francesco Bonami p.83

Ester Viola p.82

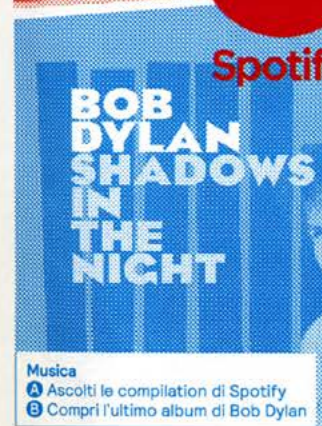
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Politica estera/1
A Guardi Homeland
B Sei abbonato a Foreign Affairs



Politica estera/2
A Hai scaricato The Interview
B Vai al cinema a vedere Timbuktu



Musica
A Ascolti le compilation di Spotify
B Comprì l'ultimo album di Bob Dylan

L'utilità del sapere inutile

di Ester Viola

Solo conoscendo Kim Kardashian, Aaron Sorkin o Carrie Mathison si vive appieno nel nostro Zeitgeist

Accadde tutto davvero nel quarto secolo avanti Cristo in Cina, periodo dei Regni Combattenti: c'era un filosofo, si chiamava **Zhuang-zi**, che usava parlare a lungo con l'amico sofista Hui-zi.

Un giorno Hui-zi, stanco di virtuosismi, fa oltraggio a Zhuang-zi accusandolo di dire cose completamente inutili. Zhuang-zi non si scompone: «Per conoscere ciò che è utile bisogna sapere ciò che è inutile», risponde.

Andò così. Il finale ci voleva meno banale. Delude un poco. Cinque righe buttate - ma è la Cina, e la Cina era il contrario della Grecia: argomentavano poco. Cambiamo continente.

Negli stessi anni sul Mediterraneo la discussione era più strutturata. Verso il trecento lasciammo il Peloponneso finalmente soddisfatti e con le idee chiarissime: le cose inutili vanno da una parte, quelle serie dall'altra (lontane).

In realtà per l'Occidente non fu un processo di classificazione molto faticoso, si convenne da subito che "inutile" era una bella parola punitiva e quindi si addiceva proprio perfettamente a una certa gamma di scienze umane per sfaccendati: letteratura, filosofia e altri **ammennicoli**.

Così la divisione fu fatta e non se ne parlò più (certe categorie di pensiero precedenti l'anno zero abbiamo imparato a non toccarle: meglio non smuovere niente

Fahrrad mit Farbe
1995/2003
Foto: Aleksandra Signer
Sammlung Hauser & Wirth, Lokremise
St. Gallen
Courtesy of the artist and
Hauser & Wirth

perché non si finisce mai. Il consiglio viene dalla Germania).

Pur esiliate da subito, le scienze oppresse (letteratura, filosofia, ammenicoli) dimostrarono immediatamente una buona tenuta, nonostante la poca carta disponibile e le biblioteche bruciate: *Iliade* e *Odissea* si preferì passarle ai posteri a memoria e i grandi filosofi a rischio pena capitale si procurarono discepoli - sfortune come quelle di Alessandria e del tribunale di Atene erano state messe nel conto (erano scienze inutili ma non sprovvedute).

A ogni resistenza il suo premio: infatti passavano i secoli, ma in società si vedevano i progressi. Nel senso che se ti scoprivano a scrivere o a strologare era certamente grave (sei sempre un ingranaggio volontariamente difettoso), ma con il tempo e una forte povertà avevi buone possibilità di guadagnarti il perdono. A volte - ma si dovrà arrivare al Milleseicento - capitava che ti prendessero a ben volere addirittura da vivo.

C'era chiaramente un processo di **tolleranza** in corso: bisognava insistere, alzarsi a difesa, veicolare il messaggio che l'inutile non è affatto una perdita di tempo.

Cominciò la Grecia. **Aristotele** avvertì subito che la conoscenza ai suoi più alti livelli «non è una scienza produttiva» e sul punto scrisse disordinatamente 14 volumi, tutti senza titolo. Lasciò i posteri a farsi da soli le prime pagine e le domande.

Poco dopo c'è **Ovidio**, che non riusciva a smettere con le poesie d'amore. «Io resto attaccato a un inutile studio», rispose in una lettera all'amico Massimo Messalino che gli chiedeva come fosse caduto così in basso con una penna in mano.

Milleottocento, la svolta romantica: è finalmente aperto attacco alle materie scientifiche. **Giacomo Leopardi** si presenta con la dichiarazione di guerra: «La letteratura mi pare utile più veramente e certamente di queste discipline [erano la politica e la statistica] seccchissime».

Nel 1832 progetta con Ranieri il giornale della rivoluzione, un settimanale di pettegolezzi, *Lo spettatore fiorentino*. Leopardi in persona scrisse una coraggiosa ma poco intelligente domanda per l'autorizzazione al



presidente del Buon Governo: «Confessiamo schiettamente che il nostro giornale non avrà nessuna utilità». Dall'amministrazione risposero picche, finì come finiva prima dell'età modernissima: si trovavano i soldi ma non davano i permessi.

Nel Novecento c'è una piacevole sorpresa: **Heidegger** (celebre studioso bipolare, di quelli capaci di scrivere somme efferate antisemite e sconcertanti lettere d'amore nello stesso giorno, sullo stesso foglio).

La storia è questa: una primavera (1963) Martin partì per la Sicilia con Medard Boss, psichiatra svizzero e amico personale. Le aspettative di conversazione erano altissime ma vennero ben ripagate - tempo due settimane ed ecco l'intuizione congiunta: «Il massimamente utile è l'inutile» (il colpo di genio arriva sempre in forma breve).

Non servì altro. L'Occidente poteva dichiararsi soddisfatto: Aristotele di Stagira, Ovidio, Leopardi, Heidegger - uno schieramento di forze minimo ed efficace.

La successione è sufficientemente mainstream e convincente (altri nomi tenuti fuori per esigenze di

spazio: Cervantes, Kant, Einstein), ma resta il problema delle conclusioni: non possono essere affidate a Martin Heidegger in vacanza a Taormina. Il problema delle conclusioni è poi aggravato da un altro problema: certi esaminatori qualificati hanno da poco finito di leggere i suoi quaderni neri e la diagnosi finale purtroppo è «Heidegger, Martin: nessun progresso, il miglioramento era apparente. Soggetto delirante tutto il tempo». Quindi fuori dal parco citazioni.

Tra l'altro serve anche un riferimento forte per il Duemila, non si può certo dare per buona la nostra opinione sull'utilità delle cose inutili, per la spallata finale ne serve una migliore.

Ci vuole un'ultima frase tra solenni virgolette - profondissima però semplice, bella ma moderna. E allora sia **David Foster Wallace** - sì, il SuperCitato, lo scrittore di cui abusano tutti. Abuseremo ancora, perché il manifesto dell'Inutile è suo.

Era il maggio 2005, una lezione agli studenti del Kenyon College che si laureavano cominciò in questo modo:

«Ci sono due giovani pesci che nuotano e a un certo

L'artista esilarante

di Francesco Bonami

L'arte è la cosa più utile fra le cose inutili diceva quello. Tanto inutilmente utile che da qualche milione di anni l'essere umano si diletta a creare opere d'arte senza interruzione di sorta. Se uno va a guardare bene, la nostra società è al 79.6 per cento, circa, fatta di cose supreflue. Lo spreco di energia che investiamo in cose che si potrebbe comodamente evitare di fare, twittare per esempio, è enorme. La sensazione è che la dittatura del superfluo stia rafforzando il suo potere. L'arte quindi si trova in una posizione molto buona. Un tempo andava di moda la parola "entropia", che è un sistema per misurare il disordine. Ma anche per descrivere l'energia che viene usata e non rimpiazzata. Oggi si dovrebbe cercare un metro di misura per il superfluo, che di per sé crea disordine. Tornando a Twitter, non c'è cosa oggi che crei più disordine nella nostra società, sprecando energia e confermando l'egemonia del superfluo. Sarebbe bello sapere cosa si potrebbe fare di utile con tutto il tempo che la gente butta dalla finestra twittando i propri pensieri a casaccio.

La *twitter art* ancora, credo e spero, non esiste. Ma l'arte ha trattato di entropia e superfluo in molti modi. Prendiamo per esempio i quadri monocromi dell'artista americano Richard Prince con sopra scritta una barzelletta. Non c'è cosa più superflua di una barzelletta e non c'è più energia consumata e non rimpiazzata di quella che si usa per raccontare o ridere di una barzelletta. Prince ha

Roman Signer



Fuori collana

→ unito arte e barzellette. Due cose inutili e superflue anche se indubbiamente necessarie affinché gli esseri umani possano distrarsi dai pensieri negativi, primo fra tutti quello della morte. Che è superfluo ricordare, essendo un destino matematico per ognuno di noi. L'artista che sul superfluo e sull'entropia ha costruito una divertente carriera è lo svizzero Roman Signer. La sua arte, principalmente corti che potrebbero ricordare le comiche di Buster Keaton, consiste in azioni o esperimenti inutili ma spesso esilaranti. Tipo lui che rema su un kayak bucatato che a poco a poco affonda. Un elicottero telecomandato che vola sopra la testa di una persona che dorme su una branda. Un'auto incastrata fra due muri. Una bicicletta su un cavalletto che spruzza inchiostro su una parete. Tre ventilatori che si fanno aria. Insomma, Signer ha dedicato la sua fantasia a costruire veri monumenti al superfluo e all'inutilità. E nel guardare le sue opere scopriamo perché esistono e sono così importanti per l'umanità: per farci divertire aiutandoci a dimenticare magicamente quanto inutili e superflui siamo pure noi. ■



Fenster
2012
Foto: Aleksandra Signer
HAB, Nantes
Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth

preveva un'idea misuratissima. Soprattutto: se le cose a marchio inutile si limitavano a quelle che ci eravamo detti a fine millennio scorso - letteratura, filosofia, ammenicoli - allora non c'era da preoccuparsi.

Fine. Solo che non è andata proprio così. Abbiamo convinto l'Inutile che non è affatto inutile e l'Inutile - approfittando dell'iniziale indulgenza - ha preso coraggio e si è allargato in modo preoccupante. Fino a traboccare.

Serve un esempio. Prendiamo il caso più facile degli ultimi dieci anni: parliamo di te.

Metti una sera a cena, è il giugno scorso. Come dimenticarlo, quell'anticipo d'estate: il tuo presidente chiudeva i comizi con *Fix You* dei Coldplay, segui una leggendaria vittoria elettorale al 40-41 per cento e non faceva neanche troppo caldo in città.

Sceita insolita, i Coldplay. Ma non hai pensato di doverti chiedere perché c'era quella canzone - in fondo era solo un altro cambio di playlist, il rinnovamento musicale era nell'aria da tempo, aveva già cominciato Veltroni con *Mi fido di te*.

Non ti interessa con che colonna sonora è successo, vuoi parlare del risultato epocale di questa sinistra. Ma i tuoi ospiti non sembrano interessati alle percentuali - che c'è da aggiungere, ai numeri? - insistono con i Coldplay. Tutti concordano che con la scelta della canzone forse c'entra Aaron Sorkin, e una certa puntata di *Newsroom* in cui suonava la stessa canzone.

Ti chiedono che te ne pare, se anche tu sei sicuro che ci sia quel collegamento, se come loro la trovi una cosa forse romantica e forse avveniristica. Se ti piace l'idea. A loro sì.

Una puntata di *Newsroom*. *Newsroom* è un programma televisivo e lo scrive un tale Sorkin. Sei impreparato. Anzi: non ne sai niente. Peggio: francamente non capisci perché lo dovresti sapere.

Una canzone di campagna elettorale da una serie tivù americana? Le serie tivù non erano quelle cose con le risate preregistrate? Non le stavamo legittimamente ignorando? Hanno tolto le risate? Ora sono la nuova letteratura? Hai letto Franzen, Roth e parecchi altri, non erano loro, la letteratura moderna? C'è una letteratura più nuova di loro? Adesso la fanno in televisione? Le serie tivù sono entrate in politica? Anche Barack Obama ha delle preferenze il martedì sera sul divano di casa? Guarda le serie tivù e non si vergogna? No, anzi ne parla anche ai giornali? Quando è successo? Dopo *Willy il principe di Bel Air*? È cominciato tutto quando la tua fidanzata ha preso a parlare di *Friends* con le amiche? La volta in cui è andata dal parrucchiere con la foto di Jennifer Aniston per farsi lo stesso taglio e già quella ti sembrò una cretinata? Il cinese del primo rigo va rivalutato? L'Inutile tende a sfuggire di mano?

Sei disorientato. Ti fanno un favore e cambiano argomento: economia. Bene, è la tua materia, possono

Hocker Mit Lampe
1986
Foto: Barbara Gerny Weissbad, Kanton Appenzell
Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth



chiederti pure le virgole del *Capital* di Marx. Solo che non vogliono parlare di massimi sistemi - quelli li sai - ma di guadagni per app telefoniche su scala semestrale. Hanno letto *Forbes*. *Forbes* non è un problema - sai che è una rivista americana, fin lì ci arrivi. Pare che in cima alla classifica delle app più scaricate dell'anno ci sia un videogioco. Di Kim Kardashian. Previsioni di guadagno: duecento milioni di dollari in dodici mesi. Nessuno ha saputo sfruttare i nuovi mezzi commerciali quanto lei, aggiungono.

Non intervieni neanche stavolta.

Provi a rilanciare con la politica economica sotto le Alpi. Ma le loro facce dicono di no - spiacenti - devi prima chiederti chi è Kim Kardashian, è più urgente.

Ti spiegano che è la protagonista di un reality americano. Non te ne importa niente, non lo vuoi sapere. Ti avvilitisci.

Però i tuoi amici sono generosi e ci riprovano: politica estera. Ti dicono che i rappresentanti di governo del Pakistan sarebbero molto contrariati da *Homeland*. *Homeland* è un'altra serie tivù - ancora. Ma quante sono? Provi ad aggiungere che è il solito pretesto per avviare una questione internazionale, e loro replicano chiedendoti se l'hai mai vista. *Homeland*.

No. Quindi non puoi parlare.

Inizi a sentire la disfatta, perché ti concedono l'argomento a piacere. Scegli il più facile: politica interna, la riforma del lavoro. Riferisci quello che hai letto stamattina, ma pare non basti. Ci sono novità - ti rimproverano - modifiche proprio di stasera, di quindici minuti fa, il ministro l'ha appena twittato.

Sei in grave ritardo anche su questo e vieni cortesemente invitato a diventare proprietario di un account **Twitter**. Ti rifiuti, ma insistono: cosa intendi fare, per il futuro? Da chi vorresti saperle, le notizie? Dai giornali di oggi? Quindi a metà? Il mondo è cambiato e i politici danno tutte le anteprime dai social network. Devi immaginarli come microannunci quotidiani a reti unificate, un telegiornale perenne - è tutta cultura, altro che inutile - ti spiegano i frequentatori di lungo corso.

Rinunci a difenderti e a dire cosa ne pensi, il curriculum sociale è già ampiamente compromesso. Che ti piaccia o no (per niente), è il momento della riflessione che stavi rimandando



Arte/1
A Segui Ai Weiwei su Instagram
B Vai a vedere la sua (prossima) mostra alla Royal Academy of Arts di Londra

punto incontrano un pesce anziano che va nella direzione opposta, fa un cenno di saluto e dice: "Salve, ragazzi. Com'è l'acqua?". I due pesci giovani nuotano un altro po', poi uno guarda l'altro e fa: "Che cavolo è l'acqua?".

L'acqua è la cultura senza tornaconto, il nome meno veloce di chiamare le cose inutili. Le conoscenze che altri hanno difeso per noi.

E fu così che ci salvammo tutti, il giorno che David Foster Wallace si divertì a fare **Esopo**. Quindi grazie ai moderni occidentali, altro che i filosofi cinesi.

A questo punto però non saremmo completamente obiettivi se non ammettessimo un altro fatto: che nel 2000 non era rimasto poi molto da dover salvare. E che in fondo l'accusa di «inutile» aveva perso smalto già da decenni. Oggi - 2015 - chi si sogna di dire che certa cultura è inutile? I

veramente esperti non vogliono vedere neanche la distinzione tra alto e basso: tutto è consumo - e perciò rispettabile - tutto è materiale. Tutto si deve sapere.

Adesso l'Inutile piace ovunque (guardiamoci in casa: a sinistra c'è proprio una tradizione di speculatori e pure da destra ammettono che qualche intellettuale in più l'avrebbero sempre desiderato).

Certo, le **ex scienze oppresse** (a parte qualche eccezione monetizzata) continuano a non essere di grande aiuto all'economia, ma - ragionevolmente - che danni possono fare adesso? Qualcuno meno portato a lavorare cercherà sempre di farne un'occupazione a tempo pieno, ma il capitalismo ha sopportato ben altri filosofi e uomini di lettere, questi moderni non spaventano nessuno.

Così, per concludere con poca enfasi, diremo che l'Inutile ha vinto, può restare, la virtù farà questa concessione al vizio.

Versione dei realisti: bene l'Inutile, in mezzo al resto.

A voler essere orrendamente snob: teniamoci l'Inutile, anche l'Inutile serve all'habitat. Pensata così,



Arte/2
A Scatti un foto della Cappella Sistina
B Ti fermi a contemplarla

Hobby
A Impari a usare gli acquerelli grazie a un tutorial su YouTube
B Ti iscrivi a un corso apposito



Relazioni
A Accumuli contatti su Tinder
B Ti fai nuovi amici al coro di quartiere



Attualità
A Segui il festival di Sanremo, la cronaca e i commenti su Twitter
B Lo guardi in diretta



Intrattenimento
 A Giochi a *Destiny*
 B Leggi l'ultimo Franzen: *Purity* (da settembre)

da anni: l'Inutile ha rotto tutti gli argini? Sta diventando pericoloso? Finirà questa follia collettiva? Vuoi provare ancora a sperare di sì?

Mentre non trovi le risposte t'accorgi che sei passato a farti domande esistenziali tutto solo mentre gli altri intorno si divertono (pessimo segno). La cena sta andando avanti senza di te - e a quanto pare anche la vita: i tuoi amici hanno cominciato a osservarti con quello sguardo freddo riservato ai disinformati. È la terrificante **Medusa dello Zeitgeist**: ti fissano così due o tre volte, non te ne accorgi e sei diventato un qualunque. Uno che discute sapendo poco o niente, perché non si interessa e non è curioso. Uno che non verrà più invitato al ristorante, da nessuna parte.

Non resta che tirare le somme: è il 2015 e non siamo mai stati così in pericolo. L'Inutile governa sul resto: è l'inspiegabile tirannia del debole sul forte. Aveva ragione il cinese al primo rigo, in Oriente avevano previsto tutto e subito - dagli Occidentali, invece, come ci si aspettava, i soliti sprechi: tutti a dire che l'Inutile è una meraviglia e nessuno a spiegare dove fermarsi. Procedendo così dissennatamente per interi secoli di storia.

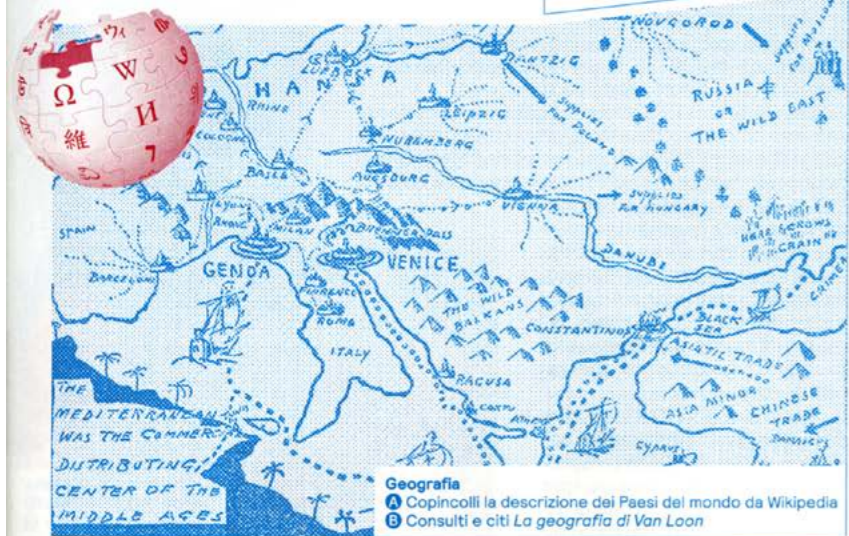
Che fare, quindi? Non si capisce, si sa solo che il tempo come al solito si rifiuterà di concedere grossi cambiamenti nel breve periodo (tantomeno su richiesta del pubblico). Perciò, in attesa del richiamo mondiale alla serietà, resta ferma la regola di **Calvino** - l'aveva pensata per i classici, ma è perfettamente riadattabile alle cose inutili: «Non servono, ma se le sai è meglio». ■



Aldilà
 A Guardi *The Leftovers*
 B Hai cominciato a studiare la teologia



Viaggi
 A Leggi tutti i commenti dedicati al *Cristo velato* su Tripadvisor
 B Vai a Napoli a visitare la Cappella Sansevero



Geografia
 A Copincolla la descrizione dei Paesi del mondo da Wikipedia
 B Consulti e citi *La geografia di Van Loon*



L'effimero e la bellezza della vita

di Annalena Benini

Un rossetto, un vestito, un pettegolezzo, un ballo: sono le piccole cose a ricordarci che siamo vivi



Engpass
 2000
 Foto: Roman Signer
 Kehr wieder Spitze in Hafen von Hamburg
 Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth

vano con il computer sulle ginocchia, e mi sconvolgevo per la metamorfosi di **Lester Nygaard** e per la pioggia di trote, dall'altro lato del divano mio marito si girava di tanto in tanto verso di me e leggeva a voce alta frasi sottolineate da un saggio di Cioran intitolato *Sulla Francia*, che Cioran scrisse a trent'anni, durante la Seconda guerra mondiale (verrà ripetuta più volte, nel corso del mio matrimonio, anche la seguente frase: «Lui a trent'anni aveva già capito tutto»).

«Senti, senti questa: «La decadenza non è che il culto esclusivo della vita... Non avere più anima», capisci? Il benessere, i bistrot, il vuoto». Nei bistrot non ci andiamo quasi mai, benessere insomma, ma perché adesso guardi il mio computer con quella smorfia? È una serie stupenda, non ci dormo la notte: c'è dentro l'umanità, la morte, diventare quello che sei, l'insensatezza, la ferocia, vieni a vederlo con me, ascolta questa bella musica.

«Gli eroi omerici vivevano e morivano. Gli snob d'Occidente disquisiscono sul piacere e sul dolore». D'accordo, buonanotte, resta lì con Cioran e celebra la fine dell'Occidente.

Ma non resisto, e mentre sto andando via mi giro e urlo: «Comunque a Parigi Cioran andava a correre ai **giardini del Lussemburgo!** Omerico con il completino da jogging!». Anche Cioran era dipendente dalle cose inutili, dalla superficialità perfino, e lo sei anche tu che sottolinei con furia e snobbi *Fargo* (e tutte le altre cose meravigliose che ti rifiuti di guardare con me: ma a tua discolpa dirò che so che ti rifiuti di vederle perché sei terrorizzato dalla dipendenza, non perché sei snob. Hai paura di venire risucchiato, ti metti i tappi di cera nelle orecchie come Ulisse con le sirene: in questo, ammetto, sei molto omerico).

Totally unnecessary è qualcosa che ci siamo guadagnati nei secoli, ed è la premessa della bellezza. Sei fiero di questo divano comodo, anche se distrutto dal gatto, su cui sottolinei le pagine con furia, sono felice di questo computer che mi porto ovunque e mi ha cambiato la vita, ci interesserà nostra figlia che ha promesso di sparecchiare la tavola per sempre se andiamo al canile a prendere un cucciolo.

E ho appena scoperto una cosa totalmente inutile



Sport
 A Passi il tempo a contare il numero di passaggi riusciti di Pirlo
 B Ti godi la partita

Certe sere ti guardo e so che cosa stai pensando. «Tutto è inutile, il vuoto sarebbe bastato»: è una frase che mio marito ha ripetuto spesso negli ultimi quindici anni. Io mi innervosisco, lui soddisfatto continua a leggere Cioran.

Posso affermare con sicurezza che il mio romanticismo iniziale è stato messo in grave difficoltà da **Emil Cioran**, filosofo rumeno importante, spietato e pieno di ironia, che attraverso le sue considerazioni sulla vita e sull'umanità ha creato, a casa nostra, un certo sospetto per i mazzi di fiori inaspettati (anche aspettati), per le feste a sorpresa, le smancerie, le scemenze, i viaggi, le serie televisive, insomma un po' tutto quello che mi piace tantissimo. Ho dato per anni la colpa a Cioran, mi rendo conto che non è giusto: ma anche poche sere fa, mentre guardavo *Fargo* sul di-



Wasserinstallation
1999
Foto: Peter Cox
Bonniefant Museum,
Maastricht
Courtesy of the artist
and Art: Concept,
Paris and
Hauser & Wirth

scatolette di tonno o delle medicine.

Ci sono momenti in cui le cose inutili ci ricordano che siamo vivi, che abbiamo una dignità, che possiamo permetterci di scherzare, e che abbiamo inclinazioni, ossessioni, passioni. Che siamo diversissimi (io però ti accompagno a sentire **Schubert**, tu non potresti darmi un po' di soddisfazione con *The Honourable Woman*?) e soprattutto nei momenti orribili abbiamo bisogno di bellezza. Nei momenti orribili la riconosciamo meglio, perfino, la bellezza.

Ho letto i taccuini della giovinezza di **Marina Cvetaeva**, la grande poetessa russa stremata nel 1919 dalla rivoluzione bolscevica e dalla carestia: «Così tanta neve, così poco pane»,

scrisse sul muro dell'appartamento in cui bruciava i mobili per accendere il fuoco e riscaldare le sue figlie, e in cui tutto era gelato tranne l'anima, i libri, l'idea del ballo, il pensiero del cioccolato e di un innamoramento, nessuna ideologia. I suoi versi celebrano la bellezza della vita, la meraviglia di un vestito, di uno sguardo:

«Nei guerrieri mi disturba la guerra, nei marinai il mare, nei sacerdoti Dio, negli amanti l'amore.

Potrei scrivere dei versi bellissimi – eterni! se amassi anche l'eterno come l'effimero.

Quando non ho più a cosa giocare, gioco alla virtù». Amare l'effimero più dell'eterno, essere superficiali con stile: non significa perdere il senso delle cose essenziali, significa renderle più belle, aderire all'immanenza.

Marina Cvetaeva è stata un genio letterario che nessuno è riuscito a etichettare, e la sua grandezza e l'impossibilità della decadenza diventavano, in quella condizione tragica, l'amare ancora di più il superfluo e non accettare **Stalin** e l'ideologia sovietica («preferisco i perdenti, gli offesi, i deboli»), non gettare via l'anima, fino alla fine.

Amo anche questo dell'immanenza e dell'inutile, oltre alla bellezza: la sua indispensabilità, che dovrebbe trasformarci perfino in (inutili) eroi, decisi a difendere il senso della nostra vita e della nostra libertà. Dimostrare a Cioran e a mio marito che il vuoto non sarebbe bastato. ■



INFANTILISMUS



Was sagt es über die Welt aus, wenn die teuerste Skulptur, die jemals auf unserem Planeten versteigert wurde, aussieht wie eine gigantische Partydekoration? Im Herbst 2013 fand der »Balloon Dog (Orange)« von Jeff Koons für gut 58 Millionen Dollar bei Christie's in New York einen Liebhaber. Das Werk ist eine von fünf Nachbildungen jener verknoteten Ballonfiguren, mit denen Clowns auf Kindergeburtstagen ihr Publikum erfreuen – allerdings auf Koons' Anweisung ausgeführt in poliertem Edelstahl und in die riesenhaften Proportionen von dreieinhalb Metern Höhe aufgeblasen. Christie's pries die Skulptur als »Ikone der vernakulären Pop-Sprache« an. Für Milliardäre wie Eli Broad, Dakis Joannou oder François Pinault ist sie der üppigste Sahnetrüffel ihrer jeweiligen Kunstkollektion.

Oder was ist von der Arbeit des Künstlers Tomás Saraceno zu halten, die sich als gigantisches Kletternetz unter der Glaskuppel des Ständehauses in Düsseldorf aufspannt? Sie erinnert an die Seilgerüste auf Spielplätzen, in denen Kinder ihre Geschicklichkeit erproben, unter den wachsamen Augen ihrer Helikoptereltern. In Düsseldorf steigen nun



Mit Essen spielt man nicht? Fischli/Weiss' Fotografie »Eitles Pack!« (1979, o.), ein Bild der »Wurstserie« aus der Sammlung des Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. Darunter: »White Snow Dwarf, Sleepy #1 (Midget)« (2012) von Paul McCarthy. Re. Seite: »Ohne Titel« (2006) von André Butzer, 2014 für 12 000 Euro von Ketterer zugeschlagen

die Erwachsenen selbst ins Netz und turnen mit versonnenem Lächeln herum. Mehr als 100 000 zählte man im Museum in den vergangenen eineinhalb Jahren.

Und dann gibt es da noch eine Erscheinung wie Jonathan Meese, der sich bei seinen Performances in wütende Wahnzustände hineinhyperventiliert, stundenlang herumkraekelt und Requisiten durch die Gegend wirft. Ein Künstler allerdings, der privat so lebenswürdig wie alltagsuntüchtig wirkt, dass ihn auch als Mittvierziger noch seine Mutter umsorgt – die für ihn laut »Spiegel«-Interview sowieso der »Verbindungsmann Nummer eins zur Diktatur der Kunst« ist. Führt Meese seinen unbearbeiteten Ödipuskomplex vor? Man könnte es denken.

Wie die Beispiele zeigen, bedient sich die zeitgenössische Kunst nicht nur gerne einer Ästhetik des Kindlichen. Gelegentlich wird sie auch richtig kindisch. Beide Entwicklungen lassen sich im Trend der Infantilisierung bündeln, den man seit geraumer Zeit in Galerieräumen und Museumssälen beobachten kann. Die Kritik an diesem künstlerischen Infantilismus fällt interessanterweise spärlich

Cucina/1
A Comperi la bottarga da Eataly
B Ti limiti a servirtene durante le vacanze in Sardegna



Se la maggior parte delle risposte è A sei perfetto per lo Zeitgeist del 2015, un'epoca dominata dal superfluo. Se la maggior parte delle risposte è B sei anacronistico

Cucina/2
A Sei fan di MasterChef su Facebook
B Rileggi ciclicamente Pellegrino Artusi



Die Dämonen seiner Kindheit bekämpfte der US-Künstler Mike Kelley mit Werken wie »Ahh ... Youth!« (1991, re). Sotheby's versteigerte das Selbstporträt im Mai 2014 für 1,16 Millionen Euro (Hammerpreis). Unten: Nicht nur für Kinder ist Jeremy Dellers Hüpfburg »Sacrilège« (2012), eine Kopie des Stonehenge-Monuments



aus. Ein ungerichteter, wertkonservativer Kulturpessimismus, der gesellschaftlich durchaus verbreitet sein mag und sich an Neil Postmans Idee eines »Sich-zu-Tode-Amüsierens« anlehnt, scheint speziell im Kunstdiskurs wenig Resonanzraum zu finden.

Wenn etwa der Literaturwissenschaftler Jürgen Wertheimer als Herausgeber der Anthologie »Strategien der Verdummung: Infantilisierung in der Fun-Gesellschaft« auf eine Installation von Martin Kippenberger verweist, zielt sein Angriff eher auf den Kalauer im Titel (»Jetzt geh ich in den Birkenwald, denn meine Pillen wirken bald.«) und weniger auf den konkreten ästhetischen Eindruck des Werks ab. Könnte das Zögern der Kritik damit zu tun haben, dass ein sprachlicher Infantilismus einfach leichter zu erkennen ist als ein ästhetischer – wenn man von zeitge-

nössischen Variationen im Fachgebiet des »Bad Painting«, wie den Bildern des Berliner Malers André Butzer, einmal absieht?

Diese These ist eine Vermutung, die sich kaum abschließend belegen lässt. Klarer scheinen dagegen die Antworten auf die Frage auszufallen, welche positiven Effekte von einer infantilen Kunst ausgehen können. Die Psychoanalytikerin Anna Freud hat in Bezug auf die Thesen ihres berühmteren Vaters, Sigmund Freud, erstmals im Jahr 1965 die nicht pathologische und reversible Regression als eine normale Anpassungsmöglichkeit des Kindes beschrieben, um Ängste und Trennungen zu verarbeiten. Und der amerikanische Kunsthistoriker und Psychoanalytiker Ernst Kris sah in der Regression gar den eigentlichen Schlüssel zur Kunst: »Zentraler Punkt jeder künstlerischen Kreativität ist

eine Entspannung (»Regression«) der Ich-Funktionen«, schrieb Kris 1952 in seinem Standardwerk »Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art«. Wie infantil ein Künstler sein darf, muss er dann nur noch mit seinem Ich und Über-Ich (Kritiker) klären.

Eine milde Form der Regression pflegen Künstler eines ersten Typus, der auf Spielzimmer-Ästhetiken zurückgreift, ohne sich selbst kindisch zu benehmen. Zu ihnen gehört Takashi Murakami, der aktuell größte Künstlerstar Japans. Sein Werk folgt einer Massenbewegung, die man in der japanischen Gesellschaft seit den Achtzigerjahren beobachtet und die sogar einen eigenen Namen hervorgebracht hat: *kawaii*, was übersetzt so viel wie »niedlich«, »kindlich« oder einfach »süß« heißt. Ein Stilmix aus Kindchenschema und quietschbunter Harmlosigkeit hat sich als designtes Ideal in vielen Bereichen durchgesetzt: Verhalten, Kleidung, Dosenöffner, ja selbst unangenehme Behördenbriefe können in dieser Verkleidung zugestellt werden.

Ziemlich kindlich wirken auch viele Kulleraugencharaktere der Manga-Comics und Anime-Filme, die Murakami nach eigener Aussage so nachhaltig faszinierten, dass er Mitte der Neunzigerjahre begann, in seiner Kunst eigene cartoonartige Figuren zu entwerfen. Entstanden sind seither die blonde Kellnerin »Miss ko²«, die Mickey-Mouse-Mutation »DOB« oder die lustigen Strampelanzug-Zwillinge »Kaikai« und »Kiki«. »Ich habe das System gefunden, das einen niedlichen Charakter ausmacht«, verriet der Künstler 2005 der »New York Times«. In seiner Kunstfabrik produzieren zahlreiche Assistenten makellose Skulpturen und Gemälde für ein Traumland voller bunter, lachender Blumen, in das sich jedoch auch Atompilze oder Totenschädel problemlos integrieren lassen. Am Ende wirkt alles poppig, farbig, *kawaii* – und das wird vom Publikum honoriert: Nicht zufällig rief Sotheby's am 20. Januar in Hong-



kong eine Plüschfigur von Murakami mit dem Titel »Petit Panda« (2009) trotz 150er-Auflage zum stolzen Schätzwert von umgerechnet 12 500 bis 18 800 Euro auf.

Wem Murakamis Figuren trotzdem noch eine Spur zu gebrochen und abseitig erscheinen, kann sich dem Chinesen Liu Ye zuwenden: Hinter den hohen Mädchenstirnen, die der 1964 in Peking geborene Künstler malt, scheint sich wenig Aufmüpfigkeit und dafür viel melancholische Sanftmut zusammenzuballen. Gelegentlich lässt Liu auch das Kaninchen Miffy des holländischen Kinderbuchillustrators Dick Bruna mit unschuldigen Knopfaugen neben abstrakten Bildern von Mondrian posieren. *Kawaii?* Keine Frage.

Das Flächenbombardement der Niedlichkeit ist allerdings keine rein fernöstliche Angriffstaktik. In den USA heißt der Drogenbaron des künstlerischen Süßstoffs Jeff Koons. Der inzwischen 60-jährige Ex-Börsenmakler hat der bankrotten Idee der Pop-Art neuen Kredit gegeben, auch wenn seine Werke immer ein bisschen wie Spielzeug wirken. So tarnt sich auch der schwere Bronzetitan »Hulk (Friends)«, der ab 3. Februar wieder im Oberen Belvedere in Wien steht, als aufgeblähte Luftkissenfigur, die sich jederzeit mit einem Handstreich erledigen ließe. Dass solche Kunst nicht viel mehr wolle, als den Betrachter mit einem guten Gefühl in seine Vergangenheit zurückzusetzen, erklärte Koons bei der Eröffnung seiner laufenden Retrospektive im Centre Pompidou, Paris, dem Fernsehsender Arte: »Es geht um Freude und Optimismus und Akzeptanz und darum, dass

In asiatischen Ländern wie China oder Japan gibt es ein Ideal der Niedlichkeit: Der 1964 in Peking geborene Künstler Liu Ye malt gerne Mädchen mit hohen Stirnen und sanft blickenden Kulleraugen. Rechts: »Painting for Summer« (2005)



Bild: Liu Ye/Galerie Frank Schlag & Cie., Essen/Courtesy Galerie Frank Schlag & Cie., Essen



Die Kunst, nicht erwachsen zu werden, beherrscht Jonathan Meese wie kein zweiter. Oben: »Der Diamantenfisch erzwingt...« (2006). Und Roman Signer brennt im hohen Alter ein wahres Feuerwerk ab (»Haus mit Raketen«, 2013, o. re.). Harmloser erscheint die Kunst von Takashi Murakami, so wie der »Petit Panda« (2009), den Sotheby's am 20. Januar in Hongkong bei 12.500 Euro aufrief (rechte Seite)



man sich die Freude eines Kindes bewahren sollte.« Immerhin hat die »Celebration«-Serie mit dem Ballonhund für den Künstler selbst einen ersten Hintergrund. Als Koons' Exfrau – die Pornoqueen Ilona Staller – nach dem bitteren Scheidungskrieg den gemeinsamen Sohn Ludwig nach Italien mitnahm und dem Künstler den Umgang verbot, trieb dieser das gigantische Spielzeugprojekt voran: »Ich wollte mit Ludwig kommunizieren«, sagte der Künstler 2008 bei einem Atelierbesuch des Autors, »sodass er aufwachsen und begreifen konnte, dass sich an ihn dachte.«

Dass Regression nach Anna Freud eine Verarbeitungsmöglichkeit psychischer Traumata sein kann, sieht man auch am Beispiel des US-Amerikaners Mike Kelley, der aus einem streng katholischen Arbeiterklassehaushalt in die Freiheit einer Kunst voll kindlicher Ästhetiken flüchtete. Der gruselige »Little Girl's Room« (1980) oder die schäbige Knuddelpuppenparade »Ahh ... Youth!« (1991), in die sich der Künstler mit einem pickeligen Jugendfoto selbst einreicht, scheinen vor einer gefährlichen Unterströmung im Planschbecken der infantilen Künstlergefühle zu warnen. Kelley nähte Stofftiere vom Flohmarkt, die für ihn weggeworfene Liebe symbolisierten, in obszönen Stellungen zusammen und lud so ihre weiche Unschuld sexuell auf.

Paul McCarthy, Kelleys Kollege und Kumpel aus L.A., treibt den düsteren Unfug noch weiter, wenn er aus Schneewittchen einen trashigen Softporno-Streifen macht (»White Snow«, 2013) oder in Skulpturen die sieben Zwerge als deformierte Zombies aufzutreten lässt. Nachdem sich Kelley 2012 im Alter von 57 Jahren das Leben genommen hat, bleibt McCarthy in Los Angeles allein zurück, um die abseitigen Triebe der Kinderseele in

Bildern zu kanalisieren. (Schneewittchen, behauptet der Künstler übrigens, würde ihn frapperierend an seine Mutter erinnern.)

Wunderbar also, wenn es Künstlern gelingt, ihren Kindskopf zu bewahren – wobei wir beim zweiten Typus wären: dem kindischen Künstler, der eine regressive Persönlichkeit zur Schau stellt. Dieses Rollenspiel scheint eng mit dem verbunden, was der deutsche Schriftsteller Dieter Wellershoff einen »Infantilismus als Revolte« nennt. »Das Blödeln ist ein freiwilliger Form- und Niveauperlust«, führt er in seinem Aufsatz von 1976 aus. »Das Hauptcharakteristikum dieses Kommunikationsspiels ist seine regressive Tendenz, die sich jeder Kontrolle durch innerlichte Normen der Vernunft oder des Geschmacks zu entziehen sucht.« Seine Theorie des Blödelns leitet Wellershoff unter anderem von den Darbietungen der Dadaisten ab, aber sie scheint noch viel besser auf einige zeitgenössische Künstler wie John Bock und Jonathan Meese zu passen. Sowohl Bock als auch Meese – der gutherzige Lord Gaga der deutschen Gegenwartskunst – zünden in ihren Bildern, Installationen und Performances ein Feuerwerk kryptischer Referenzen (»Modder der Summenmutation« / »Erzstaat Atlantis«), dem man beim besten Willen nicht mehr folgen kann. Schlimm ist das nicht unbedingt, denn nach Wellershoff »haben Blödelnde häufig die Neigung, sich einen privaten Code zu schaffen, der für Außenstehende unverständlich bleibt«. Nur sollte man im Gegenzug eben nicht den Fehler begehen, im kindischen Künstler keine höheren Wahrheiten oder ernsthaften Motivationen zu vermuten. Beide, Bock und Meese, sind disziplinierte Workaholics und Gutverdiener. Ihren Infantilismus setzen sie strategisch ein.

Seit Picasso gestand, er wolle wieder lernen, wie ein Kind zu malen, und seit Jean Dubuffet in der »Art brut« von Kinderzeichnungen die Fährte zur eigenen Kreativität fand, wählten ab und an einzelne Künstler das Infantile als probaten Karriereweg, um sich vom Establishment und von vorangegangenen Kollegen abzugrenzen. Der wohltdosierte Niveauperlust – oder besser noch Tabuverstoß – bewirkt heute beim Publikum allerdings oft sympathisierende Anteilnahme. Wer kann sich das Lächeln verkneifen, wenn auf so kreative Weise gegen beliebte Elterngelote verstoßen wird, wie in der »Wurstserie« (1979) vom Schweizer Duo Fischli/Weiss? Mit Essen spielt man etwa nicht? Tiefe Bewunderung erfährt auch Roman Signer, ebenfalls Schweizer, der sich noch mit über 60 zu juvenilen Mutproben herausfordert: Er lässt sich im Kajak hinter einem Auto die Landstraße entlangziehen (»Kajak«, 2000) oder kreiselt auf einem Drehstuhl mithilfe von zwei brennenden Silvesterraketen in den Händen um die eigene Achse (»Bürostuhl«, 2006). Albernheit bedeutet letztendlich immer Freiheit.

Hinter der dritten Variante einer infantilen Gegenwartskunst stecken Künstler, die man als Regressionsingenieure bezeichnen möchte: Sie manipulieren den Betrachter, indem sie ihm verführerische Spielsituationen aufdrängen, in denen er wieder die Rolle eines Kindes annimmt. Tomás Saraceno's Klettergebilde gehören zu dieser Strömung genauso wie die Skater-Halfpipe, die der früh verstorbene Michel Majerus im Museum aufbaute. Der Brite Jeremy Deller lässt sogar eine aufblasbare Version des Stonehenge-Steinkreises als gigantische Hüpfburg durch die Kunstwelt touren. Am bekanntesten sind jedoch die Rutschen von Carsten Höller, auf denen die Besucher der Tate Modern 2006 in London bis zu 25 Meter in die Tiefe sausten. Höllers Rutschskulpturen werden gerne mit Kuratorenkauerwelsch verbrämt. In Wahrheit liegt ihr Reiz wohl einfach darin, den inneren Racker freizulassen und sich aus der eigenen Komfortzone in den Abgrund des lustvollen Kontrollverlusts zu stürzen. Oder wie Jeremy Deller über sein Hüpfkunstwerk sagt: »Das ist einfach ein bisschen Spaß.«

Die »Spaßgesellschaft« war in den Neunzigern die Ersatzfamilie für alle, die der beängstigenden Welt temporär entkommen oder auch langfristig »nicht erwachsen werden« wollten. Mittlerweile sind die Spaßmacher im Museum angekommen. Ein ernsthafter Grund zur Besorgnis ist das nicht. ×

Seit Picasso gestand, er wolle wieder lernen, wie ein Kind zu malen, haben Künstler immer wieder das Infantile als probaten Weg für ihre Karriere gewählt.





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The Artist as Curator

TURIN PALAZZO CAVOUR

Jusqu'au 11 janvier

Maurizio Cattelan s'exhibe à Turin

Maurizio Cattelan est de retour, et c'est plutôt fracassant. Car le jeune retraité des arts plastiques n'a rien perdu de son mordant. Sa victime de l'hiver est la ville de Turin. Une aimable cité, propre sur elle, qui ne songeait sans doute pas se retrouver ainsi à nu après le passage de ce diabolin curateur. Avec ses deux complices Myriam Ben Salah and Marta Papini, celui qui a fait tomber Jean-Paul II sous une météorite n'a rien épargné à la capitale du Piémont. Pour préparer l'exposition, son équipe et lui ont farfouillé partout, notamment dans les musées les plus obscurs de la ville, de celui de criminologie à l'auto-mausolée du designer Carlo Mollino. Et ils sont revenus au palazzo Cavour forts des entrailles de la ville, dont leur exposition révèle tout le noir inconscient. Réduits à néant, ses rêves de cité de l'automobile, avec une voiture fracassée par Florian Pugnaire et David Raffini qu'un vérin raccourcit chaque jour un peu plus. Ridiculisées, ses envolées baroques, avec ces deux ventilateurs qui s'affrontent de Roman Signer, soufflant pour rien sur les soieries carmin. Un brin ridicule, cette riche bourgeoisie, qui s'étend de Carla Bruni aux joueurs de la Juventus. De salles white cube en salons parfaitement préservés dans leur jus, le parcours est sans concession. Mais pour comprendre tout le gai savoir collecté au fil du processus, on conseille vivement la lecture du catalogue de l'exposition (en anglais): où l'on croise d'autres fantômes turinois, Paracelse, Nostradamus ou Nietzsche, qui offrent à Turin ses derniers moments de raison. **E.L.**



CARLO MOLLINO Senza titolo, vers 1968-1973

«Shit and die» - Via di Cavour, 8 - +39 011 530 690 - artissima.it



“SHIT AND DIE” at Palazzo Cavour, Turin / MOUSSE

MOUSSE blog

MOUSSEMAGAZINE.IT | BY INTERFASE

In 2013 Artissima presented the first edition of One Torino comprising five independent yet interlinked group shows in collaboration with museums and foundations in the city and Palazzo Cavour, a magnificent historical venue in the town centre. An extraordinary exhibition project aimed at placing Torino at the centre of an important cultural dialogue about contemporary art by consolidating its position as an experimental and dynamic art capital and by promoting both its contemporary and historical identity.

Seeking to create an engaging and original project that actively involves the city and which addresses the notions of exhibition-making and contemporary art at large, Artissima has invited a “retired” artist with an inquisitive mind and a talent for discovery and display to act as the “non-curator” for One Torino, namely Maurizio Cattelan. He chose to work in a team with Palais de Tokyo’s Myriam Ben Salah and independent curator Marta Papini.

Taking the city of Torino as its main inspiration, “SHIT AND DIE” lies on a narrative thread drawn by a series of objects that the curators have sourced from a selection of established yet unconventional institutions and collections in the city. “SHIT AND DIE” is conceived as a highly subjective, obsessive and irrationally non-exhaustive composition in which different stories, objects and artworks incorporate into one consistent narrative that visitors can read as a whole tale.

Colonising Palazzo Cavour’s Baroque architecture, the show is rooted in another time, when the building was home to Camillo Benso Conte di Cavour, an Italian statesman and leading figure in the movement toward Italian unification, who left behind scant remains of both his public and private fate. Still haunting the space, these ghosts are revealed through subtle hints, playful remembrances and imaginary digressions that revive Torino’s history and suggest the obliteration of the story of one man, one space, one city by universal torments and a vision of the human condition.

The exhibition is divided into seven sections, each emanating from a specific object that functions as a thematic anchor for the show. From the interior design of Olivetti’s residential units to the execution scaffold of Museum of Criminal Anthropology Cesare Lombroso, to the skeleton of Professor Giacomini, once Director of the Human Anatomy Museum Luigi Rolando and the special collaboration between Museo Casa Mollino and artist Yuri Ancarani: all these elements throw a singular light on the city’s history, underlining its obsessions, its fetishes, its secrets. What is more, through deliberately fortunate and randomly fortuitous affinities, the artworks in the exhibition bring extra levels of meaning to the objects, thereby creating a dialogue that distorts both objects and artworks as well as their relationship to the space itself.

The project by Maurizio Cattelan, Myriam Ben Salah and Marta Papini is a nonlinear experience punctuated by a wealth of questions and musings that are stimulated by the intertwining of the artworks, the space and the city itself.

at Palazzo Cavour, Turin

until 11 January 2015

INTERNATIONAL ARTS | THE ART OF COLLECTING: FRIEZE LONDON

Berlin Art Complex Rises From a Brewery’s Ruins

By DAVID BELCHER OCT. 16, 2014



The Swiss artist Roman Signer assembled a model airplane in the voluminous exhibit hall at the Kindl Center for Contemporary Art. Two large fans blow air on the plane, causing it to spiral as if descending rapidly. Jens Ziehe, Berlin

BERLIN — In this city's not-quite-yet-hip Neukölln district, the Kindl Center for Contemporary Art is taking shape in a vast abandoned brewery thanks to the vision of two art collectors — and an artist and his nose-diving airplane.

The Kindl, named after the popular beer that was brewed at the facility for 70 years before the company relocated to a larger space outside the city, is the brainchild of the Swiss art collecting couple Burkhard Varnholt, a banker, and Salome Grisard, an architect.

The facility was built in the late 1920s in the German Expressionist style. Its red-brick facade and imposing main tower evoke the Tate Modern in London — both in its physical aspect and as an example of how a transformed industrial space can slowly help revive a neighborhood.

The art complex, which covers 5,500 square meters, or 59,000 square feet, will open fully next summer at a cost of 6 million euros, or \$7.7 million, with two more exhibition areas, several artists' studios and a cafe in the large space amid six enormous dormant brewing coppers. It will be devoted entirely to new art and will not feature the private collection of Mr. Varnholt and Ms. Grisard, who live in Zurich. They are funding the entire project aside from revenue generated from admissions and occasional space rentals for special events.



The Brew House, which will be opened to the public after refurbishment. Jens Ziehe, Berlin

Judging by a recent visit during the fourth annual Berlin Art Week, a citywide celebration of the city's burgeoning arts scene in different galleries and repurposed venues, the Neukölln neighborhood, which lies in an industrial area of the former American sector of East Berlin, is off the beaten path of the city's hipper gallery areas, which have attracted collectors from all over the world.

"Neukölln is more grass-roots than other, more artistically established neighborhoods in Berlin," said Andreas Fiedler, the center's Swiss-born curator. "But here are a lot of artist spaces and a lot of artists produce here."

"The success of Berlin as a center for artists is because of who is here, who has been here, and the freedom that is based on the myth of the '90s," he continued, referring to the decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall when the city exploded with art and refurbishment. "It's still a very liberal city, and you can realize here what you can't necessarily in other parts of Europe."

That is evident in the main hall of the art center, the only room currently open to the public, where a two-seat yellow plane dangles from the 20-meter, or 65-foot, ceiling of the former boiler house of Kindl Beer.

The facility's massive room helped to draw the installation that will anchor the new art center's first phase. "Kitfox Experimental," by the 76-year-old Swiss artist Roman Signer, who is known for his outrageous outdoor installations, is an assemble-yourself airplane (the popular Kitfox brand), with two large fans blowing from opposite walls to move the plane in a circular motion. It hangs upside down, spinning from the force of the fans, and their deafening sound adds to the almost movielike sense that the plane is spiraling toward earth.

For Mr. Signer, finding a space to create a monumental artwork like "Kitfox Experimental" is rare. He said his idea for the piece came from a childhood memory.

"As a boy, I was lying by a river, looking into the sun, and I saw an airplane high in the sky, probably a military plane, with a buzzing engine. Suddenly the plane turned downward and started plummeting toward me," he recalled. "At first I didn't realize it, but the pilot was aiming his plane at me. I jumped up and ran away. Then he turned the plane at the last moment and righted it. He was playing a joke. He saw me and wanted to scare me."

That reaction is something Mr. Fiedler hopes the first visitors to the Kindl will experience.

“It can be such an overwhelming and threatening experience if you go under the airplane, especially if you stand directly under the nose and look up,” Mr. Fiedler said. “For me, it evokes the idea — and terror — of flying. It is uncomfortable and meditative at the same time.”

A recent tour of the facility with Mr. Fiedler was a study in a raw space being transformed by both construction workers and the vision of its owners. A large Art Deco clock, frozen in time at 11:35 a.m., when production at the brewery ended in 2005, hangs over a room being gutted and recast for an exhibition area.

Another exhibition area, on the second floor, will be a more conventional space with white walls and minimal natural light. Gigantic steel girders that crisscross the room can either be utilized or hidden, depending on the exhibition, Mr. Fiedler said.

The facility’s top floor, six flights up, will be an exhibition space with views across the rooftops of Berlin, and an already completed saw-toothed roof celebrates the natural light.

Mr. Fiedler acknowledged the challenge presented by a space where the view above and across the skyline are constantly distracting.

“This is the danger of having such an amazing space so high above Berlin,” Mr. Fiedler said, waving his hand toward the skyline. “This could easily upstage most artworks.”

Yet the space is what caught the eye of the Kindl’s art benefactors, Mr. Fiedler said.

“Burkhard Varnholt and Salome Grisard did not come to Berlin with the intention of starting a project here in the city or in this space,” Mr. Fiedler said. “In reality it was really the other way around. They encountered the building and then thought about doing something with it.”

Mr. Varnholt acknowledged that the unconventional space might seem risky in a neighborhood far from the tourist crowds of central Berlin.

“I’m reminded of what George Bernard Shaw once said,” he said, by way of response: “We want a few mad people now. See where the sane ones have landed us.”

Kunstmuseum St.Gallen presents a comprehensive showcase of Roman Signer's work

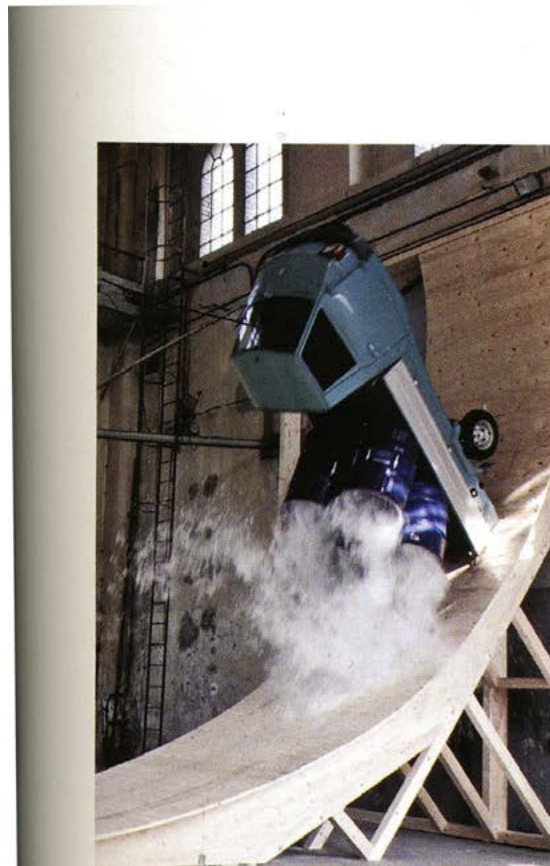
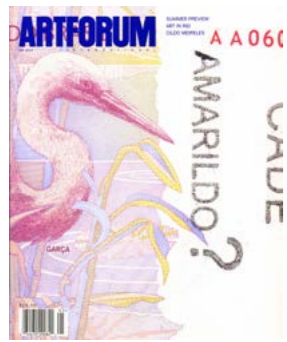


ST. GALLEN.- His "small and large happenings" as he calls them, have brought him international fame. Roman Signer, born in 1938 in Appenzell, Switzerland, has become one of the most important sculptors in the world. The starting point for his unique creative process is a concept of sculpture that is disengaged from the object, making processes visible. Everyday things form the basis of his work. The objects he uses, such as tables, chairs or kayaks have a distinct character of their own. However, Roman Signer does not use them for their typical functions; instead, he transforms them in a way that exposes the multiple potential layers of meaning in their presence as physical objects. Familiar things become strange; functional things appear absurd. Both the exhilarating and the abysmal qualities of everyday life become visible.

Roman Signer has accrued an impressive list of exhibitions both in Switzerland and internationally. After presenting his first retrospective in 1993 and numerous contributions to group exhibitions, the Kunstmuseum St.Gallen is once again presenting a comprehensive showcase of Signer's work. The centrepiece of the exhibition is his installation work created since 2011. It will be exciting to see how the artist deals with the traditional museum spaces when he returns to them after twenty years. He knows these spaces like the back of his hand - in the early 1980s, when the museum was closed, he had the opportunity to set up a studio there.

Roman Signer's creative process has become even more complex. The roles that things played in earlier works have now taken surprising new interpretive directions. There is a stronger sense of cross-referencing with reality, if one wishes to look for it. The content-based element of his work is significant to Roman Signer's lucid contemporaneity, even in pieces that can clearly be read as existential ciphers. The exhibition combines sculptures, installations and video works into one concise flow and moves between large-scale single pieces and interrelated groups of works.

Curators: Roland Wäspe, Konrad Bitterli



From left: Roman Signer, *Unfall als Skulptur* (Accident as Sculpture), 2008. Performance view, Kunstraum Dornbirn, Austria, 2008. Charles Ray, *Unpainted Sculpture*, 1997, fiberglass, paint,

ST. GALLEN, SWITZERLAND

ROMAN SIGNER

KUNSTMUSEUM ST. GALLEN • June 7–October 26 • Curated by Roland Wäspe and Konrad Bitterli • Roman Signer is the only artist that I know of who possesses an official license to blow things up. And it isn't just for show. The Swiss artist, who creates much of his work outside, takes his sweeping native landscape as his studio, often staging destructive processes and massive performances involving fire. Though this exhibition will be installed predominantly indoors, it will nevertheless feature Signer's signature alchemical transformations of everyday objects (such as chairs, tables, or a model helicopter) into assemblages of newly exploded elements. Viewer wariness is not entirely unjustified: To be sure, there are various levels of pyrotechnic accreditation in Switzerland, and Signer apparently has the authority to detonate any object he likes save for entire buildings. Which is to say: Will there be rockets in this show? Yes. But the kunstmuseum itself is likely to survive.

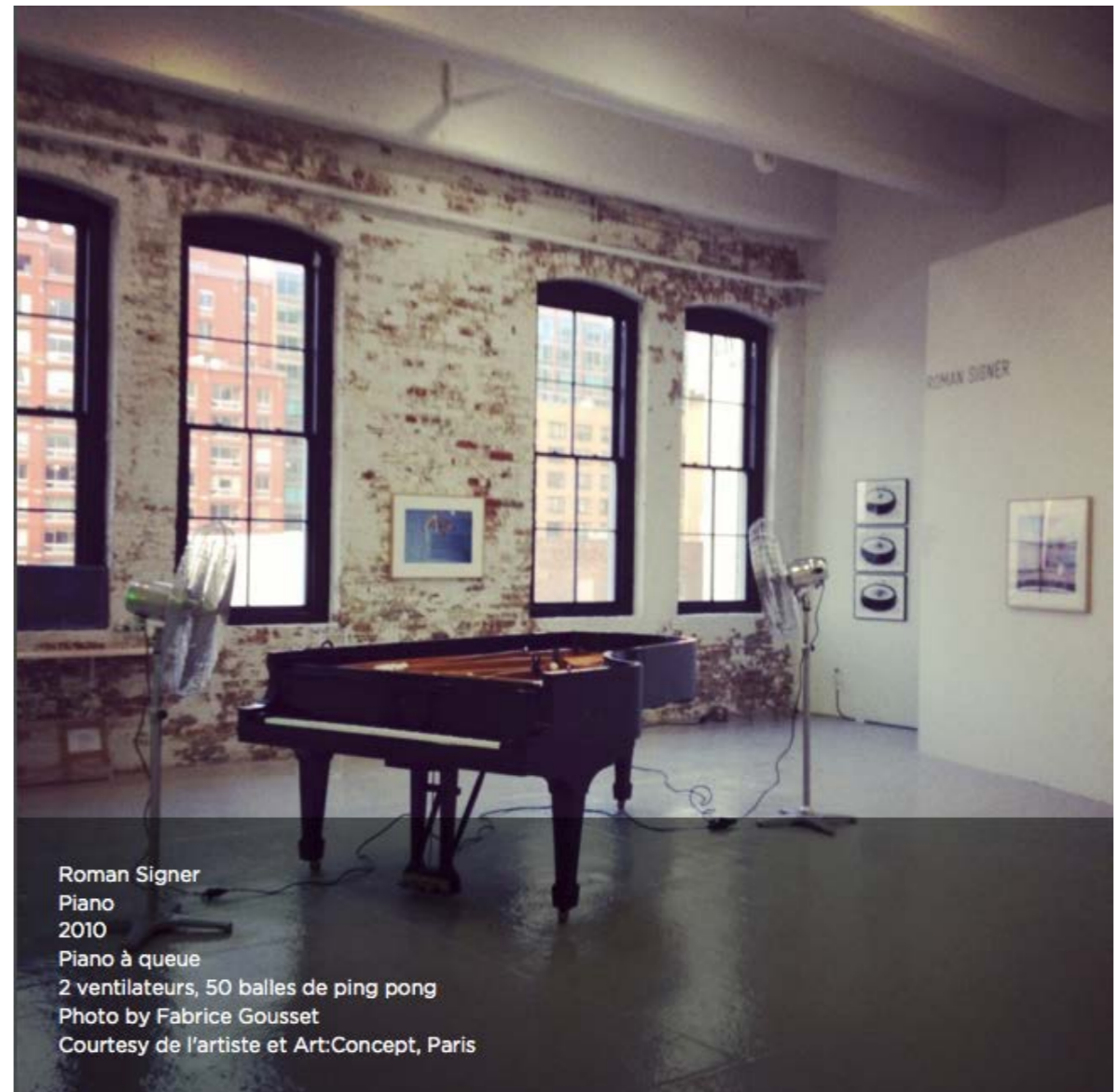
—Daniel Birnbaum

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2014 INDEPENDENT ART FAIR

Always a breath of fresh air during **Armory Week**, the now five years-old **Independent Art Fair** returned to its original location of 548 West 22nd Street, the former home of the Dia Foundation. This year the unique fair brought together a lively mix of over 50 alternative project spaces, nonprofit institutions and larger commercial galleries, with the goal of rejuvenating the contemporary art dialogue with daring new artists and historical works that feel particularly relevant now.

The goal is to be anything but a gridded, formulaic "art fair," and young architects **Andrew Feuerstein** and **Bret Quagliara** created a dynamic layout inspired by the tangram, an ancient seven-pieces puzzle designed aid the development of spatial reasoning skills. Here are a few highlights from the show.

LUCY LI | MARCH 10, 2014



Roman Signer
Piano
2010
Piano à queue
2 ventilateurs, 50 balles de ping pong
Photo by Fabrice Gousset
Courtesy de l'artiste et Art:Concept, Paris

ART REVIEW

Volta, Armory Week, Satellite fair



High Volta Armory Week's Best Satellite: Ben Austin's Diary Day 3

The highlights included a whole section devoted to the work of Roman Signer, video vignettes and a piano with ping-pong balls being blown explores tension and movement in a comical manner. The bold paintings by Alice Mackler at Kerry Schuss were very strong and the deconstructed collage photographs by John Stezaker were great too. It was difficult to focus on an individual pieces as the fair is more of a collective experience, but not poorer for it. I spotted Matthew Slotover of Frieze there, so you know we are in realm of high contemporary art.

Onwards and upwards to Scope, the opposite of Independent, where Neo-Pop and commercial work rules the roost. Art, I suppose shouldn't be elitist and there should be room for artists to riff on Warhol and the like.

I must give a special mention to Lori Zimmer (Art Nerd) and Frankie Shea of Moniker Projects, who presented 'We're speaking the same language' alongside performance pieces (Muffinhead) there. Their small booth exuded energy with lively and accessible work (Pam Glew, Beau Stanton, Ben Eine, David Shillinglaw, Greg Lamarche and Ron English. They also featured fine bone china mugs by 1882 Ltd designed Shillinglaw and Stanton. These mugs are fun and more importantly affordable. Great job guys.

Today I'm going to visit the Park Ave Armory, for big bucks art and check out the Biennial at The Whitney.

Words/photo By Ben Austin © Artlyst 2014 Suclpture: Roman Signer



Whitney: Roman Signer had a piano crane-lifted onto the third floor of a building and then ran opposing fans so that ping pong balls will roll lightly back and forth, over the strings. This would be one of the better pieces at Art Basel because of its sensitivity, but next to the few great works at Independent here, it's an art fair meh.

An Art Fair That Tries to Be Something Else

The Independent, a Maverick Forum

By MARTHA SCHWENDENER MARCH 6, 2014

In its fifth year, the Independent continues to assert its maverick identity. It's an art fair that pretends not to be an art fair. And because it takes place in Dia Art Foundation's former exhibition space, you're almost convinced. If fairs are part of the new necessary evil for small galleries to stay afloat, this one offers a good concentrated roundup of artists and exhibitors: nonprofit institutions, alternative spaces along with a few commercial galleries that might be barely paying their bills.

The fair still eschews souklike booths or the gridded cubicles of more corporate art fairs. And the organizers employed two young architects, Andrew Feuerstein and Bret Quagliara, to create a layout inspired by the tangram, a puzzle said to help develop spatial reasoning skills.

The conversation running throughout the fair this year has to do with history. Contemporary art is often accused of recycling and repurposing, and among the more than 50 participating galleries and nonprofits from 14 countries, there is plenty of work that looks old but is actually new, and vice versa.

Among the new work that nods to older models are paintings by Jessica Warboys at Gaudel de Stampa from the series "Sea Painting, Dunwich, 2014," on unstretched canvas flowing onto the floor made by soaking the canvas in seawater. The works look like a cross between Abstract Expressionism and the mechanically produced "machine" abstractions of Pinot Gallizio.

At Labor, a Mexico City gallery, Etienne Chambaud has retooled a trope made famous by Andy Warhol in his "Oxidation Paintings": urine applied to pulverized copper to create dazzling metallic effects. In Mr. Chambaud's case, the urine is from animals and refers to the Anthropocene or urbanizing human

impact on the planet. (The gallery also points out that in Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1968 film "Teorema," a character urinates on a painting, which may have provided Warhol with the idea.)

At Gavin Brown, Jennifer Bornstein's rubbings made with wax and oil pastels are strongly reminiscent of the frottage technique employed by Max Ernst and the Surrealists. Most of Ms. Bornstein's were made on site and include objects like Joseph Beuys's "7000 Oaks," squat basalt columns that line 22nd Street (also a Dia-sponsored legacy).

A tabletop display by the Czech artist Eva Kotatkova at Meyer Riegger recalls Hannah Hoch's photomontages except that Ms. Kotatkova's images, cut from Communist-era books, have been fashioned into an accordion-pleated book. At Untitled, Brad Troemel's panels with objects vacuum sealed into them hark back to '80s bedroom bulletin-board collages, although these won't be on view for long. Mr. Troemel sells his work on the website Etsy, where people "around the world connect to buy and sell unique goods" (just like art fairs).

Nostalgia is also a boon for older (or dead) artists whose work look remarkably fresh. Rosemarie Castoro is a painter from the first generation of minimalists. Broadway 1602 has two of her paintings from 1965 that use methods derived from modern dance in their composition. They feel perfectly relevant now.

Robert Mallery, who was included in the Museum of Modern Art's 1961 exhibition "Art of Assemblage," is featured at The Box. His dark and existential works, are reminiscent of European painters like Alberto Burri and Antonio Tàpies. Julian Beck, a co-founder of the Living Theater, is represented by paintings and works on paper from the '40s at Supportico Lopez, while an exhibition of Richard Nonas's drawings from the '70s and small, steel sculptures from the '80s, rearranged on the floor here to respond to the immediate spatial environment, are at McCaffrey.

The Austrian artist Gerwald Rockenschau's colored dots displayed throughout the stairwell, courtesy of Mehdi Chouakri, have a '60s feel. Martos is showing works on paper by Dan Asher from the '80s. Another artist who became known in '80s is Julia Wachtel, who exhibits at the gallery of the Independent co-founder Elizabeth Dee. Given the art world's current interest in the '80s, Ms. Wachtel's paintings, which juxtapose found images with goofy cartoons, look contemporary again.

Another prevalent strain here is so-called outsider art (which also includes

people simply unacknowledged by the institutional art world). Suzanne Zander rounds up William Crawford, an avid draftsman of erotic scenes and photographs taken by an unknown man named Gunther K. of his red-haired secretary, with whom he had an affair.

Alice Mackler is a ceramic artist whose brightly glazed sculptures of female figures, with their exaggerated eyes and breasts, look vaguely “outsider.” (She is also represented by Kerry Schuss, who deals in outsider art.) And yet, Ms. Mackler, famous now in her early 80s, doesn’t identify as an outsider artist; her aesthetic shows the blurring of boundaries, which often seems merely a matter of institutional recognition.

There is a lot of painting in this year’s Independent. Painting sells at art fairs, but it’s also popular right now. The young Brooklyn gallery Real Fine Arts has an extravaganza, with Nicolas Ceccaldi’s portraits of the writer Michel Houellebecq and Morag Keil’s funny text paintings, as well as a larger abstract canvas by Jon Pestoni.

Beyond the painting-centered nature of the fair, Art: Concept offers a thoughtful roundup of Roman Signer’s videos, as well as a work that involves a grand piano, Ping-Pong balls, and fans that blow the balls along the strings. And Mendes Wood from São Paulo is showing Adriano Costa’s playful, topical sculptures that address Brazilian politics and culture.

Given the season, there are overlaps with the just-opened Whitney Biennial: Michel Auder and David Diao, both at Office Baroque, are in this year’s edition, as is Paul P., shown here by Broadway 1602. The other hopeful aspects of the season are daylight saving time beginning on Sunday and the forecast for warmer weather, since a selection of books from Artists Space is for sale on the roof. It is a poignant reminder of the time when the building was occupied by the Dia Art Foundation, conceptual commissions appeared on the roof, and March in New York wasn’t dominated by art fairs.

The Independent continues through Sunday at 548 West 22nd Street, Chelsea; independentnewyork.com.

A version of this review appears in print on March 7, 2014, on page C32 of the New York edition with the headline: An Art Fair That Tries to Be Something Else.

Our guide to Independent 2014

Matthew Higgs, the creative adviser of Independent, talks about New York’s coolest art fair

Photograph: Courtesy de l’artiste et Art:Concept; Paris





You're including more exhibitors this year; how do you do that and still maintain an intimate environment?

The allocation of the space stays the same because the number of galleries that are collaborating has gone up. For example, Modern Art and Maccarone are sharing a room to present Paul Lee's series of small tambourine paintings. The Independent's manageable scale has always been one of the interesting things about it, and it changes subtly each year as galleries rotate out. It'd be nice to have everyone back each year but the way the fair drifts organically is part of its nuance.

Who do you consider the standout group presentations this year?

Cologne's Susanne Zander is bringing examples of outsider and vernacular photography, including Polaroids of a cross-dressing man shot over a seven year period. Plus, there's an archive documenting a love affair between a German business man and his secretary as well as an extraordinary collection of anonymous found photos by a foot fetishist. And Untitled from New York is showing the work of Brad Troemel, who's invited nine other artists to create two- or three-hour-long solo presentations with the transformation of the space happening in real time while the fair is open.

What about site-specific installations?

Art: Concept from Paris is presenting a great one with a grand piano and videos by Roman Signer, and Berlin's Mehdi Chouakri is installing Gerwald Rockenschaub abstractions throughout the building, even in areas dedicated to other galleries. Dia, the former occupant of this building, had a history of installation art that was thoughtful and responsive to these really beautiful rooms, and we're trying to go for a little of that here.

Besides that, what has been the impact of the building on the show?

For me it's one the most iconic and perfect spaces in New York for art. One of the great things about Independent is that it's not clear where one gallery's presentation begins and another one ends. This year we're working with new architects, Andrew Feuerstein and Bret Quagliara, who've come up with a very dynamic re-imagining of the place. And we're very keen on maintaining the idea that the space here is as much a part of the experience as the work on view.

Independent 2014 is on view Thu 6–Sun 9.



Documentation of Roman Signer's Haus mit Raketen (House with Rockets), 1981, in Gonten, Switzerland. "This work was created in large part as a response to the local architecture and monochromatic, snowy background," explains Neville Wakefield. Signer's piece for Elevation 1049 is "also temporal, using the natural forces that will drive a large structure on skis down the mountain," says Wakefield.

OPPOSITE: Stills from Christian Marclay's work-in-progress for Elevation 1049, compiled from Bollywood films shot in Gstaad.

Paul Laster, «Matthew Higgs, the creative advisor of Independent talk about New York coolest art fair», in *TimeOut*, 03.03.14

Scott Indrisek, «Who's afraid of entropy? Elevation 1049 might melt but that's the point», in *Modern Painters*, janvier 2014, p.73

« ELEVATION 1049, BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL » À GSTAAD

PAR ROXANA AZIMI



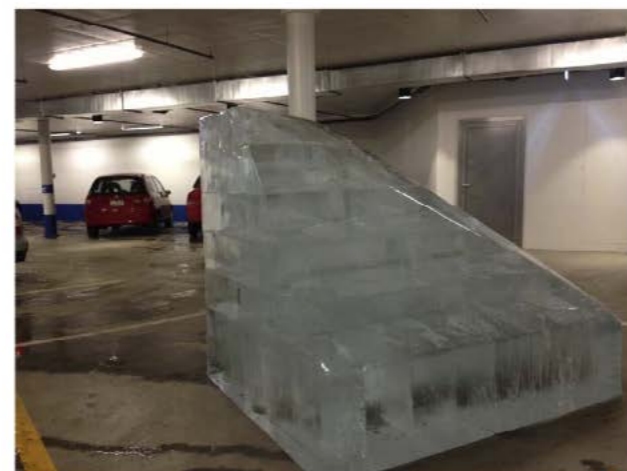
Matthias Brunner, *Hommage au réalisateur Daniel Schmid*, 2013, bunker, chalet Coucou à Saanen. Photo : Roxana Azimi.



Roman Signer, *Alles fährt Ski*, 2014, station Eggli. Photo : Roxana Azimi.



Thomas Hirschhorn, *Mürrischer Schnee*, 2014, Lauenen. Photo : Roxana Azimi.



Olivier Mosset, *Untitled (Ice Toblerone)*, 2003-2014, parking de Saanen. Photo : Roxana Azimi.

Smoking sculpture unveiled at fashion designer's foundation

Fondazione Zegna commissions Swiss artist Roman Signer to create permanent work for its Italian headquarters

By Ermanno Rivetti. Web only

Published online: 24 September 2012



Signer's work, *Horologe*, 2012

The Swiss artist Roman Signer unveiled a permanent site-specific installation with a bang at the countryside headquarters of Ermenegildo Zegna, the Italian clothing brand, on 22 September. Standing in front of the entrance to the company's historic mill in Trivero, Piedmont, Signer's work, *Horologe*, 2012, was covered by a long white cloth, which the artist tore off with a controlled explosion. The event marked the fourth instalment of "All'Aperto" ("In the Open"), an annual site-specific arts programme run by Fondazione Zegna and organised by Andrea Zegna and Barbara Casavecchia.

DE NANTES À SAINT-NAZAIRE, L'ART À FLOT

PAGE 02

Signer's sculpture—which consists of a large clock with no hands, mounted on a four-metre pole—will emit short bursts of vapour from its centre-point at 15-minute intervals for as long as it stands. Signer, who worked in a factory when he was younger, says he was inspired by the vapour emitted by the mill's towers but also wanted to make a tongue-in-cheek reference to the rigid concept of factory working hours.

"Site-specific public art is not easy to commission, especially away from big cities," Zegna says, "but we wanted to collaborate with Roman because much of his previous work has taken place outdoors, in nature." Zegna has collaborated with Casavecchia, an arts journalist and curator, on all the previous editions of "All'Aperto", and they avoid commissioning monumental and visually aggressive public works that are at odds with their surroundings. "We don't want to alienate or irritate the people who will be confronted with the work every day, so we prefer subtle and relevant interventions such as this one, which carries clear references to the company's local history," Casavecchia says.

The series began in 2007 with Daniel Buren's intervention on the company roof—an installation titled *The Coloured Weathervanes*. Next up was Alberto Garutti, an Italian artist and professor of fine arts at the Accademia di Brera, Milan, whose sculpted benches—*Dedicated to the people who will talk about it as they sit here*, 2009—are dotted around communal spaces in the town of Trivero. The most recent work is Stefano Arienti's *The Telepathists*, 2011, which combines a free wi-fi network with sculptures inspired by drawings made by children from the local primary school. "As far as possible, we want to commission works that are in some way relevant and even useful to the local community," Zegna says.

The curators are already making plans for the fifth edition of "All'Aperto", although they have yet to reveal which artist they will be working with. The open-air arts programme is one of many cultural initiatives undertaken by the Zegna foundation, including "Visible", a €25,000 prize that aims to encourage socially engaged artist projects from around the world. The most recent edition of the prize was awarded in January to the Colombian collective Helena Producciones in a ceremony at the Serpentine Gallery, London.

SUITE DU TEXTE DE UNE gravement sur l'impact écologique de l'activité humaine. Aussi éco-responsable, le *Péage sauvage*, signé par le collectif néerlandais Observatorium, est une architecture en bois située à la lisière entre l'urbanisme récent et une zone de verdure préservée depuis l'abandon d'un projet d'autoroute dans les années 1970 : une œuvre en guise de mobilier urbain propice à créer de nouvelles situations de sociabilité et réenchanter le regard porté sur la ville. C'est l'ambition en arrière-plan de l'art présent à tous les coins de rue pendant l'été nantais, saupoudré d'œuvres le plus souvent aussi spectaculaires qu'anecdotiques, comme une cure de vitamine anti-morosité. Plus convaincants seraient les rendez-vous purement ludiques, comme les activités sportives réinventées par les designers et architectes réunis au Lieu Unique (« Playgrounds »). On y retiendra l'ingénieux et très sculptural jeu de ballon en bois, *Bantoosh*, du collectif Fichtre, banc de touche en forme d'arène, où le spectateur est aussi le joueur, pour une compétition reposante.

Le visiteur mettra en priorité sur sa feuille de route quelques étapes consistantes, telle que l'exposition de Jessica Stockholder à l'École nationale supérieure d'architecture, où le bois est le nouveau support d'une œuvre qui brouille les pistes entre peinture, installation et mobilier, et mêle l'héritage de l'abstraction moderniste et de l'artisanat indien. Dans le « Temple du goût », hôtel particulier du centre-ville, le studio de création de céramique Polyhedre revisite la grotte maniériste du XV^e siècle par un design géométrique. Dans le passage Pommeraye, Agnès Varda recrée le magasin de téléviseurs d'*Une chambre en ville* de Jacques Demy, court-circuitant savamment le réel et la fiction, le passé et le présent, le cinéma et l'histoire.

L'événement majeur est la rétrospective consacrée à la HAB Galerie au Suisse Roman Signer, chez qui l'humour, l'expérience ludique et l'émerveillement infantile face aux éléments naturels et aux phénomènes physiques

définissent précisément une méthode productrice et une posture artistique. L'exposition réserve une exceptionnelle rétrospective des actions filmées entre les années 1970 et 1980, dont l'ahurissante explosion de ramettes de papier à la Documenta de 1987 (*Action pour l'Orangerie*), ainsi que des vidéos récentes qui ne dérogent pas à cet humour né du vivant plaqué sur de la mécanique, et de cette poésie du bricolage.

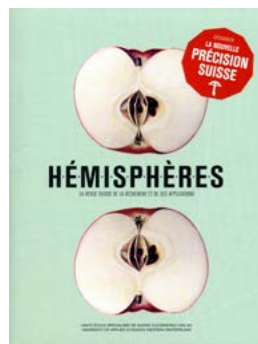
À Saint-Nazaire enfin, si le constructivisme postindustriel et très visuel de Séverine Hubard et de Vincent Ganivet au Grand Café vaut le déplacement, c'est un rare moment de grâce sculpturale que concoctent les frères Chapuisat dans l'ancienne base sous-marine, le Life. Montagne géométrique renversée et plongée dans l'obscurité, ventre d'un vaisseau spatial cubiste, *Métamorphose d'impact # 2* donne un vertige à l'envers, un spectacle grandiose mais à peine perceptible, un cataclysme dont on percevait l'emprunte, le verso. Le chef-d'œuvre retourne l'enjeu dicté par l'échelle du lieu en orchestrant un émerveillement solitaire. Le trésor est accessible par une petite entrée vers les entrailles lumineuses de la sculpture, obligeant le visiteur curieux à reprendre la posture primordiale de l'animal rampant à la conquête de la connaissance. ■

LE VOYAGE À NANTES, LA VILLE RENVERSÉE PAR L'ART, jusqu'au 19 août, divers lieux, Nantes, www.levoyageanantes.fr
ESTUAIRE 2012, jusqu'au 19 août, entre Nantes et Saint-Nazaire, www.estuaire.info

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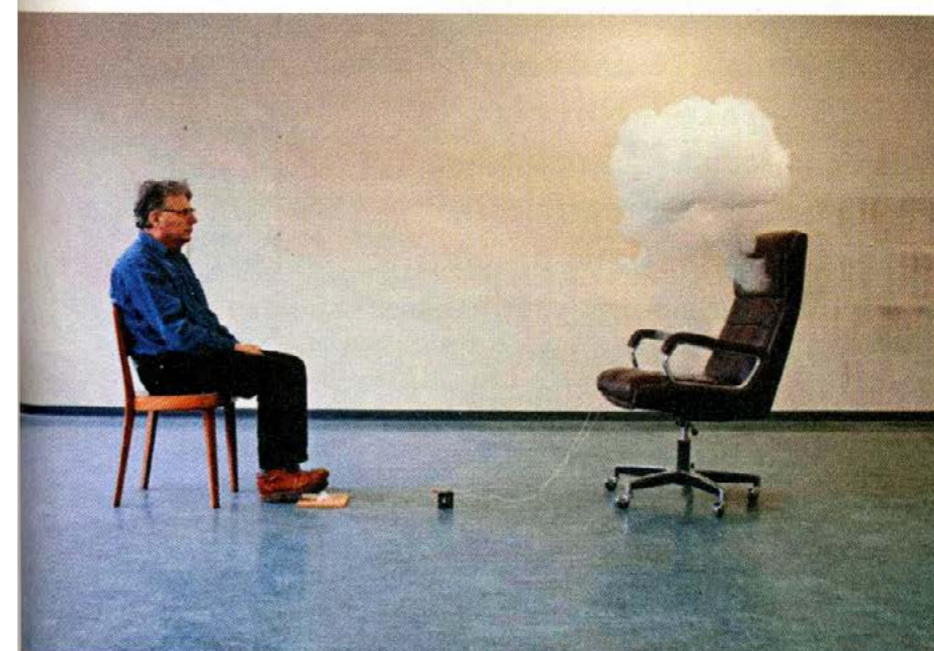
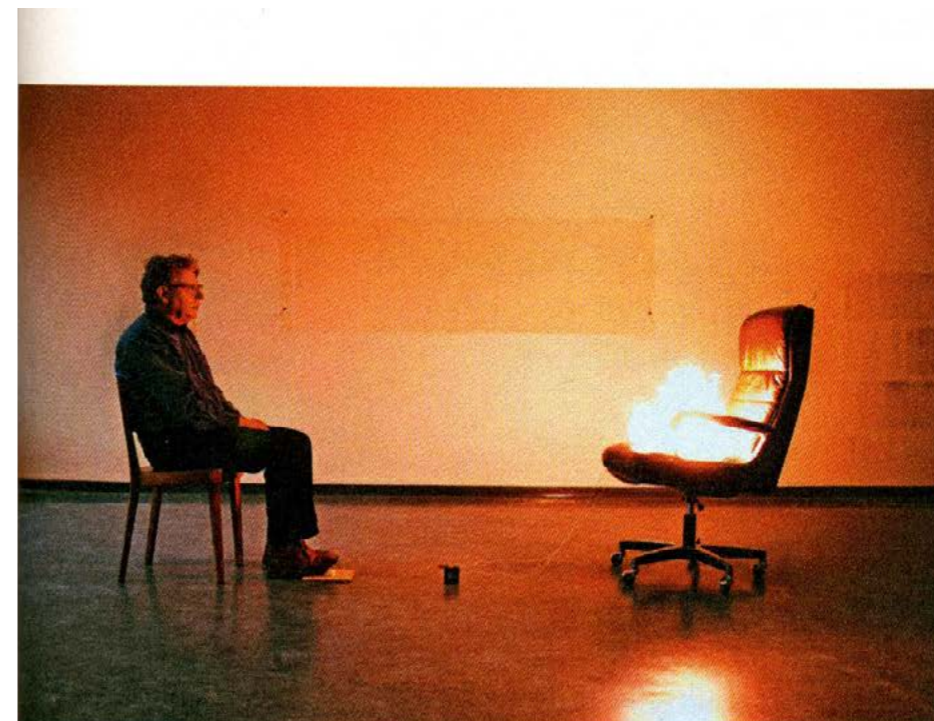
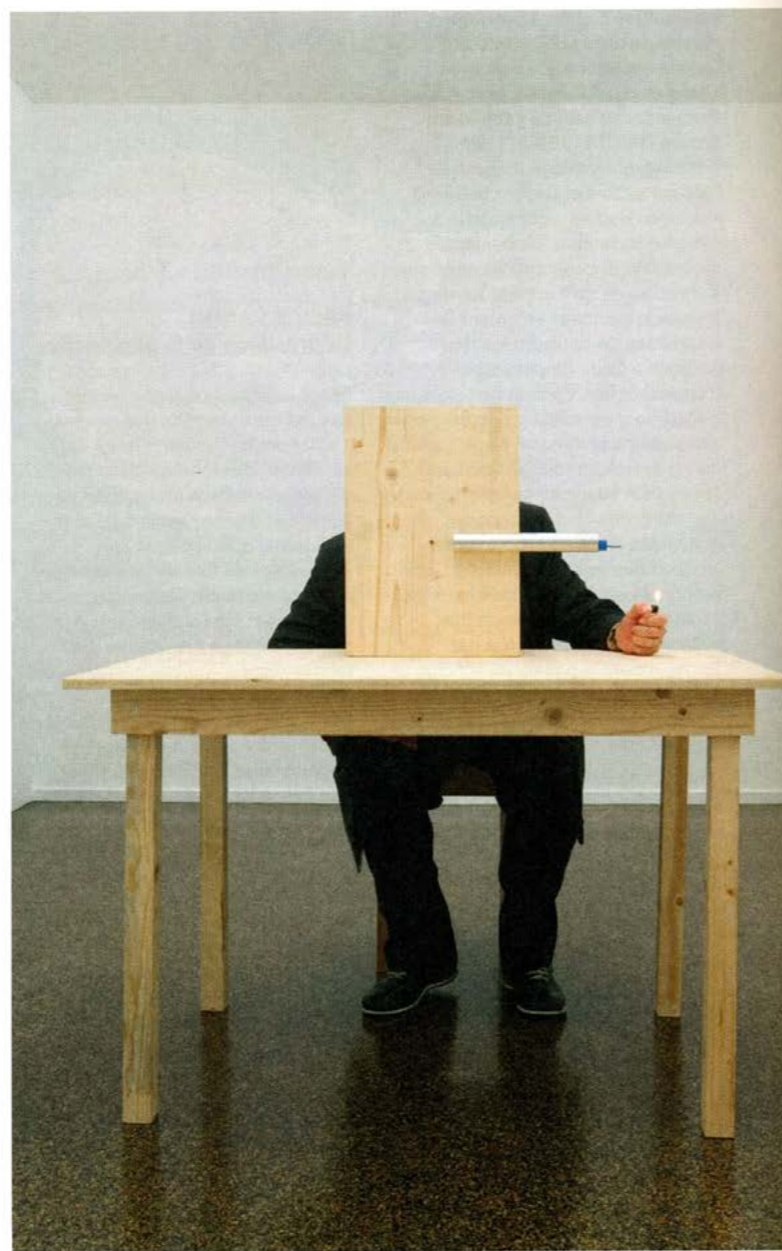


ART Les Suisses ne laissent rien au hasard

est un bon exemple. Pendant trente minutes, une série d'objets sont mis en action par différents moyens tels que le feu, l'eau et la loi de la pesanteur. Le mouvement de l'un entraîne l'autre par un effet de domino qui, par instants, semble prêt à s'enrayer. Lors de ces hoquets momentanés, la farandole court le risque de l'échec, la précision de n'être plus assurée. C'est peut-être dans ce dosage homéopathique de doute sur la pérennité du système et de gestion du hasard que les artistes suisses s'avèrent le plus précis. 📖

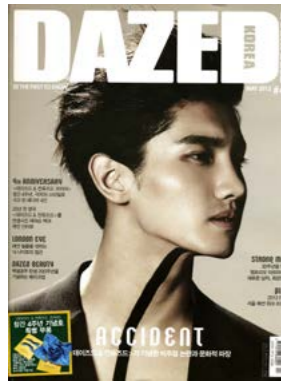
Co-commissaire de l'exposition *Swissmade. Précision et folie. Art suisse de Hodler à Hirschhorn* au Kunstmuseum de Wolfsburg en 2007, Julia Wallner ne réduit pas le goût de la précision à ce mouvement. «Il s'agit d'une caractéristique basique de n'importe quelle forme d'art de qualité. Même le chaos peut être très précis. Christoph Büchel, Thomas Hirschhorn ou Adolf Wölflli travaillent de manière aussi précise que Max Bill, bien que leurs œuvres apparaissent différentes.» On évitera d'opposer à la féconde tradition géométrique, celle, plus surréaliste, incarnée par des artistes comme Jean-Frédéric Schnyder, Roman Signer ou Fischli et Weiss. Plutôt que de la refuser, ces adeptes de l'humour se limitent à mettre en danger la précision dans leur travail qui se présente parfois comme une modulation burlesque autour de rouages suisses bien huilés. «Leur travail peut renvoyer une forme d'ironie et de critique envers la Suisse et ses clichés. Mais il y a aussi chez eux une estime du passé et un sens poussé de la précision. Ils incluent l'histoire dans leur œuvre plutôt que de la nier», commente Julia Wallner.

La fameuse vidéo *Le Cours des choses (Der Lauf der Dinge)*, 1987) du duo bâlois Fischli et Weiss



ROMAN SIGNER La précision du prestidigitateur

Avec les moyens du bord, une tondeuse à gazon, un parapluie, des chaises, des balles de ping-pong, de la farine et de la dynamite, Roman Signer imagine des œuvres qui font en apparence la part belle à l'aléatoire, au farfêlu, au fiasco poétique. En apparence seulement, car ce physicien émotionnel, selon l'appellation qu'il se donne, calcule tout, prévoit tout et met parfois en place des moyens techniques et conceptuels colossaux pour réaliser ses sculptures événements. Ainsi lors de la 8^e Documenta de Kassel en 1987, il a propulsé dans l'espace un mur constitué de milliers de feuilles de papier qui sont retombées ensuite en planant sur le sol. Chacune de ses sculptures, qu'elle soit à base d'explosif ou non, est assimilable à un feu d'artifice fait maison, qui nécessite une parfaite gestion des risques, une connaissance des matériaux et un sens de l'anticipation des mouvements. «Il y a dans ce type d'humour une retenue, qu'on retrouve aussi chez Jean-Frédéric Schnyder et Fischli et Weiss. L'art helvétique est plein d'humour, mais celui-ci est tenu, cadré, ce qui donne à ces artistes un côté pince-sans-rire», note Julien Fonsacq.



Threads

Accident

<데이즈드> 스타일로
사고 치는 법을 소개한다.



Beim Chelli With the Boss
C-print, Delayed Edition of 16
30 x 45cm, 2009
Photo: Florian Bachmann



Hay Fever
DVD 2'20, Edition of 10, 2006
Video: Aleksandra Signer

© Roman Signer and House & Witt

Bomb!

폭탄이 터진다. 내 발 밑에서.

스위스의 아티스트 로만 지그너는 한마디로 제정신이 아니다. 불꽃 제조 아티스트 혹은 폭파 아티스트로 불리는 그는 우산, 장화, 중선, 의자 등 일상 용품을 재료로 삼아 폭발을 시도한다. 추락 및 파괴의 이미지를 비디오나 스틸 사진으로 담아내는 그는 다행히도 폭파 허가증이 있다고 한다. 시험을 통과해 국가 기관에서 인증한 허가서를 갖고 있거나 뭐라나. 그의 작품 'Water Boots'는 고무 장화 안에 폭발 장치로 설치한 뒤 물을 가득 붓고 폭발물이 터질 때 물이 솟구쳐 오르는 장면을 기록한

것이다. 비디오 작품 'Hay Fever' (위 오른쪽)는 더 놀랍다. 밀폐된 방으로 보이는 곳에 그가 방독면을 쓰고 앉아 건축들이 바닥에서 계속 폭발해 천장까지 솟구치는 데도 아랑곳하지 않고 책을 읽는다. 'With the Boss' (위 왼쪽)는 더 웃기다. 자신의 앞에 있는 빈 의자를 폭발시킨 장면으로, 빈 의자는 보스를 상징한다. 자동차를 추락시키는 건 기본이고 장난감 헬리콥터 56대를 공중으로 날려 서로 충돌하게 하질 않나, 방화복을 입고 빙하 안에 들어가기도 한다.

'액션/조각(Action/Sculpture)'으로 불리는 그의 이런 퍼포먼스는 즉흥적이고 유머러스하며 일시적이다. 사건, 사고를 예술의 모티프로 이용하는 그가 사치 밀짚한 게 다행일 지경이다. 이 위험한 퍼포먼스로부터 사람들이 뭘 배울 수 있을까, 라는 질문에 로만 지그너는 이렇게 답했다. "더 재밌게 노는 법을 배울 수 있을 겁니다." ■

EDITOR 나지연



alternate each other. They create a poetry which is vital yet expressed through a very restrained vocabulary. This is an action which brings to a ineluctable destiny, of a poetic and impossible kiss. The economy of means allows an intimacy in the works and accentuates a moment of suspension and transformation.

Signer blends the simplicity of daily gestures and objects with the complexity of technical gear and the physical phenomena that he creates without wanting to control them. Such metaphysical aspect and intellectual audacity show an absence of judgment criteria; a place where success and failure have no value. His works are dangerous mise-en-scènes in which absurd situations are resolved with subtlety, and are the self-determined and aleatory.

Turn – Tisch (1977), *Nasse Tücher* (1982), *Bügeleisen* (1986) and *Installation avec 2 ventilateur* (2010), the works that Pigna Project Space is presenting in Rome, reflect on a precise poetic of the moment. The fact that something is about to happen presumes an existence in which the past and that same instant could vacillate, letting us glimpse at a possibility of the future.

at [Pigna Project Space, Rome](#)

until May 31, 2012



From the middle of the 70s, Roman Signer's works bring into question and stimulate some paradoxes through a kind of art that can be reduced to a unique and common denominator. Each action is characterized by a personal approach to different elements, which often acquire an autobiographical meaning.

Let's take for instance the element of air. As an asthmatic, Roman Signer has suffered for the lack of air. This is the reason why it is omnipresent in his works: it brings upon ideas of both survival and suffocation.

At Pigna Project Space the fans face each other in a human coreography, in which attraction and repulsion



Nasse Tücher, 1982



Turm – Tisch, 1979

NERO

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« An Incomplete History of Incomplete Works of Art

Roman Signer

19 May 2012

Francesco Arena Orizzonte con Riduzione di mare »



March 31 - May 31, 2012

Pigna Project Space - Via del Gesù, 84 - Rome

Roman Signer. Roman Signer was born in 1938. He is a unique artist. In equal parts similar to both Buster Keaton and Robert Smithson, he embodies the epitome of the solitary figure. While staying close to San Gallen, the swiss-german city where he was born, Signer has realized his "Aktionen" in cities like Paris, Dubai or Mexico City, and now for the first time in Rome, in occasion of this exhibition.

His actions can take shape as performance, photography, paintings and installation which utilize the physic laws applied to wind, gravity power, floatage or pyrotechnics.

His works define a sort of philosophical paradigm on the functioning of the rules of the world and of human life. This approach does not make him an "artist of elements", a definition which he refuses, but more of an "emotional physic".

From the middle of the '70s Roman Signer's works bring into question and stimulate some paradoxes through a kind of body art which can be reduced to a unique and common denominator. Each action is characterized by a personal approach to different elements, which often acquire an autobiographical meaning.

Let's take for instance the element of air. As an asthmatic, Roman Signer has suffered for the lack of air. This is the reason why it is omnipresent in his works: it brings upon ideas of both survival and suffocation.

At Pigna Project Space the fans face each other in a human coreography, in which attraction and repulsion alternate each other. They create a poetry which is vital yet expressed through a very restrained vocabulary. This is an action which brings to a ineluctable destiny, of a poetic and impossible kiss. The economy of means allows an intimacy in the works and accentuates a moment of suspension and transformation.

Signer blends the simplicity of daily gestures and objects with the complexity of technical gear and the physical phenomena that he creates without wanting to control them.

Such metaphysical aspect and intellectual audacity show an absence of judgment criteria; a place where success and failure have no value. His works are dangerous mise-en-scènes in which absurd situations are resolved with subtlety, and are the self-determined and aleatory.

Turm - Tisch (1977), Nasse Tücher (1982), Bügeleisen (1986) e Installation avec 2 ventilateur (2010), the works that Pigna Project Space is presenting in Rome, reflect on a precise poetic of the moment. The fact that something is about to happen presumes an existence in which the past and that same instant could vacillate, letting us glimpse at a possibility of the future

Image above:

Installation view



Installation view



Installation view



Installation view



Installation view



Installation view

• SURFACE TO AIR •

MEET: ROMAN SIGNER



Roman Signer is an artist. His staged events may make you laugh; but that is not their express intention. Roman himself says that he will find things funny afterwards, but not at the time. And therein lies their beauty. His work, often involving explosions and objects being flung through the air, has an immaculate sense of precision. It is no surprise that Roman comes from Switzerland, where this sort of precision is practically part of the national culture.

He makes his dreams into realities. His ideas into artwork. People may laugh at their absurdity, but it is the seriousness and thoughtful way in which he goes about staging his events that makes his work truly interesting. He is most comfortable with a 3-minute roll of Super 8 film and is hesitant to embrace the digital realm. He rightly says that people film too much these days. It is not far fetched to say that the possibility of endless digital filming leads to a diminishing in quality. If you can't express what you want to say in 3 minutes then maybe you should just stop right there. It is not the medium that is important but rather the idea and process behind it.

We spoke to Roman at Art: Concept Gallery in Paris. Thank you to Olivier Antoine from the gallery who helped organise this interview.

Interview by Félix Antoine, Alberto Cabrera & Olivier Antoine.

S2A: *What attracted you to the art world? I heard that you started off working as a draftsman...*

RS: Yes that's true. I drew architecture plans. I did three years of an apprenticeship at school, and then I worked for ten years as a draftsman. But, this profession didn't really suit me, I wasn't happy. I have always been in love with art. Architecture in the first place and sculpture in the second place because it's also linked with architecture. So basically, i don't come from painting.

S2A: *How did you start off?*

RS: I started at an art school in Zurich for one year of a preparatory class. I thought that it would be good for my career, you know just drawing, modelling... I entered into an especially dynamic space that pushed my interest in art. From this moment on I was sure that I didn't want to be a draftsman anymore. At the same time, I didn't know what I really wanted to do and I didn't have much money. So, I worked for 2 years to earn money. Then I went back to Lucerne to start another art school for one year and a half. As I had saved some money I took the opportunity to go study in Varsovy in Poland.

S2A: *Was it an exchange with your school?*

RS: Yes, four swiss students exchanged with four polish students. I came to Poland where it was really difficult for me at the beginning. A new language, another culture and a different mentality...

S2A: *Did you have a desire to go there or was it because you didn't have the choice?*

RS: No, I wanted to go to Varsovy. I was always attracted by the East [of Europe]. I travelled a lot to Czechoslovakia, Hungary and other places but I've always wanted to go to Poland. I could have gone to Norway instead, but Poland interested me more. It was really difficult as I didn't speak German or Polish. And the weather was rough. So cold and I was all alone and didn't have much fun without my family and my friends. But things have changed, Poland was a good experience and I feel better and better each day that in hindsight this experience was really great. There are a lot of interesting artists over there.

S2A: *What did you do after Poland?*

RS: I got a scholarship from the Swiss government. With that I could really started my career as an artist. So I came back to my hometown of Lucerne in Switzerland. I remember that my mother was a bit against the idea of me spending this money to start my art career. She told me that I should start a new school in Germany or Austria. But it was clear to me that it was too late. If my mother had told me that one year or two years earlier, maybe my opinion would have been different. But at this moment I knew what I wanted to do. I had many ideas.

So, I rented a room in St Gallen in the north-east of Switzerland and I started to work. A gallery was interested by my work and we planned my first exhibition for October 1973. So that's what I worked toward. I was already 35 years old at this time and I told myself that maybe it was time to move to another city; but in the end I preferred to stay in St Gallen. It's an ideal city for me; you have the nature, the lake and the rivers. And of course, my workshop!

S2A: *Does the environment in St Gallen inspire you?*

RS: Yes, it's really important to me to work in nature. I travel a lot. To England, France, Italy, China, Poland.. So I love to come back to a peaceful place where i can do what i want. To have a walk in the woods, make a movie or whatever.

S2A: *So you use the natural environment as your workshop?*

RS: Yes that's it. But, one important thing to note is that although it's my workshop; I try not to leave a trace. I make a movie and then I clean up. I try to do my best to clean up but sometimes I do leave a mark.

S2A: *Do you consider yourself a land artist?*

RS: Not really because I work differently. What land artists do is really fantastic and beautiful but I wanted to do other things.

S2A: *In your work, is there always this notion of movement? Has that always been there?*

RS: Yes, this idea of movement; of changing and of transformation is a really important thing in my work. I left sculpture and the 'third dimension' to evolve toward something different because it didn't suit my work anymore.

S2A: *The static nature of sculpture wasn't right anymore?*

RS: Yes I really wanted to include a fourth dimension: of time and speed. I didn't know really how to understand all of it so I started making movies around 1975. I used to film a lot with my Super 8. I showed it to my friends who loved it, so I invited them to see my performance. It wasn't really a performance in the classic sense like in a gallery, but rather just an event to me.

S2A: *Is that why you are always serious during your performances?*

RS: Yes, because laughing is useless. I make explosions, some artwork with guns and so on. There is no real reason to laugh in the moment. I laugh after actually.

S2A: *So there is no humor at all?*

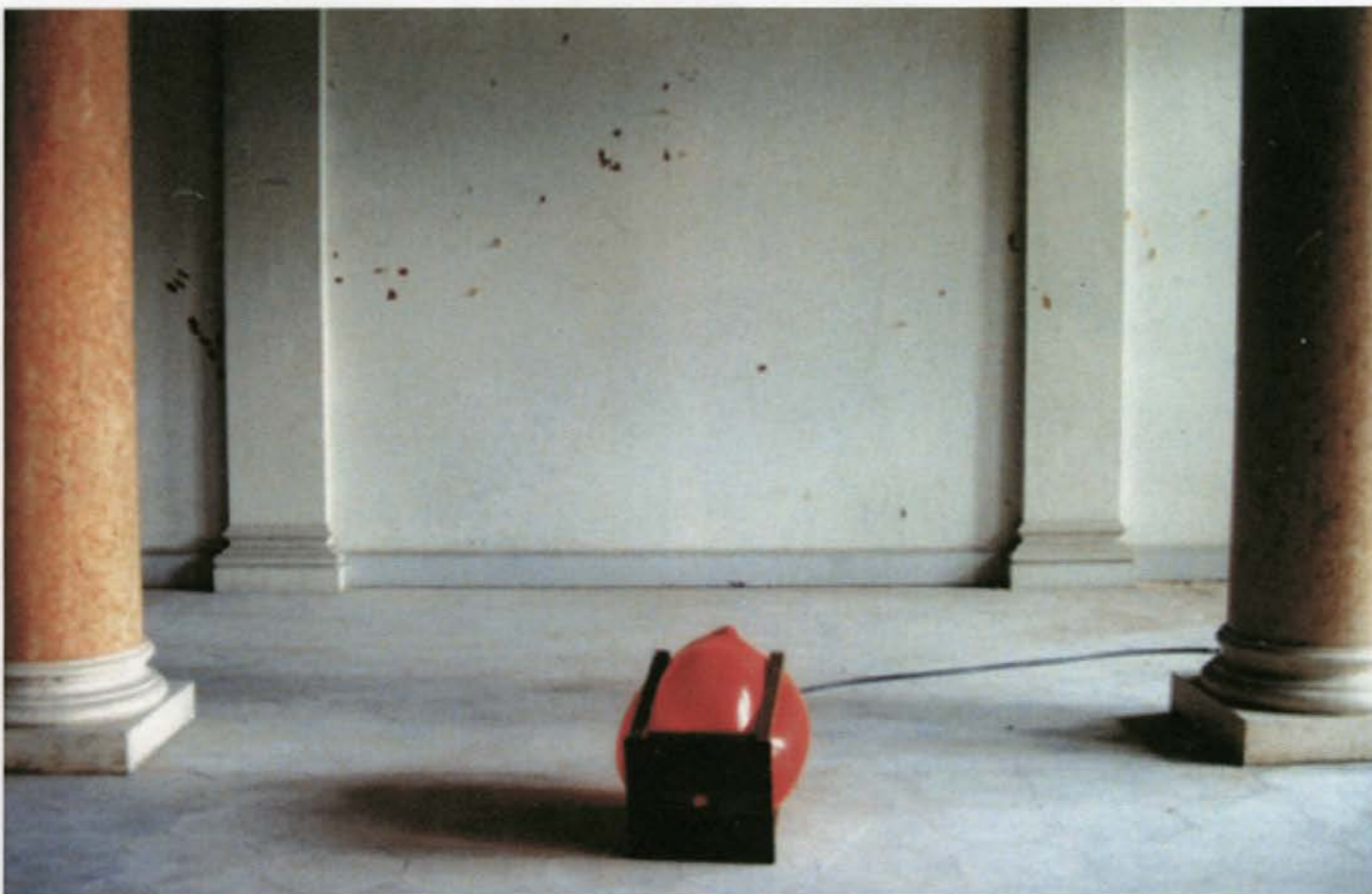
RS: No, i think the humour is hidden. Sometimes, people tell me that my work is funny but actually it's not for me. We laugh after because it's not forbidden. But i'm not there to make people laugh. Humour is inside. For example, Buster Keaton wanted to make people laugh because it was his job.

OA: *But sometimes there is this feeling while watching your movie "Signers koffer" (Signers Suitcase), that what you are watching is actually pretty funny... There is this action that I had seen where a red balloon is blowing up on a stool. Sometimes it's hard not to laugh...*

RS: Of course.

OA: *And then, when you put it into the context of a devastated industry in Poland without any workers anymore, the meanings change. The red balloon becomes a flag and the stool a tool for workers. It evolves in a political dimension.*

RS: Indeed it's very sad, one can't laugh about it. But I believe that it also depends on your culture. For example, I showed this movie in Japan and some people laughed. They found it very funny. Japanese humour is different to ours. In fact, sometimes you can find humour in my art and sometimes not. I'm not a comedian, nor a terrorist but just an artist.



S2A: *How do you work nowadays?*

RS: I still do some events of my own. Filming has been very important to me until the 90's. Now, it's hard to find Super 8 film and certain other types of film. I still use slides but I'm sure that's coming to an end. So, I'm obliged to work with digital.

S2A: *Don't you like digital?*

RS: No, for the moment I'm not ready. I love to work with slides so much.

S2A: *Is it because digital is immaterial?*

RS: Yes, with photographs, films and slides I can see and touch what's going on. Digital is different. Obviously the quality is better but we have to know that the life of a slide is longer than any other photograph. You can look at a slide in 100 years and the colours will be a little desaturated but you will still see something. Super 8 film, on the other hand, will be totally erased in 100 years.

S2A: *Does the rigidity of the Super 8 camera make it necessary to reflect more on what you are going to film? In the sense that it's not possible to click pause or rewind once you've started..*

RS: I have my own idea in my head and I know that I only have 3 minutes to do what I want. I love this precision. Nowadays people film too much.

S2A: *What do you do if you don't use all the film in one shot?*

RS: When my performance is over and I have some film to use I keep filming around me. The river, the sun, friends and of course, my wife. Those are the most beautiful moments. I have 25 hours of films like that.

S2A: *I heard that you had a project on his way with the Swiss bank?*

RS: It's happening! My "water boots" artwork will be printed on 20 swiss francs. It's completely bizarre for me.

S2A: *Do you have an exhibition coming up?*

RS: Yes, in Nantes this June.

S2A: *Will you introduce some new artwork?*

RS: Yes, but not only. There will be some existing artworks and maybe four and five new artworks. Some explosions, some films and so on.



Roman Signer

Escalier long, 2011

Galerie Manchester

← Badaboum. À l'écran, le grand escalier que vous avez descendu il y a quelques minutes. Une grosse boule jaune le dévale en rebondissant dangereusement de gauche à droite. On pense à la série *le Prisonnier*, où McGoohan a souvent fort à faire pour échapper au Rôdeur, cette boule qui menace sans arrêt de l'écraser. Mais, en bout de course, celle de Roman Signer écrase simplement sur son passage quelques bouteilles de champagne. Des bulles de bowling.

← Badaboom. On screen, you see the grand staircase that you just came down a few minutes ago. A big yellow ball tumbles down it with kamikaze rebounds from left to right. We think of the series *The Prisoner*, in which McGoohan often has his work cut out for him to escape the Rover, the orb that constantly threatens to crush him. However, at the end of the chase, Roman Signer's ball has only smashed a few bottles of champagne in its path. Bowling with bubbles.



Roman SIGNER

Avr 07 | 10:42

Mehdi Brit



Roman SIGNER, *Aufstieg / Ascent*, 1975
Installation in Stadtpark, St. Gallen
Roman Signer, Bernard Tagwerker
Super-8-Film: Emil Grubenmann
SD 4:3 (15'30")

Roman SIGNER

Né en 1938 à Appenzell. Il vit et travaille à Saint-Gall, Suisse.
Galerie Art : Concept (Paris).

Pyrotechnicien, artiste de l'explosion, physicien émotionnel... beaucoup d'étiquettes. Comment vous définissez-vous?

Au début il y a la physique élémentaire, mais ce n'est qu'un emballage de mon travail, une robe. Il y a, je pense, plus de poésie dans mon oeuvre que d'explosions, il y a beaucoup de choses en fait dans mon travail. Donc si vous me demandez de me définir je dirais que je suis un artiste et non un pyrotechnicien.

Début 2011, une exposition chez Art concept avec des oeuvres inédites. Quelques mots sur cet "événement" et les oeuvres exposées?

Non rien de spécial.

Roman SIGNER, *Aktion Graz 1987 / Action Graz*, 1987
Forum Stadtpark Graz
Herbst 1987
Super-8-Film
Videoproduction: Peter Liechti
SD 4:3 (09'43")

Comment avez-vous commencé à "jouer avec le feu"? Parlez nous des premières explosions.

La première explosion eut lieu en 1975, avant je faisais des essais mais pas de l'art. Aujourd'hui il y a un concept, ce n'est pas juste allumer des pétards.

Le risque et le danger sont-ils réellement présents dans vos événements? Le danger est-il toujours incertain?

oui, mais quelques fois le danger est caché. On pense que ce que l'on fait n'est pas dangereux mais ça l'est. Le danger est fourbe, il frappe quand on n'y pense pas.

De toutes ces expériences, quel est l'événement le plus drôle?

Mon propos n'est pas d'être drôle et de faire le clown. Si les gens rient, c'est bien, mais ce n'est pas le but recherché.



Roman SIGNER, *Aktion Graz / Action Graz*, 1987
Forum Stadtpark Graz
Herbst 1987
Super-8-Film
Videoproduction: Peter Liechti
SD 4:3 (09'43")

Personnellement, j'aime beaucoup les *Actions in Graz* (Film, Super 8, 1987). Pouvez-vous revenir dessus...

1987 est une année spéciale pour moi. Cela a commencé avec un action à St Gallen puis la Documenta à Kassel et enfin Graz. J'ai fait beaucoup d'actions

cette année et Peter Liechti a filmé tout cela. C'était beaucoup de travail pour moi. J'ai fait un projet que j'ai remis sous forme de dessin aux autorités de Graz.

Cela n'a pas du tout plu au maire qui a refusé le projet. Tout était prêt, les invitations, le financement avec l'aide de ProHelvetia et le refus de la municipalité a été vécu comme un affront contre les Suisses. J'y étais pour rien mais on m'a dit que le maire a dû démissionner. Nous avons fait le projet, l'année suivante, avec le nouveau maire.

Roman SIGNER
Mon voyage au Creux de l'Enfer, 1992
Polaroids: Peter Liechti
SW Fotos: Stefan Rohner



Le corps n'est-il qu'"objet fonctionnel" dans ces actions?

Oui car je ne fais pas de performance comme on l'entend aujourd'hui. Je suis une partie de la sculpture, je fais corps avec.

Vous a t-on déjà dit que vous étiez performeur?

Oui bien-sûr, mais je me sens un peu spécial car je ne viens pas de la performance ou actionnisme. Je suis un élément de la sculpture.

Au mois de novembre 1992 [1], vous accomplissez le Voyage au Creux de l'Enfer, un voyage de trois jours en triporteur. L'itinéraire est enregistré sur polaroid. Comment s'est déroulé ce voyage?

Je suis allé avec Peter Liechti à Thiers. Peter a fait les polaroid du voyage car la commissaire de l'exposition, Laurence Gateau, désirait faire un catalogue pour l'exposition. J'y suis allé en Piaggio car je voulais l'utiliser comme sculpture et vivre cette expérience du voyage dans un véhicule aussi fragile. 3-4 mois plus tard un français de Clermont-Ferrand m'a ramené le Piaggio à St Gallen.



Roman SIGNER
Piaggio Auf Schanze Polen, 2003
photographies couleur cibachrome contrecollée sur aluminium, quadriptyque
40 x 60 cm chaque (sans cadre)
Edition de 10 + 3 ea
Courtesy: art: concept, Paris
Photographe: Rudolf Steiner

Qu'est-il advenu du Piaggio utilisé dans un événement intitulée Piaggio on Ski Jump (Chocholow, Pologne) daté de 2003?

Ce Piaggio a été acheté par une compagnie de film pour faire un projet avec moi. J'ai eu l'idée de le faire sauter sur un tremplin de saut à ski. Le piaggio a pris la rampe et s'est posé comme un sauteur. C'était assez incroyable de le voir planer et se poser. J'ai donc récupéré le Piaggio et

je l'ai utilisé pour d'autres actions. Il vit maintenant une retraite heureuse en Pologne.

Dans le catalogue [2], la conversation évoque l'aspect magique de l'objet. Pensez-vous toujours que les objets ont un pouvoir magique?

L'objet n'est pas seulement physique, il a un secret qu'on ne peut pas expliquer. C'est en dehors de la logique.

Roman SIGNER, *Frosch 2001 /Frog, 2001*
Rheintal, 2001
Kamera: Tomasz Rogowicz
Schnitt: Aleksandra Signer
SD 4:3 (2'10")



A l'occasion de l'exposition On & On à la Casa Encendida, Madrid, plusieurs de vos travaux ont été montrés. Frosch (vidéo, coul., 2001-2010) ne serait-elle pas une expérience plus poétique?

Oui bien sur, et c'est la preuve que mon travail n'est pas toujours explosif.



Roman SIGNER, *Frosch 2001 /Frog, 2001*

Un ouvrage à me conseiller?

Non il y en a trop.

La prochaine explosion, c'est pour quand?

Chateau de Chamarande le 29/05/2010 16h précise, venez nombreux !



Une interview réalisée par Mehdi BRIT

1. Roman Signer, *Mon voyage au Creux de l'Enfer*, Le Creux de l'Enfer, Centre d'art contemporain, Thiers, 18 décembre 1992-21 février 1993.
2. Roman Signer, transcription d'une conversation vidéo enregistrée par Peter Liechti pour son film *Strumenti Delle Belle Arti in Roman Signer. "Mon voyage au Creux de l'Enfer"*, Le Creux de l'Enfer, Centre d'art contemporain, Thiers, 1992.

Plus d'informations:

Galerie ART:CONCEPT
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DU YODEL
À LA
PHYSIQUE
QUANTIQUE...
FROM
YODELING
TO QUANTUM
PHYSICS...

VOLUME 4

PALAIS DE TOKYO

SIGNER, ROMAN

[F] → *1938, vit à Saint-Gall. Depuis 1973, Roman Signer combine sculpture, performance, photographie et film. Ses œuvres sont structurées autour d'actions révélatrices des forces élémentaires ou des quatre éléments. L'artiste emploie les possibilités offertes par les objets usuels, utilise des explosifs, des hélicoptères ou des triporteurs pour explorer la quatrième dimension, le temps. Chaque œuvre est un agencement maîtrisé, une masse d'énergie contenue. Ces « sculptures temps » font surgir le hasard comme un vecteur d'autonomie des choses. Roman Signer renverse le suspense et déplace la tension des événements : l'attente ne précède plus la détonation, mais lui succède. S'insinue alors, dans l'esprit du spectateur, un doute, une incertitude. Derrière la fumée, derrière l'image, paraissent se dessiner des zones instables où le réel se réduit en termes de possibilités. Concrètement, Roman Signer offre des images fugitives. Il n'y a rien qui tienne dans ses œuvres, mais c'est précisément dans ce vide que tout se joue. C'est là que l'artiste porte le langage au seuil de ses possibilités.

[E] → *1938, lives in St. Gall. Since 1973, Roman Signer has combined sculpture, performance, photography and film. His work is structured around actions which reveal elementary forces or the workings of four elements. Exploiting the possibilities offered by everyday objects, the artist uses explosives, helicopters or delivery tricycles in order to explore the fourth dimension, time. Each piece is a controlled arrangement, a contained mass of energy. These "time sculptures" make use of randomness as a vector of the autonomy of objects. Roman Signer inverts the suspense and displaces the tension of events: the expectancy no longer proceeds but rather succeeds the detonation. At this point, a doubt, an uncertainty enters the mind of the spectator. Behind the smoke and the images, zones of instability in which the possibilities of reality diminish seem to take shape. Essentially, Roman Signer offers fleeting images. Nothing remains in his work, but it is precisely this emptiness that matters. This is where the artist pushes language to the limits of its usage.

[→ FRESH HELL]

Le Monde

Galleries

Roman Signer

Galerie art: concept

L'œuvre du plasticien suisse Roman Signer se dessine toujours comme un feu d'artifice de délices. D'un parapluie trempé dans un bac rempli d'eau à un tableau de chewing-gum, le septuagénaire a su préserver sa légèreté d'enfant, qui joue avec brio de l'aléatoire dans ses actions-sculptures explosives et joliment absurdes. En témoigne la pièce maîtresse de l'exposition : entre deux ventilateurs, un piano à queue a le ventre ouvert. Sur ses cordes à nu,

une flopée de balles de ping-pong vont et viennent sous l'action du vent. Elles produisent le souffle d'une mélodie tintinnabulante et toujours renouvelée : le bruit de verre du hasard. ■

Emmanuelle Lequeux

Galerie art: concept, 13, rue des Arquebusiers, Paris 3^e. M^o Saint-Sébastien-Froissart. Tél. : 01-53-60-90-30.

Du mardi au samedi, de 11 heures à 19 heures. Jusqu'au 19 février.

Galerieartconcept.com



[Roman Signer](#)

Roman Signer
08 janv.-28 fév. 2011

[Paris 3e. Galerie Art: Concept](#)

Avec une extrême simplicité, Roman Signer excelle dans l'art de la transformation des gestes et autres objets du quotidien, dans des installations dont il se contente généralement de livrer les traces et résidus. Des installations non conceptuelles, et sans mystère; une série de numéros de cirque expérimentaux, tout en légèreté, et volatilité

■ Par Marie-Ange de Montesquieu

Tel un enfant avide d'expériences pour comprendre comment l'eau se transforme en glace, pourquoi le bois ne laisse que des cendres après avoir brûlé, à 73 ans, Roman Signer ne se lasse pas de jouer avec l'air, l'eau, et le feu...

Et même avec les vibrations sonores: un piano à queue noir est ouvert et sans couvercle. Deux ventilateurs se font face de part et d'autre de l'instrument, 50 balles de ping pong, de dimensions variables, vont et viennent sur les cordes en acier au hasard des courants d'air: une mélodie sans cesse improvisée émane de cet ensemble orchestral insolite sans pianiste, aux résonances lointaines. De quoi rendre l'expérience d'autant plus énigmatique. Ces balles légères, remuantes, un brin insolentes auraient-elles profité de l'absence du pianiste, (et de l'artiste ?) pour s'amuser librement et impunément, à notre insu?

Lorsque objets du quotidien et phénomènes physiques s'associent, la mise en scène se suffit alors à elle-même. Au centre de la salle située au fond de la galerie trônent deux ventilateurs suspendus face à face. Brassant de l'air, ils se repoussent par l'effet mécanique de l'un sur l'autre. Tel un numéro de cirque, dont l'enjeu consiste à faire rire, ce dispositif aussi minimal soit-il, offre le spectacle spontané d'une portion de réalité soumise aux regards. Un spectacle dont il n'est jamais l'acteur visible.

En effet, Roman Signer travaille toujours sans témoin direct, et le plus souvent en pleine nature, son atelier de prédilection. Deux skis sont disposés en équerre sur la neige, l'un des deux est surélevé et s'appuie sur un ballon rouge (première photographie)... Sur la deuxième photographie, le ski posé sur le ballon tombe sur le sol neigeux, et ce qui reste du ballon est suspendu sur l'une des spatules. Sur le troisième cliché, le «déchet» du ballon est tombé, il gît sur la neige à côté des skis. Discretion malicieuse ou facétieuse, l'artiste se tient hors-champ, tel l'enfant attentif aux effets de ses bêtises. Si, pour certaines d'entre elles, l'artiste utilise des «objets résiduels», le plus souvent il se sert de matériaux légers: on peut ainsi voir sur une autre photo un «feu d'artifice» projetant vers le ciel des casques d'ouvriers.

L'art de détourner les objets de leur fonction initiale: les skis au ballon rouge de la première salle apparaissent maintenant grandeur nature. Ils surgissent du mur, les spatules suspendues pointent en direction des visiteurs. Il s'agit de skis anciens. Ici pas de furtive transformation de la matière, mais plutôt le résultat d'une lente évolution de cet objet qui a (sur)vécu après des années d'utilisation, et apparaît ici en suspension, et bien loin de son usage habituel, c'est-à-dire chaussés aux pieds d'un skieur et sur la neige.



Le Suisse **Roman Signer** confronte des objets du quotidien aux lois de la physique. A voir notamment, son installation *Piano*. Galerie Art : Concept, à Paris, jusqu'au 19 février. (galerieartconcept.com)

La chronique d'Olivier Cena

Non-sens dessus dessous

Près de la porte d'entrée, un parapluie noyé dans un porte-parapluie en plexiglas transparent est rempli d'eau. Et si un parapluie pouvait devenir autre chose qu'un objet uniquement destiné à se protéger de la pluie. Un joli tour de travestissement, sous des airs de jeu d'enfants, où l'art peut finalement crier victoire contre l'efficacité et la performance.



— Roman Signer, *Aktion in Sedrun*, 2010. Photo couleur. 122 x 122 cm

— Roman Signer, *Piano*, 2011. Piano à queue, 2 ventilateurs, 50 balles de tennis de table, dimensions variables

— Roman Signer, *Parapluie*, 2010. Parapluie noir, boîte en plexiglas, eau déminéralisée. 93 x 20 x 20 cm

— Roman Signer, *Ski*, 2009. Photo couleur, triptyque. 45 x 60 cm chaque.

— Roman Signer, *Ski de fond*, 2010. Paire de ski, suspension murale. 201 x 28 x 20 cm

— Roman Signer, *Installation avec 2 ventilateurs*, 2010. Deux ventilateurs suspendus. Dimensions variables

Publication

Roman Signer, *When You Travel in Iceland You See a Lot of Water-Scheidegger Und Spiess Ag Verlag*, 2010

L'artiste suisse Roman Signer expose un parapluie noir, fermé, plongé dans un vase de verre rempli d'eau. D'inspiration surréaliste évidente, l'œuvre peut amener un sourire sur le visage du visiteur (elle a été conçue pour ça), bien que son auteur n'appartienne pas à la jeune génération des installateurs comiques. Signer est né en 1938, et s'est fait reconnaître par ses explosions balançant dans le ciel tout un tas d'objets inattendus – la plus drôle, peut-être, ayant consisté à faire jaillir de l'eau d'une paire de bottes en caoutchouc. Mais pour l'heure Signer expose son parapluie et, fixée au mur à l'horizontale, une vieille paire de skis. Dans un courriel récent, un lecteur écrit qu'il faut posséder « *le sens de l'humour duchampien* » pour comprendre et apprécier tout un pan de l'art contemporain. Sans doute. On devine alors que toute personne qui en serait dénuée (à commencer par celui qui écrit ces lignes) appartient à un autre temps, où l'art était chose sérieuse, qui commença au paléolithique moyen pour s'achever il y a quelques années. Il y aurait donc d'un côté la culture actuelle, amusante et légère, et de l'autre l'art d'hier, grave et pesant, d'un côté les joyeux et de l'autre les pisse-vinaigre, d'un côté ceux qui se marrent devant le parapluie de Signer et de l'autre ceux qui font la gueule. Mais est-ce aussi manichéen ? Il est envisageable qu'une même personne sourie face à l'objet paradoxal (le parapluie dans l'eau), et se demande ce que l'œuvre, elle, produit, quelle émotion, quelle pensée qui ne soit pas le recyclage d'une vague idée surréaliste des années 1930 ? Le non-sens, peut-être ? Mais le non-sens à l'œuvre aujourd'hui n'a pas la profondeur du concept qui, au milieu du siècle dernier, intéressa un temps la philosophie (en particulier Wittgenstein et Merleau-Ponty). Plus trivial, il vient du dessin humoristique et de la publicité auxquels il emprunte même parfois sa forme – ainsi l'Anglais Glen Baxter ou l'Américain David Shrigley. Et puis les ready-made de Duchamp avaient du sens, même si on ne les prit jamais en leur temps pour des œuvres d'art – au point que leur acheteur, le couple Arensberg, les égara. Mais

la répétition sans fin de l'effet comique a fini par avoir raison de ce sens, et ne demeure plus aujourd'hui que l'humour parfois un brin potache – le parapluie immergé ou la paire de skis. Bien sûr, le travail de Signer ne se résume pas à ces aimables plaisanteries. Il montre aussi deux ventilateurs opposés que leurs souffles éloignent, ou un ventilateur animant des balles de ping-pong sur les cordes d'un piano à queue et créant une musique aléatoire malheureusement inaudible à cause du bruit.

De cette dernière œuvre Signer n'est pas l'inventeur. John Cage fut le premier musicien à utiliser des balles de ping-pong dans un piano : c'était à la fin des années 1930, lorsque, en fixant des objets divers aux cordes afin d'en changer la sonorité, il inventa le « piano préparé ». Beaucoup de musiciens contemporains en jouent aujourd'hui (Benoît Delbecq, Sophie Agnel, Aki Takase, Hauschka) et, à la suite de Cage, composent pour lui : l'Américain Christian Wolff ou l'Allemande Ulrike Haage. Mais leurs œuvres ne doivent rien à l'humour duchampien : elles cherchent à intégrer l'aléatoire à la musique. Pour la rigolade (et la poésie), il y avait le spectacle de Jean-Paul Farré (1) et son piano dans lequel chutent deux cents balles de ping-pong ; quant à la performance amusante, deux vidéos sont visibles sur YouTube : « Billy's Ball 2 » et « iBall » – impressionnantes, spectaculaires, plaisantes, allez, duchampiennes.

(1) Les Douze Pianos d'Hercule

★★ Roman Signer, jusqu'au 19 février, galerie Art : concept, 13, rue des Arquebusiers, Paris 3^e. Tél. : 01-53-60-90-30.



ŒUVRE DU SUISSE ROMAN SIGNER. DUCHAMPIEN.

THE BIG APPLE

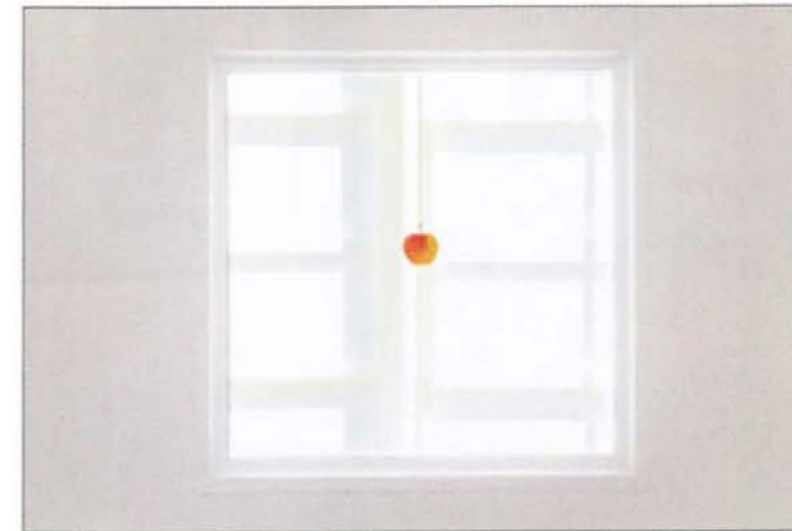
A MAN WHO HAS SPENT A CAREER INVESTIGATING MOVEMENT AND TIME, ARTIST ROMAN SIGNER RECENTLY FOUND HIMSELF STANDING STILL AND REFLECTING ON ONE VERY INFLUENTIAL SOURCE

I deeply admire the work of the late Harold Edgerton. Everyone knows his photograph of a bullet flying through an apple. My installation, *Waiting for Harold Edgerton*, is simply an apple from Union Square Market, hanging from the ceiling. It gestures to the American photographer, who became famous as "the man who made time stand still." My installation is also about frozen time. It is an homage. Somehow I wish Edgerton would all of a sudden show up and shoot the apple for me. **Roman Signer, 72**

Roman Signer

Swiss Institute

Swiss artist Roman Signer is best known for his mysterious photographs, films, and installations of choreographed explosions, collisions, and other quasi-scientific experiments that rely on wind, water, snow, or smoke to project objects through space. His forte is the sublimely ephemeral—and the comically sublime. In his filmed works, nothing seems to happen for the longest time—but if you



Roman Signer, *Waiting for Harold Edgerton*, 2010, mixed media, installation view. Swiss Institute.

blink, you'll miss the action when it does. Signer's art has as much to do with anticipation and anxiety as cause and effect.

In one room of this show, "Four Rooms, One Artist," was an installation, *Piano* (2010), that could almost have been pseudo-Cagean or mock Beuysian, except that it had more to do with pure wonder than with chance or social sculpture. Two oscillating fans were aimed at a backless grand piano filled with ping-pong balls. The breeze from the fans caused the balls to dance across the strings, creating ambient music. The second room contained *Cinema* (2010), a makeshift movie theater with wooden chairs. The middle chair in the last row was continually rocked back and forth by a string, as if it were off its rocker. The images on the screen were "Restenfilm," or "leftovers"—clips of failed experiments captured by the artist. Occasionally Signer would flit across the screen, busily setting up an experiment. The third room presented three videos of moving objects: a rotating chair in the middle of a rocky stream, a shirt fluttering through the trees in a snowy forest, and two lashed-together umbrellas dancing in the wind. Accompanied by the sounds of the ping-pong balls, they suggested the serendipitous trajectories of life itself.

The fourth installation, in the reading room, was minimal, enigmatic, and breathtaking. It consisted simply of a red apple suspended in a white room. Titled *Waiting for Harold Edgerton* (2010), the piece is dedicated to the American photographer known as the master of speed photography and the strobe light, whose his most famous image is a bullet going through an apple. Edgerton was known as "the man who made time stand still." Signer does the same thing in a different way. **—Kim Levin**

Roman Signer (Swiss Institute Contemporary Art New York; curated by Gianni Jetzer) An all-too-infrequent New York appearance by the merry prankster of St. Gallen, "Four Rooms, One Artist" featured new pieces (involving actions utilizing prepared umbrellas, a white shirt, and an office chair; a piano full of Ping-Pong balls; and a Harold Edgerton-esque apple hanging from a string) as well as a package of older experiments (a *Restenfilm*, or "leftover movie") situated within a newly constructed installation. Fascinated, as always, by chance, and animated by a commitment to an economy of means, Signer devised the last—*Cinema*, 2010—to draw a representative inventory of his poetic devotions, from a ridiculous rocket-propelled boot spinning on a pole to a sublime blanket of heavy spring snow, slowly dislodging itself from sun-warmed tree branches.

Swiss Institute Contemporary Art, New York, USA

Roman Signer's work - which is about trial and error, humour and simplicity, nature and machines - is subtle even if his actions (i.e. explosions) are anything but. "Four Rooms, One Artist", the septuagenarian artist's recent exhibition at the Swiss Institute, comprised all new works. The reading room was turned into a life-size Joseph Cornell-like box: a small glass window in the door allowed viewers to peer into the bright white room where there was only an apple hanging from ceiling. Some watched for ten seconds, others for ten minutes. They were all waiting for something to happen. Was the string leading to an explosive device? Would the apple start to swirl around the room? Titled *Waiting for Harold Edgerton* (2010), those who got the reference to the eponymous MIT professor - who was credited with making the strobe light a common device - might have expected the apple to be shot at (Edgerton was famous for using strobe photography to capture the split-second moments of a bullet during its impact with an apple). Like Edgerton's photographs, Signer's work is frozen in time: the title suggests that the ghost of the professor was playfully summoned to shoot the apple. Signer captures the stillness of anticipation - a moment frozen in time before a potential action.

Acoustics played an integral part in the show. In another room, a piano was flanked by two oscillating fans that were pushing a dozen table tennis balls across the piano's strings, the delicate strumming noise and the whirring of the fans amplified through speakers (*Piano*, 2010). It was a calming sound, like the ocean or the wind.

In the central gallery, the largest of the four rooms, rows of wooden chairs were lined up facing a wall-projected film (*Cinema*, 2010). In the back row a chair attached to a string was being tipped backward, the string being pulled mechanically into and out of a large black box on

the floor. There was a clicking noise as the chair was tipped, like the sound of a film projector. The screen showed water rushing through a kayak, the bow and stern of which had been hacked off. The scene then cut to wet leaves. The room felt like the makeshift theatre of a small-town primary school, the constant rhythm of the chair tipping like the ticking of a metronome. It was comforting and autumnal; Signer's cinema a place to burrow from the impending cold winter.

In the adjacent gallery, three separate films were projected, creating a vista of Signer's brilliant 'happenings'. *Shirt* (2010) shows a lush forest located near the artist's home in St. Gallen, Switzerland. On a rope usually used to transport wood, a white shirt is ferried back and forth, waving elegantly as it recedes then returns to the foreground. In *Two Umbrellas, Iceland* (2009), filmed in Iceland, Signer is shown struggling to gaffer tape two wooden-handled umbrellas together, his jacket flapping in the violent wind. Signer lets go of the umbrellas - now one entity - and the wind carries them across the foggy, barren landscape; it's a mesmerizing scene. In the third film, *Office Chair* (2010), also made near the artist's home, Signer places a chair in a rushing stream, the current of the water spinning it around on its base. In all three works the natural and manufactured are married in a poignant and simple picture. The delicate trial and error processes in Signer's works make them unpredictable and playful, simple but not empty. This is Signer's trademark, despite his intention not to have one.

Marina Cashdan



The New York Times

Roman Signer

'Four Rooms, One Artist'

Swiss Institute

495 Broadway, between Spring
and Broome Streets

SoHo

Through Nov. 13

The Swiss artist Roman Signer calls himself a tinkerer, but mad scientist might be more appropriate. The Swiss Institute's "Four Rooms, One Artist," a show with humor and clarity, samples Mr. Signer's performative action sculptures. (Mr. Wizard meets Fischli and Weiss.)

In one gallery oscillating fans move table-tennis balls around the strings of an open grand piano, producing softly dissonant arpeggios. The idea owes much to John Cage, Céleste Boursier-Mougenot and Christian Marclay, but it's pleasing nonetheless.

The second room takes you deeper into Mr. Signer's "laboratory," with film clips of some of his experiments in the name of art. Many involve explosive devices, used to propel rubber boots, kayaks and other objects through the Swiss countryside. Rows of wooden chairs are provided for viewers' comfort, but they're also part of the science; one of them, tethered to a rotating electrical device, rocks back and forth with a disconcerting tapping sound.

In the show's third section Mr. Signer plays with hydraulics, gravity and wind in three short video projections. An office swivel chair placed in the middle of a flowing stream starts to spin, becoming a kind of turbine. A white shirt flutters as it moves along a zip line threaded through snowy woods. And in the third and most evocative piece, a pair of umbrellas duct-taped together at the handles are released in a windstorm. They roll across a field like a tumbleweed, before a big gust sweeps them up and deposits them back on the ground in a crumpled heap.

A final piece, "Waiting for Harold Edgerton," consists of a red apple suspended from the center of a bright white room. (Edgerton, the pioneer of strobe photography, once photographed a bullet piercing an apple.) Elegant and rational, it seems at odds with Mr. Signer's sometimes unpredictable actions and reactions.

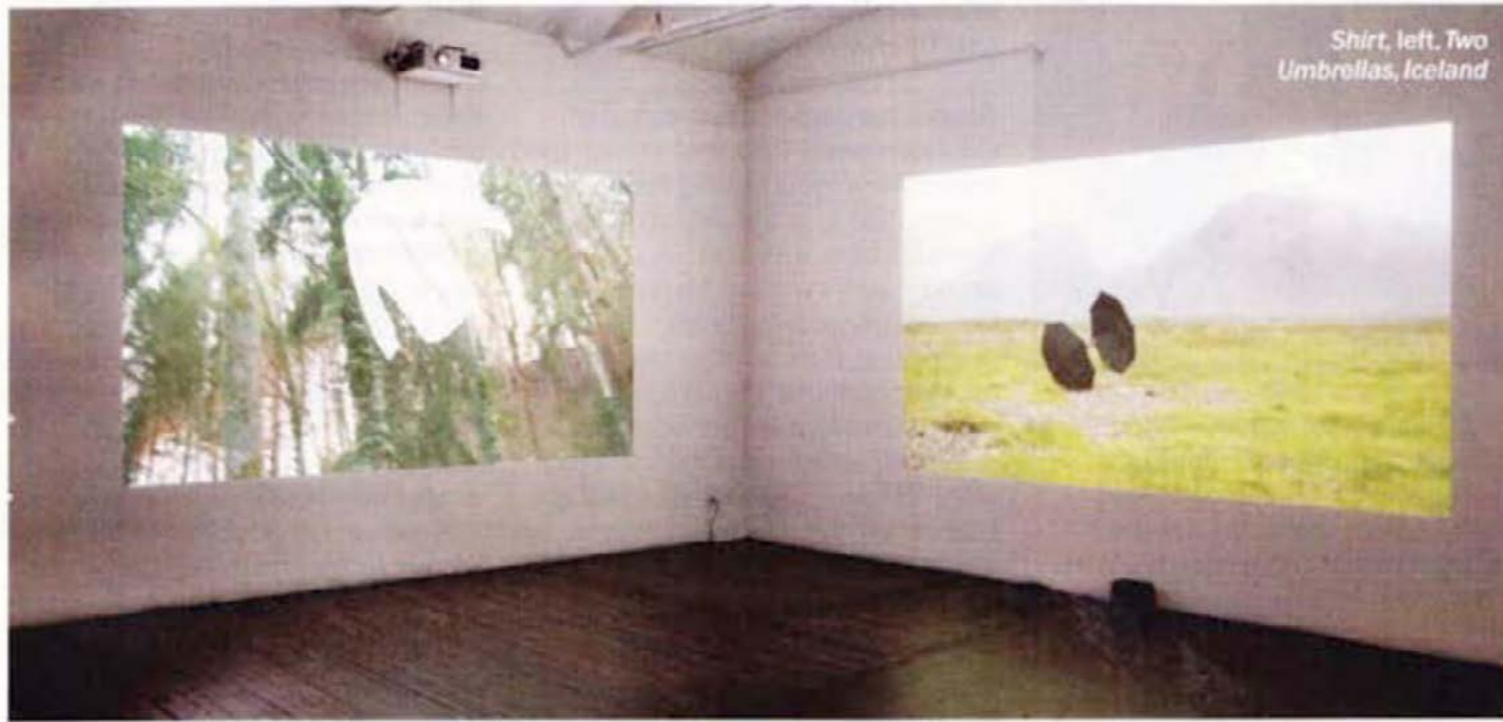
KAREN ROSENBERG



THE NEW YORKER

ROMAN SIGNER

The septuagenarian Swiss Conceptualist, who isn't as well known on these shores as he should be, is one part Buster Keaton and one part Robert Smithson. His actions, captured on film and video, combine the antic deadpan of pratfalls with an eye for entropic mysteries. Two umbrellas are attached at their handles and carried off by high winds; a plain white shirt whizzes through a forest (thanks to an almost invisible wire) like a poltergeist; stacks of white paper laid out in an Alpine landscape explode in a cascade over water and trees like Brobdingnagian flakes of snow. Viewers watch an hour-long selection of the artist's *Restenfilms* ("film leftovers") in a darkened gallery filled with wooden chairs, one of which tips backward at regular intervals, thanks to a mechanized string. Signer's experiments are absurdist but far from pointless—they're odes to evanescence. Through Nov. 12. (Swiss Institute, 495 Broadway, at Broome St. 212-925-2035.)



Shirt, left. Two Umbrellas, Iceland

Reviews

Roman Signer, "Four Rooms, One Artist"

★★★★★

Swiss Institute, through Nov 12 (see Soho)

Until the artist is given the full-on survey treatment, this solo show will have to do. By **Anne Wehr**

Don't mess with Mother Nature, they say, but of course plenty of artists do. Take the indefatigable Swiss artist Roman Signer, who documents his experiments with wind, water, fire, velocity and other forces in low-tech videos, made with just one or two cameras. He's been at it for more than 30 years. A refreshing alternative to the work of better-known eco-interventionists who make, say, huge scaffolding waterfalls or meticulously crafted cairns in the woods, Signer's art suggests a workaday relationship with the elements not unlike that of genial Looney Tunes antagonists Ralph and Sam: Go outside, make art, clean up, clock out.

At times, the overall effect can be pleasantly cartoonish. Consider *Kayak* (2000): The artist sits in the titular vehicle, roaring like Speed Racer down a one-lane country road by dint of rope attached to a truck. Signer points, and the camera obediently pans over to a herd of confused cows keeping up alongside, bells clanging like crazy. The pan also reveals a babbling brook running parallel to the road.

If you haven't seen it, it's worth catching the bootleg someone put on YouTube, even though it's crooked and incomplete. That's the best you'll do with most of Signer's older work, as he's woefully overdue for a real retrospective in New York. (Hello? New Museum?) His videos have made appearances in group shows; Dan Graham, a self-professed "big fan" of Signer's, recently included him in one such exhibit at Marian Goodman Gallery.

Thank heavens for the Swiss Institute, Signer's longtime go-to outlet in the city. His last New York solo show was here too, in 1997. "Four Rooms, One Artist" features recent work from this year and last. Those who come to see fireworks—one of Signer's signature mediums—might be disappointed, but nobody else will. Three new videos have him working from his wheelhouse, carting man-made objects into the great outdoors and liberating them, for the moment, from functionality.

Office Chair (2010) shows the eponymous object in white, sitting in the middle of a creek, spinning round and round in the current in a simple, perfect demonstration of action and



Waiting for Harold Edgerton

reaction at work. In *Shirt* (2010), the identified flying object catches the weak winter sunlight as it descends a zip line down a woodsy, snow-spotted hilltop, rapidly transforming from tiny, heavenly creature to life-size, plain old white clothing item.

Signer's art suggests a workaday relationship with the elements.

Two Umbrellas, Iceland (2009), made in more severe circumstances, best reveals Signer's ingenuity as an opportunistic matchmaker of material and elements. Clad in an all-weather anorak and sensible shoes, and working fast in the face of what seems like a hurricane-force gale, the artist duct-tapes a pair of open bumbershoots handle to handle. He lets go and off they tumble, like a pair of wagon wheels, flipping end over end, before briefly taking flight. Bounce, crash, show over. A final shot reveals them crumpled and done for.

And that was a good day. The show's central work, *Cinema* (2010), features one of what Signer calls his *restenfilms* ("leftovers"), a compilation of Super-8 footage of old, failed experiments, projected in a theater of wooden chairs. In the back row, one chair attached to a chain gear thunks rhythmically as if operated by an invisible class clown. It's a fairly generic installation, but makes for a fine place to view Signer's collected attempts to open an umbrella by dangling it in a stream, or to pinwheel a boot nailed to a tree by lighting a fuse at its heel. Repetition underscores dual themes of anarchy and organization in his work, while all that hazy footage of Switzerland's gorgeous wilderness and pretty countryside confirms the utter appropriateness of the show's venue.

In contrast, Signer's sculptures and installations seem like the staid work of a less interesting artist. Oh well. *Piano* (2010), an open-topped grand piano wired for sound, is reasonably good. Two oscillating fans blow Ping-Pong balls back and forth across the piano strings, resulting in a restrained cacophony that sounds a bit like the soundtrack for a made-for-

TV suspense film. But *Waiting for Harold Edgerton*, an apple dangling by a thread (seen only through the window of a locked door), is a disappointing homage to a kindred spirit, the pioneering stroboscopic photographer best known for his arresting image of an apple pierced by a bullet. Still and open-ended—one surmises the apple will decay throughout the show—it's the polar opposite of Signer's succinct visual narratives. No biggie, but if I have to wait another 13 years for Signer's next show, I kind of regret the waste of space.

Kultur & Gesellschaft

Roman Signer

SWISS INSTITUTE
495 Broadway, 3rd floor
September 15–November 12

Fans of Roman Signer's "experiments" will not be disappointed by his new antics in "Four Rooms, One Artist," his latest exhibition, wherein inanimate objects are subjected to unpredictable natural forces. Presented as a three-channel video projection, *Shirt*, 2010; *Two Umbrellas, Iceland*, 2009; and *Office Chair*, 2010, are set in a forest, a meadow, and a stream, respectively. The results—a ghostlike collared shirt fluttering through tall trees; a pair of conjoined umbrellas dancing in gale-force winds; and a swivel chair spinning haplessly in a gentle current—are droll and poignant portraits of typically unremarkable objects. Signer's pointed recontextualization of these humdrum items effectively humanizes them, creating a cast of surprisingly charming characters.



View of "Four Rooms, One Artist," 2010. From left: *Shirt*, 2010; *Two Umbrellas, Iceland*, 2009.

Also on view are three amusingly enigmatic installations, all 2010, in which Signer challenges expectations of where his art begins and ends (both physically and conceptually). *Cinema*, presented in the gallery's main room, consists of a film projection in front of several tidy rows of chairs. One empty seat in the rear rocks back and forth, vying for attention and distracting from what initially appears to be the main attraction—the film. (Actually, it is what Signer calls a *restenfilm* [residual film], an edited composite of cuts from various failed projects.) By activating the chair and screening what is essentially a blooper reel, Signer recasts the venue (the chairs and by extension the gallery) and the artwork (the film) as equally important—or equally trivial—elements of the installation. Similarly, *Piano* (a player piano of sorts made with Ping-Pong balls rattling across piano strings set in motion by oscillating fans) and *Waiting for Harold Edgerton* (an apple dangling from the ceiling of a sealed-off annex, visible only through a small window) raise questions about the relationships between "art" and its immediate environment in Signer's work.



Innen- und Aussenansicht: «Waiting for Harold Edgerton», Roman Signers Hommage an den amerikanischen Hochgeschwindigkeits-Fotografen.



Nur Wind und Ton und jetzt: Bei der Installation «Piano» lassen Ventilatoren Pingpong-Bälle über die Klaviersaiten huschen. Fotos: PD



Klavierklänge statt Kabumm

Roman Signer ist für seine Knall-Aktionen bekannt. Im Swiss Institute in New York zeigt der Schweizer Starkünstler nun aber seine subtilere Seite.

Von Sacha Verna, New York

Er habe genug davon, der «Sprengkünstler» zu sein, sagt Roman Signer. Deshalb kracht es nicht im Swiss Institute. Akustisch empfängt einen die Ausstellung «Four Rooms, One Artist» mit einem sanften «Kling-Klong», auf das ein «Tock-Tock» folgt – und darauf das Hintergrundrauschen in Mikrofonen.

Dies ist die zweite Schau des 72-jährigen St. Galler Künstlers in der Schweizer Kunsthalle am Broadway. 1997 zeigte das Swiss Institute Fotografien und eine Installation, für die sich Signer buchstäblich auf den Kopf stellte, um farbige Stiefelabdrücke an der Decke zu hinterlassen: «Ich war hier» lautete damals der Titel. Diese Spuren befinden sich da noch immer irgendwo unter vielen Farbschichten. Doch natürlich hat Signer für die gegenwärtige Schau drei ganz neue Werke konzipiert. «Waiting for Harold Edgerton» besteht aus einem Apfel, der in einem weiss gestrichenen Raum von der Decke hängt. Der Raum ist verschlossen. Hinein guckt man durch ein kleines Fenster – wobei man bitte nicht

an Wilhelm Tell denken soll, so Signer. Dem Deuten seiner Arbeiten ist er ohnehin abhold. Wenn man hier ausser dem Apfel wirklich etwas sehen will, dann am besten eine Hommage an den titelgebenden Pionier der Hochgeschwindigkeitsfotografie: Edgerton ist berühmt für seine Bilder von Objekten (wie eben Äpfeln) und darauf abgefeuerten Projektile im Augenblick ihres Ein- und Austretens.

Verwertung von «Restfilmen»

Das «Kling-Klong» erzeugen Pingpong-Bälle auf den Saiten eines Flügels, die von zwei Ventilatoren in Bewegung gehalten werden. «Piano» geht auf ein früheres Werk zurück, in dem der Luftzug vom Propeller eines Mini-Helikopters über dem Klavier die Bälle herumwirbelte. Davon drehte Signer einen Film. «Piano» hingegen ist nur das: Wind und Ton und jetzt.

Im nächsten Raum bildet Film hingegen durchaus eine der Attraktionen. Genauer sind es «Restfilme», wie Signer sie nennt: Material, das er mit einer

Super-8-Kamera aufgenommen und nie verwertet hat, wird hier auf eine Wand vor mehreren Stuhlreihen projiziert. In der hintersten Reihe wippt ein Stuhl ununterbrochen vor und zurück. «Tock-Tock», als könnte ein Zuschauer das Ende der Vorstellung nicht erwarten. Die dauert eine Stunde und beinhaltet oft leicht verwackelte Aufnahmen von einem ausbrechenden Vulkan, einem Wasserfall, einem tanzenden Spazierstock. Und einige Explosionen.

Denn Roman Signer spielt schon gern mit dem Feuer. Mit Knall-Aktionen ist er bekannt geworden. Erwa mit der «Aktion Kurhaus» im appenzellischen Weissbad. Dafür befestigte er Raketen an die Innenseite von geschlossenen Fensterläden eines Gebäudes und zündete sie, worauf sich die Läden mit funkensprühendem Radau öffneten. Derlei macht dem Publikum Spass. Besonders in Europa, wo Signer längst zum Star avanciert ist. In den USA kennt man ihn zwar ebenfalls – so war er 2008 für den vom Guggenheim Museum vergebenen Hugo-Boss-Preis nominiert. Aber Einzel-

ausstellungen des Schweizer sind jenseits des Atlantiks rar. «Die Amerikaner mögen vor allem meine Filme», sagt Signer.

Unterhaltungswert garantiert

Drei dieser Filme schliessen die Ausstellung im Swiss Institute ab. Darunter «Two Umbrellas, Iceland», in dem zwei offene, aneinandergeliebte Schirme über eine isländische Heide gefegt werden. Wieder nichts als Wind und eine Idee. Ist Roman Signer ein Lufttibus, dessen geniale Vielseitigkeit bald auch die Amerikaner überzeugt? Als Export-Künstler eignet er sich unbedingt. Wie Fischli/Weiss oder Pipilotti Rist trägt seine Arbeit die clownesken Züge, die man im Ausland gern mit Helvetiens kreativen Geistern assoziiert: sich selbst nicht allzu ernst nehmend, und vielleicht grundsätzlich nicht allzu ernst zu nehmen, aber mit garantiertem Unterhaltungswert.

Bis 12. November.

www.swissinstitute.net

Quöllfrisch in New York



Roman Signer in New York. Bild: Carl Friedrich

Vier Räume – ein Künstler heisst Roman Signers dritte Solo-Ausstellung in New York. Die «Boutique Show» im Swiss Institute ist während sechs Wochen zu sehen.

ROMAN ELSENER, NEW YORK

«Tripple A!», urteilt Swiss-Institute-Direktor Gianni Jetzer und verleiht der Ausstellung von Roman Signer, die am Dienstagabend in New York eröffnet wurde, ein dreifaches A, was in den USA die höchste Qualitätsstufe ist. «Es scheint, als ob er einen neuen Jungbrunnen entdeckt hätte – er sprudelt vor neuen Ideen und ist voller Schalk und Neugierde», freut sich Jetzer.

Signer zeige in der Ausstellung «Vier Räume – ein Künstler» im Swiss Institute nur neue Werke, obwohl er auf ein reichhaltiges Werk von 35 Jahren zurückgreifen könnte.

In den USA ein Geheimtip

Exakt 35 Jahre ist es her, dass Roman Signer zum ersten Mal nach New York kam. «Die hektische, lärmige Stadt war für mich ein echter Kulturschock», sagt der 72jährige Künstler, aus dessen listigen Augen immer noch der Bub im Manne spricht.

«Ein zweiter Kulturschock erlebte ich, als ich zurück ins Appenzellerland kam und dort von der Stille fast erdrückt wurde.» Seither war er wiederholt in den USA, stellte neben New York in Rochester, Philadelphia und Los Angeles aus. Der für Schweizer Verhältnisse hochberühmte Künstler blieb aber in den USA ein Geheimtip. Die neue Hochform, die Jetzer im quirligen Mann in Jeans und blauem T-Shirt ausmacht, soll dies ändern. Sechs Wochen lang will Jetzer die Ausstellung als «Boutique Show» benutzen.

Ziel ist es, Signer in eines der grossen Kunsthäuser wie das Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) oder das neuere PS1 in Queens zu bringen. An Medieninteresse fehlt es nicht, auch wenn sich Signer mehr über das kühle, echt appenzellische Quöllfrisch in der Hand freut, als er über seine Kunst spricht. «Ich versuche, gute Arbeit zu machen, das ist mein Ehrgeiz», sagt der Bücherfan, der in New York gerne durch Buchhandlungen wie den riesigen «Strand» am Broadway streift. Auch dieses Jahr ist das Gepäck bereits wieder um drei Bücher schwerer.

«Vielleicht kauf ich einen iPod»

Doch hat er angenehme Reisebegleitung, die bestimmt beim Tragen hilft: Signers Tochter Barbara ist mit dabei in New York. Sie sei viel weltgewandter als er, sagt der Vater, zudem flink mit Computern und solchem Zeug. «Ich bin Jahrgang 38 – mit so viel Jahren auf dem Rücken gilt sogar ein Haus schon als ziemlich alt.» Dann schmunzelt Signer: «Aber ich kaufe mir vielleicht doch noch einen iPod.»

Art in America

Roman Signer: Suspended Moments

"Four Rooms, One Artist," Roman Signer's current solo show at the Swiss Institute New York, gives viewers the experience of a blockbuster museum show in miniature form. In said four rooms, curated by Gianni Jetzer, Signer's decades-long practice reveals the artist's synthesis of comic and romantic effects housed in an economy of motifs and material.

The show begins with a new work, *Waiting for Harold Edgerton* (2010), comprised of a single apple that levitates in a cordoned-off room, visible through a window. The title references Edgerton's famous still photograph of an apple being pierced by a bullet, and the impetus of the piece is the action, or non-action, of waiting: "It's kind of similar to Edgerton because the image in that photograph is also frozen in time. I like the idea that I could wait in front of an apple tree until the moment that an apple falls down," says Signer. "The idea of waiting for an apple to fall has a similar structure [to Edgerton's work]: waiting until something happens. But I would need a bit budget for Super 8 film to do that. And probably what would happen is that the apple would fall down at night!" As it stands, the piece elicits its own anticipatory emotion, which is of a part with its conceptual premise, according to the artist. "It's very crucial that people not be able to enter the room—it's like a safe room, or a forbidden room. I would be very upset if people started to touch the apple or move it around."



WAITING FOR HAROLD EDGERTON, COURTESY SWISS INSTITUTE NEW YORK. PHOTO BY DANNY PEREZ

At the age of 72, Swiss artist Roman Signer makes work that seeks to unbind normative space and time. The artist has lived in Switzerland for nearly his entire life, barring a stint in school in Poland, and his focuses are decidedly less urbane than other artists of his generation. His film, video and photographic works deal with their natural settings and give little pause to contemplate the urban rumblings of the world at large. The body of this practice comprises simple, elegant forms, animated and detonated to elucidate the cinematic ideas of suspense, climax and conclusion. His best-known works are Super 8 films and video wherein the artist stages a spectacular event—sending a Piaggio truck over a ski jump (*Piaggio on Jump*, 2003), for example—or makes a banal moment spectacular in its slapstick simplicity: shown within this exhibition, *Shirt*, 2010, features a simple, ghostly white button down shirt gliding up and down a hill on a pulley. Signer is also perhaps best-known for works involving rockets and combustion, though the works here are newer, and perhaps illustrate the artist's desire for a quieter and more circumspect output.

A second room within the exhibition shows a work that uses the artist's simple, workaday magic to produce a rumination on music. Two large fans blow ping pong balls slowly and chaotically around the strings of an open piano, producing eerie, inconsistent tones. In the last two rooms, four screens showcase Signer's films and video. *Office Chair*, 2010, exemplifies the artist's ease at effecting visual seduction with an economy of devices: an office chair spins wildly—yet statically—in the flow of a wooded creek. The HD video is a departure from the artist's beloved Super 8. "I want to get back to Super 8, not for questions of nostalgia, but because I think it's a very interesting medium, much more filmic to a certain extent," says Signer. The exhibition also calls into the question the difference between a Signer work created for a film, and the installations he creates specifically for galleries. Parsing this difference, Signer explains: "Film asks for narratives, and you have to think in narrative terms. The installations are more like organisms, that just have a life in themselves. Also, you can enter and exit an installation. Film has fluidity; it's more spontaneous. Before I used film, I would [use still photographs to document] a sequence of different movements."



CINEMA, COURTESY SWISS INSTITUTE NEW YORK. PHOTO BY DANNY PEREZ

Cinema (2010) combines film and installation, and features a viewing room staged as a schoolhouse, replete with a chair mechanized that rocks back and forth. On the viewing screen, a series of mixed-together outtakes spanning Signer's career presents a quiet, unresolved "greatest hits." While viewers have become used to Signer's devotion to rocket-launch suspense, the montage produces an ambient retelling Signer's career that focuses on the quieter moments in his films, recalling the interstitial events-caught glances, true smiles, guards let down. For all the combustible, narrative energy that drives Signer's work, it is interesting to think of those in-between moments, and how they illuminate a human pathos inherent in each of the artist's little machines.



Phénomène

propos recueillis par Nicolas Trembley, photos Lukas Wassmann

Pour Roman Signer, ses "actions" relèvent davantage de la sculpture que de la performance : dans son œuvre protéiforme aux multiples niveaux de lecture, l'artiste suisse travaille la problématique du temps et de l'éphémère, avec la nature comme atelier.

Roman Signer est un artiste à part dans l'art contemporain. Il se définit d'ailleurs lui-même comme un solitaire. Pourtant, de Saint-Gall, ville suisse allemande connue pour ses manufactures de broderie destinée à la haute couture, où il réside, et du Japon à l'Islande, il ne cesse de parcourir le monde pour égrener ses "Aktionen", comme il dit. Ces actions sont des interventions qui utilisent les lois physiques des phénomènes naturels comme le vent, la chute des corps ou la force du courant des rivières, par exemple. Ces œuvres éphémères, qui esquissent une sorte de paradigme philosophique des mécanismes dynamiques de la vie, dans lesquelles il se met parfois en scène, peuvent être constituées d'explosifs, et redéfinissent les paramètres du temps et de l'espace dans le champ de la sculpture. Alors qu'il vient de remporter le prestigieux prix Meret-Oppenheim, il nous a reçus dans son atelier, en Suisse.

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Numéro : Comment avez-vous commencé ?

Roman Signer : Je n'ai pas eu la vocation de devenir artiste. C'est plutôt l'architecture puis la sculpture qui m'intéressaient. J'ai suivi un apprentissage de dessinateur en bâtiment, et je fréquentais assidûment les musées. J'ai fait une classe préparatoire en sculpture dans une école à Lucerne. Mais je n'avais pas les moyens de poursuivre et j'ai dû arrêter. Puis j'ai entendu dire qu'il existait une bourse d'échange avec la Pologne où je suis allé en 1971 pour une année. De retour en Suisse, je me suis dit que je ne pouvais plus continuer ma profession de dessinateur en bâtiment. J'ai choisi de m'installer à Saint-Gall, car mes parents venaient d'Appenzell, une région campagnarde pas très éloignée. J'y ai loué une chambre qui me servait d'atelier, et chaque soir, je prenais un petit train pour aller manger chez mes parents parce que je n'avais pas un rond. J'ai fait ce trajet aller-retour un peu comme un travailleur avec son balluchon pendant cinq ans. Puis, en 1977, je me suis marié et je suis resté à Saint-Gall. J'ai toujours voulu aller à New York, Paris ou Zurich, mais je n'avais pas d'argent et je me suis dit qu'on pouvait aussi faire de l'art ici. Pour moi, le cadre est idéal, la nature, avec laquelle je travaille, est tellement proche. Maintenant j'ai un énorme atelier là-bas, qui m'est nécessaire.

Quelles étaient vos premières pièces ?

Comme nous étions pauvres, ma femme faisait des ménages, et j'ai exercé plusieurs emplois. Au départ, mes premiers travaux étaient en métal, car je travaillais dans une usine de métal, une sorte de serrurerie. Le directeur, collectionneur d'art, me permettait d'utiliser des machines en échange de dessins. En 1973, il y avait une seule galerie dans la région, la Galerie Wilma Lock, qui m'a exposé. Cela a lancé ma carrière. J'ai vite compris que l'atelier n'était pas suffisant, j'ai voulu en sortir. Et j'ai commencé à faire des films en super-8, puis en 1989 en vidéo. C'est ma femme Aleksandra qui filme.

Votre travail relève-t-il de la performance, de l'action, de la sculpture ou de l'objet ?

Tout est étroitement mêlé. Une action, c'est en public. Quand je fais un projet pour moi dans la forêt, c'est une installation.

Comment êtes-vous arrivé à la performance ?

Ce terme ne me correspond pas, j'ai toujours pensé qu'il renvoyait à des *events* ou à des *kleine Ereignisse* ["petits happenings"]. La performance vient du théâtre, alors que je viens de la sculpture. Je fais des sculptures qui se transforment et se développent dans le temps. Un temps très court en général. Au départ, je faisais des films, et quand je les présentais, les gens me disaient qu'ils aimeraient les voir en live. Dès 1981, je l'ai fait.

Vous travaillez en étroite relation avec la nature. Vous définissez-vous comme un "land artist" ?

Non, car il ne subsiste aucune trace de mes actions dans la nature. Je l'utilise comme un atelier, l'eau, le vent... me donnent des idées.

Est-ce important de laisser une trace ? Qu'en est-il de l'éphémère ?

Quand je ne fais pas de photos ou de vidéos, rien ne subsiste. Cela arrive, mais dans ce cas, je n'existe pas comme artiste pour les autres, je travaille pour moi. Cela ne vaut pas la peine de produire quelque chose s'il n'en reste rien...

Vous êtes-vous déjà mis en danger ?

Parfois. Il y a comme une frontière à ne pas franchir... Mais cela n'a rien à voir avec l'actionnisme viennois par exemple, avec lequel certaines personnes ont voulu m'associer. Il n'y a pas de destruction humaine chez moi, et lorsqu'il y a du sang, c'est un accident.

Votre position est particulière dans la création contemporaine, car beaucoup de personnes qui ne sont pas familières avec l'art apprécient votre travail. Pourquoi à votre avis ?

Je suis souvent étonné que des personnes sans connaissance artistique, qui ne vont jamais au musée, comprennent mon travail. Mon art est ouvert, on peut y entrer sans théorie intellectuelle particulière et les gens le sentent. Cela me touche beaucoup. Et les intellectuels ont un autre point de vue sur mon travail, qui me va très bien également, même si je ne me considère pas spécialement comme un conceptuel... Je fais mon chemin seul.

Certains critiques perçoivent beaucoup d'humour dans votre démarche, est-ce votre intention ?

On a parfois cité Buster Keaton ou Jacques Tati à propos de mes œuvres. Mais je ne cherche pas à faire rire les gens, je ne suis pas un comique. Cela m'est égal que ce soit drôle ou pas.

Quel est le sens de votre travail ?

Je n'ai pas de direction stricte, j'utilise différents médiums. Ce sont différents outils, qui me servent à exprimer la même chose finalement.

Quelle est l'interrogation qui sous-tend votre œuvre ?

La question du temps... et ce qui est éphémère.

Quels sont vos projets ?

Une exposition au Swiss Institute de New York, une action à l'hôtel Castell de Zuoz, une à Zurich pour l'inauguration des locaux de la banque Syz. Puis la Tasmanie pour l'ouverture du MONA où j'ai quelques pièces exposées, et Paris chez Art: Concept en janvier...

Roman Signer est représenté par la Galerie Art: Concept à Paris, www.galeriartconcept.com.

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Roman Signer

09.16.09

AUTHOR: MICHELLE GRABNER

06.05.09-09.27.09 *Hamburger Kunsthalle*

A rich trove of twenty-nine films and videos dating from 1975 to the present demonstrates Roman Signer's talent for constructing ever-curious short works about time and meter. Conceived of as moving images, Signer's self-described events result from maneuvering materials in specific environments. His films document these temporary sculptures as they undergo transformations. Kayaks, bicycles, and his renowned model helicopters are recurring sculptural elements that regularly endure Signer's spectacularly humorous routines. Yet a welcome respite is found in *Elastic Rope*, 1980, which depicts an ordinary snow-covered conifer standing in the forest. Here, a medium-size tree has a rope tied to its trunk. The cord is tugged. The tree shakes and sheds its snow. The film repeats. Less innocent but equally poetic is *Balloon on Railroad Track*, 1982. In it, a red balloon tied to a track hovers guilelessly in the breeze; then a train rides by, jarring the vignette. The locomotive passes, and the balloon, caught in the train's draft, bursts.

A video from 2008 conveys a profound wonder sorely missing from all the sophisticated engineering and scientific research churned out of the Olafur Eliasson studio as of late. Titled *At the Radio Station Beromünster*, it depicts an illuminated fluorescent tube that is dragged along the ground by an unseen cable in an icy mountain landscape. The contrast of the blue nighttime atmosphere with the dancing and glowing linear shape is profoundly mysterious and beautiful. Projected side by side, and gallery after gallery, the thirty-plus years of films that comprise this survey prove Signer's mastery at converting his own curiosity into universal wonderment.

ROCHESTER, MN

Roman Signer

ROCHESTER ART CENTER

Though a finalist for the 2008 Hugo Boss Prize (or perhaps the winner, by the time this magazine hits the stands), Roman Signer is not well known in the United States; in fact, before the Rochester Art Center's recent exhibition, his work had not seen a large-scale survey in the US since the Cranbrook Art Museum staged one in 1997. Born in Switzerland in 1938, Signer has been working for the past three decades in a poetic style that mobilizes chance, humor, found objects, and a

our perspective today, Signer's pared-down assemblage and his emphasis on the temporal event read as a missing-link between 1970s Conceptualism and the relational attitude of contemporary artists like Gabriel Orozco and Felix Gonzalez-Torres.

Favoring objects that speak of the body in motion (such as kayaks and bicycles), Signer, like many artists who came of age in the '70s, works with elemental materials: earth, air, water, and fire. Yet he avoids the heroics of Land art and the edgy spectacle of early performance art. *Gravel Cone and Kayak*, 2006, for example, is exactly that—a red kayak sticking out of a huge pile of gravel. Displayed outside the building, where it cut a dramatic silhouette against the zinc-and-glass facade, the work brought the static industrial ontology of the contemporary structure into dialogue with the Zumbro River, located but a few yards away. It is hard to miss Signer's humor in this work, the kayak resembling a projectile catapulted from a distance; one imagines it having landed with an unceremonious thud.

Just inside the building, a series of flat-screen monitors ran a sampling of Signer's film shorts. In *Kajak* (Kayak), 2000, the artist, seated in a kayak tied to a moving van, is dragged along an otherwise tranquil road in the Swiss countryside. A few cows briefly run alongside the vehicle; the clanking of their bells mixes with the sound of gravel scraping fiberglass. This ridiculous sequence concludes with Signer, like the natural philosophers of old, one imagines, examining the results of



his experimental investigation of the material world. *Bürostuhl* (Office Chair), 2006, shows Signer seated, with outstretched arms and, in each hand, a lighted rocketlike firework—one pointing forward, the other backward, the chair spinning in response to their force. While these deadpan documentary-style films are funny, they are also gorgeous in their simplicity.

Like his films, Signer's sculptures and installations are characterized by an economy of means and a commitment to the transformation of the ordinary. In Rochester, one gallery was given over to *B* 2007, an installation made up of six half-empty whiskey bottles hanging by cords from the ceiling above six electric fans pointing upward. Powered on, the fans produce drafts that set the bottles in motion. The hum of fans and the slow, perpetual orbiting of the booze bottles enlivened the entire room. One of the most memorable works of the exhibition was *Rad* (Wheel), 2008, a bicycle wheel frozen upright in a block of ice. So delicate that if its surrounding conditions changed even slightly it would fall apart, this uncanny ephemeral object requires extraordinary measures for its maintenance. Aware of both the humor and the irony in the installation, the viewer can only peer at the wheel through the chilled window of a large walk-in freezer.

Signer focuses on the material world as a kind of brute substance and brings into view that most evanescent of dimensions, the temporal. Like some of his younger contemporaries who also integrate found objects and understated performance elements, Signer seems intent on cutting through the ideological and discursive registers to reveal something more unmediated, perhaps even "real."

—Patricia Briggs

AN EMOTIONAL PHYSICIAN

Michele Robecchi

I giocatori d'azzardo lo sanno bene. Il propulsore che li spinge non è l'esito della scommessa, il montepremi in palio o la soddisfazione di aver sconfitto eventuali rivali. La forza centripeta trova origine nell'attimo antecedente, quando il croupier distribuisce le carte, la pallina gira sulla roulette e le caselle scorrono sulla slot machine; quel momento, insomma, di attesa, dove la tensione si concentra su un destino in divenire che sta per trasformare i carnetti in vittime, i ricchi in poveri e i fratelli in disadatti. Se si dovesse riassumere in due parole il lavoro di Roman Signer, si potrebbe dire che la sua arte è una rappresentazione visiva della forza di quel momento. Il bruciarsi della miccia, il traboccare dell'acqua, lo spegnersi della fiamma o il lento e inesorabile scorrere di un oggetto su una rampa che lo porterà a decollare verso una destinazione ignota: tutte queste immagini riassumono una condizione a cui l'artista elvetico, che si autodefinisce propriamente «un fisico emotivo», non riesce a rinunciare. La staticità della scultura e l'autoreferenzialità della performance sono viste come trappole restrittive, e le fasi di realizzazione dell'opera che solitamente si cercano di nascondere vengono invece fatte accomodare in prima fila, nel ruolo di protagonista.

Signer è il classico esempio di un artista nato tale che ha scoperto molto tardi di esserlo. Cresciuto nella Svizzera rurale degli anni Quaranta, dove il vocabolo 'arte' era patrimonio esclusivo di qualche pittore figurativo locale, manifestò presto la sua insoddisfazione davanti alle convenzioni dettate da un luogo così rassicurante, assentandosi sia fisicamente che mentalmente (era noto con il soprannome di 'Roman il Sognatore') e intraprendendo una serie di esperimenti naturali e pirotecnici tra boschi e montagne destinati a suscitare la preoccupazione di chi gli stava intorno. Che possibilità ci sono per un uomo a metà tra Albert Einstein e Tom Sawyer, armato di un'apertura mentale inversamente proporzionale a quella caratteriale? Signer trovò delle risposte alla scuola d'arte di Zurigo e soprattutto in un viaggio nell'atmosfera austera della Polonia degli anni Settanta: la realtà sociale con cui entrò in contatto, insieme alla conoscenza della Land Art e alla visita di "When attitudes become form" alla Kunsthalte di Berta nel 1969, contribuì a gettare le fondamenta formali e filosofiche del suo lavoro.

Se Signer fosse vissuto a inizio Novecento anziché alla fine, sarebbe stato un eroe della comunità surrealista. Tutti i «Cosa succederebbe se...?» che affollano la mente umana nei momenti di pazzia o di maggior slancio creativo, con Signer prendono una forma tangibile. Nel 1986 la somiglianza del Monte Kamor con un vulcano lo spinse ad arrampicarsi in vetta per farvi detonare venti chili di polvere da sparo e simulare un'eruzione (Kamor, 1986); in *Action With A Fuse* (1989), Signer bruciò una miccia lunga diversi chilometri lungo i binari di una ferrovia per scoprire in quanto tempo la fiamma avrebbe coperto la distanza che separa San Gallo da Appenzello; in *Action Kurhaus Weissbad* (1992), catapultò nel cielo quattro sedie attraverso le finestre di un hotel abbandonato; in *Koyok* (2000), si sedette all'interno di una canoa facendosi trascinare da un camion per le strade della Svizzera interna. Signer realizzava queste azioni col desiderio di poterne visionare i risultati proprio come i suoi spettatori: una condizione che lo portò alla decisione immediata, e a conti fatti naturale, di individuare nel film il suo strumento espressivo d'elezione. Nel corso degli anni le azioni di Signer hanno però dovuto fare i conti con la forza di appiattimento dello schermo, finendo col mettere in secondo piano la dimensione di pericolo e di ricerca in favore di un senso dell'umorismo "slapstick" vicino al cinema di Buster Keaton, o all'ro



PHOTO: STEPHEN, DECEMBER. COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND HAUSER & WIRTH ZÜRICH LONDON © HAUSER & WIRTH ZÜRICH LONDON

Artista svizzero col piglio dello scienziato pazzo, o forse più semplicemente del piccolo chimico, Roman Signer (1938) ha alle spalle quasi trent'anni di pratica artistica, con un curriculum di mostre che include Biennale di Venezia (1976), Documenta a Kassel (1987) e una sfilza di musei europei e non solo. Nel corso della sua carriera ha provocato eruzioni, catapultato oggetti nello spazio, ma soprattutto ha sondato con un'energia straordinaria le possibilità, i limiti e le tentazioni della materia: in riconoscimento della portata poetica e simbolica dei suoi esperimenti funambolleschi, ora Signer - terminate da poco le personali presso l'Hamburger Bahnhof a Berlino e la londinese Hauser & Wirth - ha ricevuto la candidatura per il prestigioso Hugo Boss Prize. Noi tifiamo per lui ma con cautela, perché, dicono, coi premi in altre occasioni abbiamo portato un po' di sfortuna.

artista la cui vocazione drammatica veniva spesso smarrita in una cortina fumogena di gag esilaranti. La questione costituisce ancora oggi un nodo centrale per comprendere il lavoro di Signer, e la recente personale da Hauser & Wirth a Londra è un ottimo esempio per capirne il perché. Il pezzo principale, *Chairs* (2008), consisteva infatti in una falciatrice automatica a cui è stata rimossa la lama. La macchina è collocata insieme ad una dozzina di sedie al centro di un ring delimitato da quattro strisce di nastro adesivo sul pavimento, e col suo aggirarsi per la stanza urta e trascina i pezzi d'arredamento creando una varietà interminabile di composizioni. Signer rivela che l'idea gli è venuta osservando sua moglie passare la lucidatrice e ammette che, come in molti altri casi, anche in *Chairs* una visione animista nei confronti dell'oggetto prescelto gioca un ruolo fondamentale. A galleria deserta, il costante movimento dell'infaticabile tosaerba compie un crescendo suddivisibile in tre parti: ad un'iniziale reazione divertita fa seguito un periodo di studio dove si valutano scientificamente i rischi e le probabilità connessi all'operazione; una volta terminato questo breve esercizio di antropologia statistica, e compreso che tale attività ostinata e inutile si concluderà solo con l'esaurirsi della batteria, subentra un senso di angoscia e di impotenza. Si tratta di tre stati d'animo drammaticamente contrastanti, e il fatto che si presentino in uno spazio fisico e temporale così ridotto rende la cosa ancora più inquietante. Ma c'è dell'altro, perché a galleria affollata, *Chairs* prende una piega completamente diversa: il rumore della folta cancella completamente la percezione sonora dell'azione; avvistare la falciatrice è impossibile e l'unica maniera per accorgersi della sua presenza è quando urta qualche spettatore, quasi come se

ci tirasse per la giacca per ricordarci che c'è in quella stanza c'è dell'arte da vedere. La rassegna di film alla Sammlung Friedrich Christian Flick Collection a Berlino lo scorso settembre e la recente candidatura allo Hugo Boss Prize a New York (che ha quasi il sapore di un Oscar alla Carriera) sembrano annunciare una seconda primavera nella carriera di Signer, con il clima rovente dei nostri tempi a risolvere l'attualità, tirando in ballo l'antico adagio che vede in Signer un illustratore delle teorie di Paul Virilio. In realtà il significato del lavoro di Signer è fortunatamente molto più universale. Forse il modo migliore per coglierne l'essenza è ancora guardare *Signers Koffer*, lo splendido documentario girato da Peter Liechi nel 1988. Muovendosi con grazia tra le Isole Eolie, San Gallo, l'Appenzello e la Polonia, Liechi riesce a dipingere un ritratto senza tempo della sfuggente personalità dell'artista, dimostrando soprattutto come un'esplosione, nelle mani di Signer, non sia un gesto di distruzione ma di creazione e liberazione.

Swiss artist with the attitude of a mad scientist, or perhaps of an amateur chemist, Roman Signer (b. 1938) has behind him an almost thirty year artistic practice, and his résumé includes the Venice Biennale (1976), the Kassel Documenta (1987), and a long series of European and non-European museums. During his career,

he has provoked volcanic eruptions, catapulted objects into the space, and above all probed the possibilities, the limits, and the temptations of matter with an exceptional energy: as an acknowledgement of the poetic and symbolic significance of his experiments, now Signer—returned from his recently-concluded solo exhibitions at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin and at Hauser & Wirth in London—has been nominated for the glamorous Hugo Boss Prize. We support him but cautiously, because it is said that on some past occasions we have brought to our favorites a damn bad luck.

Gamblers know it all too well. The driving force is not the success of the bet, the jackpot at stake, or the satisfaction of beating the rivals. The thrill originates a moment before, when the croupier is dealing the cards, the ball is rolling on the wheel, and the symbols are spinning in the slot machine. In other words, it's the waiting, when the tension is high and changing fathos are about to turn persecutors into victims, rich into poor and triumphs into fiascos. If called to sum up Roman Signer's work in a few lines, one could say that his art is a visual representation of the power of that moment. The burning of the fuse, the overflowing of water, the



PHOTO: STEPHEN, APRIL 2009 - PHOTO: STEPHEN ROBECCI, PHOTOGRAPHY: ROBECCI ONLINE, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 - PHOTO: DAN LINDENBERG - COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND HAUSER & WIRTH ZÜRICH LONDON © HAUSER & WIRTH ZÜRICH LONDON



gling out of the flame, the slow, implacable running of an object on a ramp that will launch it towards some unknown destination: all of these images synthesize a condition that the Swiss artist, who ones described himself as «an emotional physician», cannot do without. The immobility of sculpture and the self-referentiality of performance are seen as limitations, while the generally hidden production stages are moved to the front line.

Signer is the typical example of a natura born artist who has discovered to be one only late in the years. Grown up in the rural Switzerland of the 40s, where the term 'art' was for the sole use of few local figurative painters, he soon expressed his dissatisfaction with the conventions in force in the reassuring place of his birth by physically and mentally absenting himself (at school he was known under the nickname of 'Roman the Dreamer') and undertaking a series of natural/pyrotechnical experiments between woods and mountains that aroused the concern of those around him. What are the chances for a man halfway between Albert Einstein and Tom Sawyer, endowed with an openness of mind inversely proportional to that of his character? Signer found some answers at the Schule für Gestaltung in Zurich, and most of all during a school trip through the austere atmosphere of 70s Poland. The social environment he came to know, along with the encounter with Land Art and a visit to "When attitudes become form" at the Bern Kunsthalle in 1969, contributed to form the aesthetic and philosophical foundations of his work.

If Signer had lived at the beginning of the twentieth century rather than at the end, he would have certainly been a hero of the Surrealist milieu. With Signer, all the 'what ifs' that fill the human brain when caught in a state of trance or creativity, find a tangible

accomplishment. In 1986, the resemblance of the Mount Kamor to a volcano drove him to climb up to the top and simulate an eruption by making explode 20 kilos of gunpowder (Kamor, 1986); in *Action With A Fuse* (1989), he burned a several-kilometer-long fuse along a railroad, in order to find out how long would the flame have taken to cover the distance from St. Gallen to Appenzello; in *Action Kurhaus Weissbad* (1992), he catapulted four chairs from the windows of a deserted hotel into the sky; in *Koyok* (2000), he sat in a canoe and was dragged by a truck throughout the country roads of inland Switzerland.

When Signer started these actions, his desire to see the final results was equal as with his spectators, and that lead him to select film as natural choice for his medium. Over the years, his actions had to come to terms with the flattering effect of the screen, and in the end the dimension of danger and search has been superseded by a slapstick humor in Buster Keaton fashion (another artist whose dramatic bent was often shrouded by a thick smokescreen of hilarious gags).

This is a fundamental point in order to have a better understanding of Signer's work, and his recent solo at Hauser & Wirth is an excellent example to realize why. The centerpiece, *Chairs* (2008), consisted of a lawnmower machine whose blade was removed: it is placed with a dozen of chairs in the middle of a ring delimited by tapes on the floor, and by roaming around the room it knocks against the chairs and the furniture pieces and moves them creating disparate compositions. Signer reveals that the idea came to him while looking at his wife using an automatic vacuum cleaner, and admits that in *Chairs* as in many other cases, his animistic view of the objects in question is of crucial importance.

When the gallery is empty, the continuous performance of the tireless lawnmower generates an effect in the audience that can be divided into three moments: the initial reaction of amusement is followed by a consideration of the risks and probabilities related to the mise-en-scène; once concluded this exercise of statistical anthropology and understood that this obstinate and pointless activity will end up with the mere exhaustion of the battery, a feeling of anxiety and impotence occurs. It is a sequence of over-contrasting emotions, and their taking place in such a reduced spatial and temporal scope makes them even more disturbing. But it's not over yet. When the gallery is crowded, *Chairs* takes a totally different turn: the uproar obliterates the sound perception of the work, and the mowing machine is almost impossible to spot, unless it bumps into someone as if reminding that in the room there is art to be seen.

The film projections at the Sammlung Friedrich Christian Flick Collection in Berlin last September, and the recent nomination for the Hugo Boss Prize in New York (almost a Career Achievement Honorary Awards), seem to announce a second spring in Signer's career: the relevance of his work is being rediscovered, along with the old adage according to which he's an illustrator of Paul Virilio's theories, but luckily, the meaning of Signer's work is much more universal. Perhaps the best way to catch its essence is to watch *Signers Koffer*, the beautiful documentary film shot by Peter Liechi in 1988: traveling between the Aeolian Islands, St. Gallen, Appenzello, and Poland, Liechi provides a timeless portrait of the artist's elusive but penetrating personality, giving a demonstration of how an explosion in Signer's hands is not a sign of destruction, but rather one of invention and redemption.

Kajak (Aarau), 1998-9,
colour photograph, 24 x 36 cm.
© the artist. Courtesy
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin,
Friedrich Christian Flick
Collection, Hamburger Bahnhof.



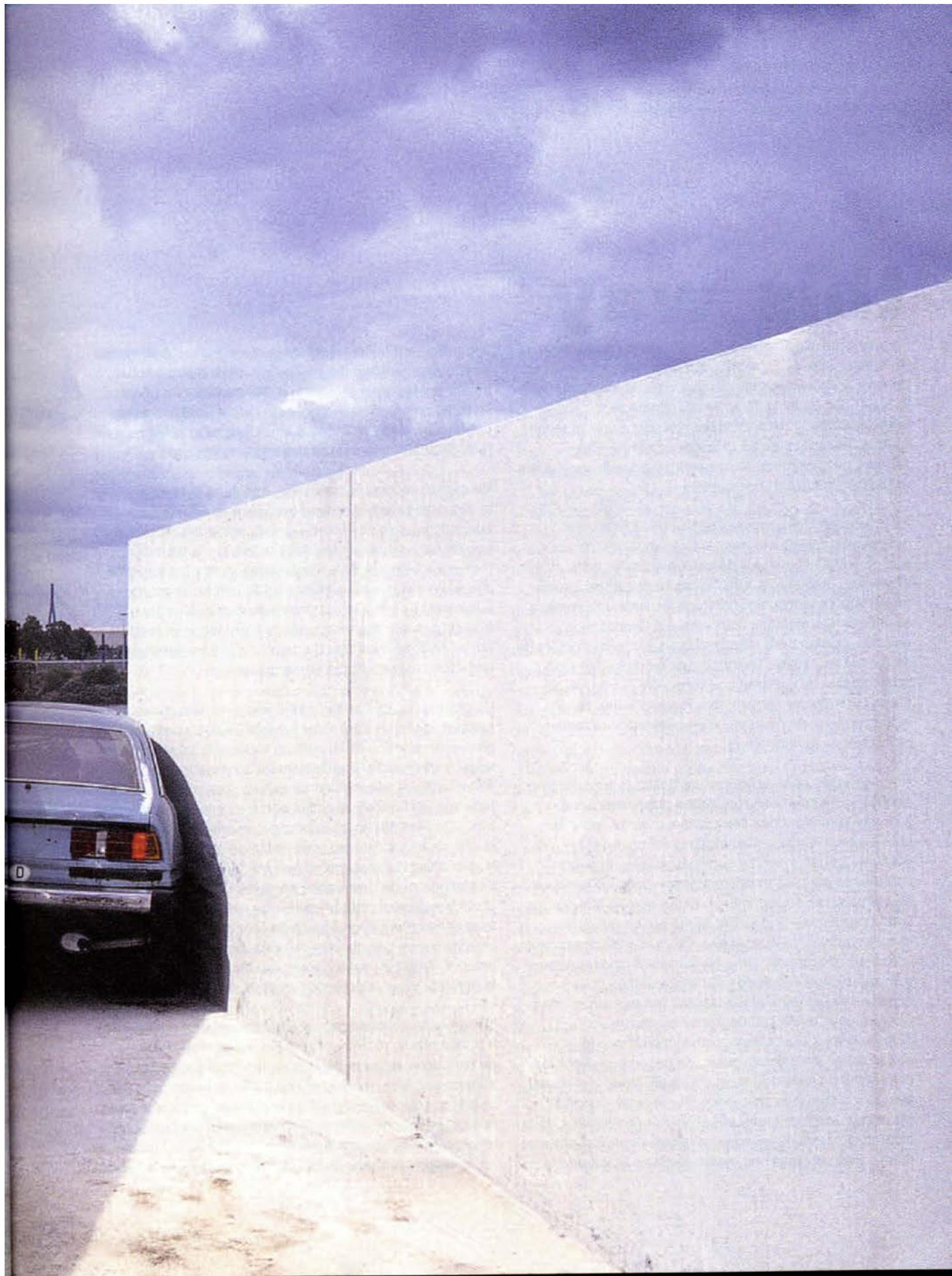
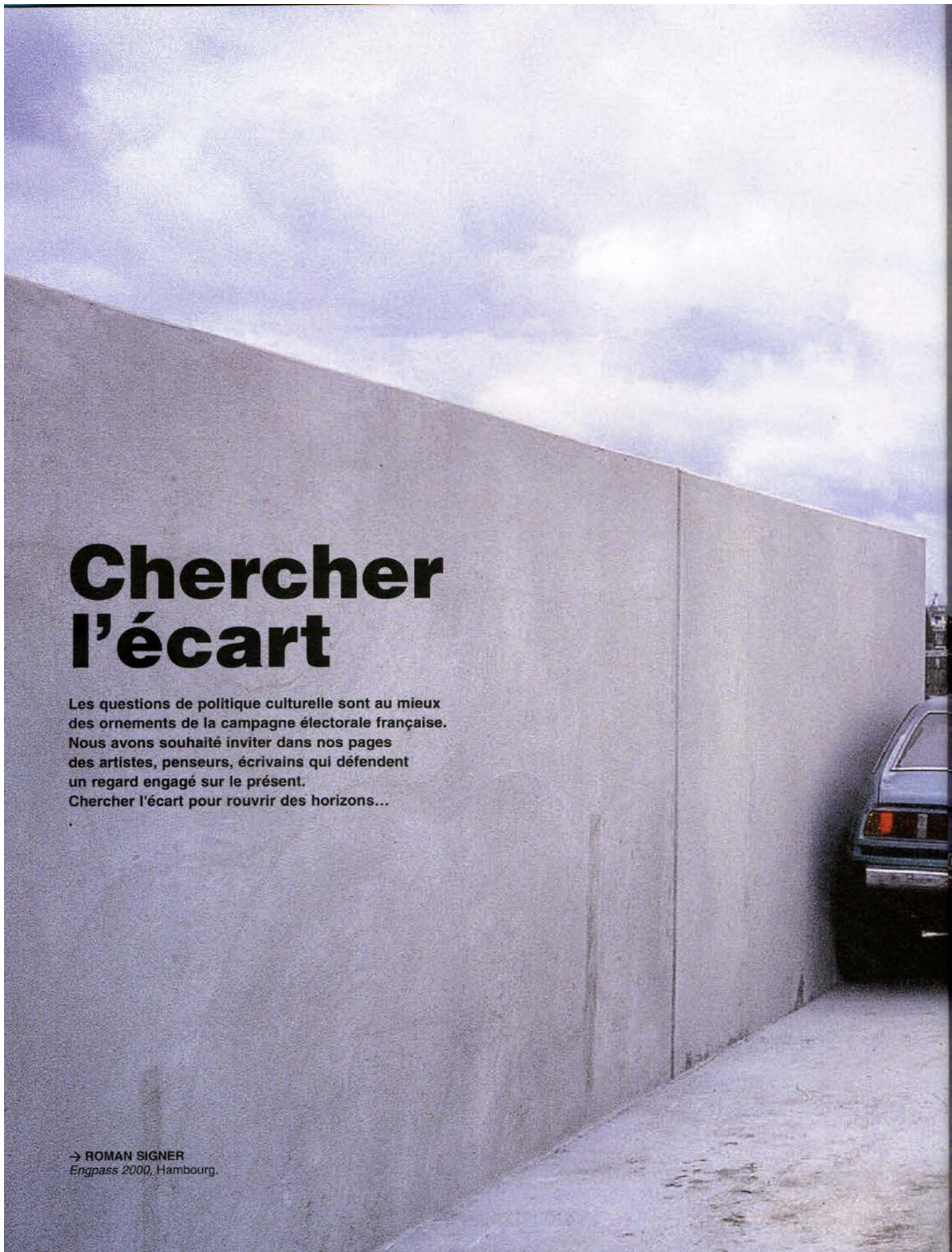
ROMAN SIGNER

HAMBURGER BAHNHOF, BERLIN
30 SEPTEMBER - 27 JANUARY

Roman Signer's sculptures, photographs and films document the effects of incalculable forces and satisfy a very basic curiosity. The question behind these works is the hypothetical 'what would happen if...?', which the artist then translates into a precarious reality. With a seemingly childlike naivety, Signer propels himself on an office chair by the force of fireworks held in his outstretched hands (*Bürostuhl*, 2006), manoeuvres a kayak dragged behind a car until it is worn through by the rough street (*Kajak*, 2000) or shoots at a target while being shaken by an old-fashioned belt massager (*Old Shatterhand*, 2007). The clarity and humour of his experiments resemble the simplicity of cartoons, yet at their best, their directness relays a nearly physical experience of what their recordings depict. Viewing the film of Signer painting a dot by exploding some device behind his back (*Punkt*, 2006), one can almost feel the force with which the brush hits the canvas, a force combining both the blast itself and his startled response to it. And in *Pfanne* (1988), the force of a Bengal light used to heat a pan reverberates violently in the physical remainder of the installation, ultimately burning a large hole through both the pan and the metal tray on which it is standing.

This retrospective is certainly one of the season's highlights in Berlin, and it showcases the breadth of Friedrich Christian Flick's collection – temporarily and partially on loan to the Hamburger Bahnhof – from which much of the show is taken. At the same time, though, it again exposes the weak position of this national institution in negotiating loans – or possibly worse, its naivety. Notices throughout the show state that all pieces on loan directly from the artist – the majority of those not from the Flick Collection – are 'courtesy' of no less than six different galleries. During the Berlin art fair, the exhibition felt like a commercial showroom, and one would hope that the institution at least participated in some of the deals and was not oblivious to its active role in the art market and the problems this might pose.

The exhibition is clearly divided into two very different parts. On the lower floor it presents an overview of Signer's videoworks, noisily documenting his actions on film, with shots and explosions in every corner, while on the upper floor there is a selection of his sculptural work, consisting of various remnants of previous actions and some possible setups for new ones. In the safe museum environs, some of these lose the original action's sense of danger and immediacy. Yet at times this further degree of abstraction creates some extremely poetic results. *Installation* (2006) consists of two rows of ten monitors apiece placed one atop the other; in the lower row, some of Signer's earlier Super-8 films are shown, while in the upper row a woman recounts what can be seen below in Swiss sign language. Upon repeated viewing, the two visual accounts come to correlate, turning Roman Signer's visual one-liners into complex narratives of expectation and experience. *Axel Lapp*



insert, in *Mouvement*, n°43, avril - juin 2007, pp.14-15



insert, in *Mouvement*, n°43, avril - juin 2007, pp.30-31



Roman Signer, *SKZ*, 2000.
Photo : Roman Signer.



entretiens / portraits / analyses / critiques

P R O F I L S

insert, in *Mouvement*, n°43, avril - juin 2007, pp.134-135

EXPOS / ROMAN SIGNER - L'APPRENTI SORCIER

LE CENTRE CULTUREL SUISSE A PRÉSENTÉ, JUSQU'AU MOIS DE NOVEMBRE, LA PREMIÈRE EXPOSITION PERSONNELLE DE L'ARTISTE ROMAN SIGNER DANS UNE INSTITUTION PARISIENNE. DIFFUSÉ DANS LA SALLE DE CINÉMA, UN PROGRAMME VIDÉO A ACCOMPAGNÉ L'EXPOSITION, PERMETTANT À CHACUN DE FAIRE L'EXPÉRIENCE IMMÉDIATE DU RAPPORT ENTRE LE TRAVAIL DE SIGNER ET LE CINÉMA.

« La vue d'un grand feu dans la nuit produit toujours une impression à la fois énervante et excitante : c'est ce qui explique l'action des feux d'artifice. (...) ceux-ci obéissent à un certain plan ornemental, et, de plus, ne présentent aucun danger; aussi éveillent-ils des sensations légères, capiteuses, pareilles à celles que provoque une coupe de champagne. »

— Dostoevski, *Les Démons*.

Au début du documentaire qu'il lui a consacré en 1996, Peter Liechti suit Roman Signer sur l'île volcanique de Stromboli située au large de la Sicile. Une « action » de l'artiste doit y être filmée. Quelques plans le montrent arpenter le volcan, dans un décor aride, enfumé, difficilement praticable. Installé ensuite au bord du cratère, l'artiste envoie deux fusées qui délassent en plein vol deux longs rubans rouges. Un plan large montre les lignes serpentes flottes et se perdre lentement dans les vapeurs dégagées par le volcan. L'artiste les regarde se fondre ainsi dans le décor.

On reconnaît ici aisément les traits caractéristiques du travail de Signer : celui-ci convoque depuis 1971 les forces de la nature dans des interventions-performances qui mettent en tension des objets quotidiens appelés à être très basiquement mis en scène, transformés ou encore détruits. Cette description serait incomplète si l'on ne rappelait pas un fait central : Signer choisit dès 1975 de documenter ses actions à l'aide d'une caméra Super-8, puis plus tard d'une caméra vidéo. L'aspect documentaire des films ainsi réalisés devient pourtant rapidement secondaire : l'activité cinématographique occupe depuis cette date presque tout le temps de l'artiste. Mise en scène, installation de la caméra, choix du cadre, montage : force est de constater que Signer, en s'appropriant ainsi les gestes fondamentaux du cinéma, pourrait bien avoir développé une façon d'en analyser quelques composantes essentielles, ayant entrepris à son sujet un inventaire sous forme d'images clés inlassablement répétées. Inventaire dont le credo pourrait être : travailler une dramaturgie minimale à l'aide de ressorts explosifs, en remontant le fil de l'histoire du cinéma.

L'épisode sur l'île de Stromboli est à cet égard emblématique. Difficile de ne pas songer au film de Rossellini, *Stromboli Terra di Dio* (1949), entièrement dominé par la présence inquiétante et colérique du volcan qui surplombe l'île, laquelle vit au rythme de ses éruptions et explosions multiples. C'est bien cette force colérique que Signer vient chercher, lui aussi, à Stromboli : se confronter au colosse de la nature dans une forme de provocation à la fois ludique et dramatique. Si le film de Rossellini raconte l'inadaptation fondamentale de l'homme face à une nature incontrôlable et destructrice,



Signer choisit de mettre en images ce décalage en confrontant sa propre fantaisie (vision poétique : voir voler des rubans rouges au-dessus d'un cratère) à la violence distillée par un lieu déjà visité par l'histoire du cinéma. Symbole puissamment évocateur pour le travail de Signer, l'image du volcan a traversé d'une façon ou d'une autre l'histoire de l'art : les peintres du XVIII^e siècle ont été fascinés par les éruptions mythiques du Vésuve ou de l'Etna, les cinéastes des premiers temps y ont trouvé une occasion d'explorer les ressources chromatiques de leur médium. Le volcan, lieu légendaire, offre aux artistes un décor idéal, désert et dangereux, à forte densité énergétique.

Car c'est bien le motif de l'explosion que Signer décline action après action, reformulant en cela les codes primitifs du cinéma. Parce que l'explosion promet à la fois l'émergence fulgurante de rayons lumineux, le suspense, la surprise, la destruction, elle se trouve au centre des premières images en mouvement qui capturent à travers elle un phénomène physique fascinant, éphémère et déstabilisant. Elle s'offre magnifiquement à la mise en scène : requiert accessoires et dispositifs, produit éclats et détonations. Les interventions contemporaines de Signer jouent avec le lointain souvenir de ces premières formes d'effets spéciaux ou de trucages, qui ont captivé avant lui Georges Méliès ou Buster Keaton, dans des mises en scène à la fois festives et inquiétantes, mettant l'homme aux prises avec ce qu'il ne maîtrise

qu'à moitié. Ses actions explosives, qu'il préfère appeler « événements », ont cependant la spécificité d'avoir « consommé » la plateforme narrative encore nécessaire aux films des premiers temps. Si chez Méliès l'explosion sert encore à faire disparaître ou à tourner en ridicule un personnage, donc à conduire un récit, chez Signer, le simple phénomène de la chaise qui s'envole suffit à faire naître le féérique, désormais débarrassé de toute intrigue pour s'incarner uniquement dans une vision fulgurante. L'investigation de l'artiste semble ainsi se loger dans la mise à nu de procédés très anciens dont il ne retiendra que l'instant du pur « effet spécial », avec cette idée centrale qu'absolument tout objet (chaise, parapluie, table, vélo...) peut potentiellement servir une telle mise en scène. Son travail est une collection artisanale constituée d'effets spéciaux, qui se donnent à voir sous la forme de la panoplie, de la série, du bouquet cinématographique.

Si une autre ligne peut être tissée qui irait de Buster Keaton à Roman Signer (filiation qu'il revendique : il dit retrouver chez Keaton une forme de tristesse également présente dans son travail), elle sera facilement repérable dans la trame infiniment burlesque des films. On sait que Keaton ne raffolait pas des mimiques, gestes et émotions inutiles, il défendait un cinéma assez pragmatique, finalement peu spectaculaire. Ses partenaires favoris étaient des machines animées d'une vie autonome : trains, horloges, projecteurs dont les dérègle-

ments donnent naissance à des scènes burlesques qui flirtent toujours avec le chaos, le désordre, la compétition dans la destruction, d'où leur potentiel transgressif. Le cinéma semble offrir le meilleur espace d'animation possible à ces visions fantastiques et inquiétantes, qui documentent la modernité, où l'homme perd ou transforme un court instant les repères qu'il croit détenir concernant le monde qui l'entoure. Signer considère aussi que les objets sont animés d'une vie propre, tout en passant une bonne partie de son temps à les détruire. Paradoxe apparent seulement, qui pourrait bien expliquer un sentiment discrètement ressenti à la vision des films : plutôt qu'à des destructions, Signer procéderait à des assassinats ciblés de chaises et de ballons rouges écrasés par des trains, noyés dans des lacs, projetés contre des falaises escarpées...

Il y a chez lui un peu du fantasmagorique de Méliès, un peu du pragmatisme de Keaton : l'exploration d'une forme de cinéma à l'état pur, conduite par un apprenti sorcier.

PAR CLARA SCHULMANN

IMAGE : ROMAN SIGNER, ACTION MIT EINER RAKETE, 1995, DUBAÏ.
VIDÉO STILL : ALEXANDRA SIGNER.

Anna Dezeuze on the aesthetics of change and uncertainty

Death Decay and the EVERYDAY



Roman Signer Table with Rockets, 'Frikart', Furka 1993

A VISIT FROM THE TAXMAN LEADS THE PROTAGONIST OF ROBERT WALSER'S 1917 STORY, *THE WALK*, TO DESCRIBE HIMSELF PROFESSIONALLY AS 'A MAN WHO WALKS'. WHAT FOLLOWS IS A LENGTHY DESCRIPTION OF WHAT THIS INVOLVES. The man who walks, explains Walser, 'must study and observe every smallest living thing, be it a child, a dog, ... a worm, a flower, a man, a house, a tree, ... a cloud, a hill ... or no more than a poor discarded scrap of paper'. He should be equally attentive to 'the highest and the lowest, the most serious and the most hilarious of things'.

In order to do so, he should forget 'his private needs, wants and sacrifices' and dedicate himself completely to 'devoted self-effacement and self-surrender among objects'. Thus will he be able to 'touch the fringes of exact science, a thing of which nobody would think the apparently frivolous wanderer capable'.

>> The tautology of the everyday's everydayness is gloriously exposed when Fischli & Weiss carve and paint polyurethane replicas of the very objects found in the studio. The trouble with these everyday lists, of course, is that they are potentially endless. No study of everyday life can avoid the spectre of the infinite inventory, which looms like the 1:1 scale map of the world imagined by Borges.

This text by Walser, selected by artists Peter Fischli & David Weiss for a recent monograph on their work, encapsulates in my eyes the major issues at stake for any artist interested in the everyday. My brief portrait of the artist as an 'apparently frivolous wanderer' through the world of everyday things will draw on three artists whose work is currently on exhibition: Fischli & Weiss themselves, Roman Signer, and Robert Rauschenberg. Signer, like Fischli & Weiss, is Swiss, while Rauschenberg ranks among the best-known American artists of the 20th Century. Though there may be something specifically Swiss about Walser's sensibility and his younger compatriots' works, national typologies will not be my concern here (any compulsion to mention cuckoo clocks will be firmly resisted). Rather, I would like to pick out these three practices as moments in the infinitely rich history of art and everyday life in the last 40 years.

Every description of the everyday in art starts with a list like Walser's, a list of 'every smallest' thing to be observed. In the early 60s, critics and artists alike delighted in enumerating objects in Rauschenberg's Combines – 'table cloths, kitchen utensils, light bulbs, animals, baseballs, reproductions of Old Masters, hats, packing crates, comic strips, love stories, Coca-Cola' figured in Lawrence Alloway's 1960 inventory of the new 'Junk Aesthetic' pioneered by Rauschenberg. At the time, the return of the everyday in art was a breath of fresh air blowing through the closed space of Abstract Expressionism. This new jumble of domestic objects, stuffed animals and photographs thrown together in Rauschenberg's Combines was perceived as essentially urban, evoking the contrasts and chaos of New York streets as much as the accelerated cycles of consumption and disposal that keep the capitalist machine alive and booming. So struck was Brian O'Doherty by the relationship of the Combines to the city that he instinctively reverted to his 'street reflexes': 'You wanted to look over your shoulder to see if you were going to be run over', he remembers.

Signer's vocabulary of rubber boots, umbrellas, buckets and chairs recalls Rauschenberg's use of everyday objects, but the inclusion of 'water, fire, wind, tension, rubber cables, physicality, power, body, gravity, falling, lightness, balloons' points to Signer's concern with elemental and natural forces. Alongside his installations, Signer has been carrying out,

since 1973, 'actions' that involve some form of movement and physical interaction between objects, from simply tugging a fir tree with a rope to make all the snow fall off suddenly, to creating an elaborate contraption that would allow a candle to be blown out when a car drives over a pedal placed on a road. Signer lives and works 20 kilometres away from the village where he grew up, and his work seems closely tied to his childhood and adolescence in the Swiss mountains: it is easy to imagine him walking and cycling around the countryside, kayaking along rivers, buying explosives from his fire-brigadier uncle, and working in a pressure-cooker factory. The energy of the city found in Rauschenberg's Combines is here replaced by that of nature itself, an incessantly teeming world of frictions, tensions, implosions, and erosions.

Fischli & Weiss's best-loved work – their film *The Way Things Go*, 1986-87 – may have been directly influenced by Signer's 70s videos, but the lists implied by their production as a whole are more varied. The Fischli & Weiss retrospective at Tate Modern includes photographs of sculptures made out of balanced everyday objects such as kitchen utensils, furniture and food (*Quiet Afternoon*, 1984-85), as well as cast rubber or unfired clay sculptures, photographs of flowers and airports, and a video installation displaying an apparently arbitrary sequence of famous tourist sights, sunsets, cityscapes and mountains all encountered during their travels (*Visible World*, 1987-2000). There is no apparent guiding principle – no hierarchy, as Walser had advised, between 'the highest and the lowest, the most serious and the most hilarious of things'. Being at hand and easy to use are the only requirements for Fischli & Weiss. *Quiet Afternoon* emerged from fooling around with objects at a bar table. Clay appealed to them because it is a 'congenial material', and taking photographs just involves pressing a button and then seeing 'what comes out'. The tautology of the everyday's everydayness is gloriously exposed when Fischli & Weiss carve and paint polyurethane replicas of the very objects found in the studio in which they are working, for example in *Untitled (Tale)*, 1992-2000.

The trouble with these everyday lists, of course, is that they are potentially endless. No study of everyday life can avoid the spectre of the infinite inventory, which looms like the 1:1 scale map of the world imagined by Borges. The choice of a framing device, in this context, becomes crucial. In Rauschenberg's Combines, the everyday is framed by the space of painting. As Leo Steinberg put it, Rauschenberg redefined the picture plane as a horizontal surface on which to dump heterogeneous materials. The flatness of this unifying plane is often underlined in the Combine paintings by horizontal lines, sometimes squeezed directly out of a paint tube, or by the starched and ironed look of the fabrics embedded in their support. The surprisingly multicoloured, thickly layered brushstrokes on the nose of the famous stuffed goat in *Monogram*, 1955-59, remind us that Rauschenberg's attachment to painting was never in question.

If the space of the Combines has been seen to evoke that of memory and its non-hierarchical layering of fragments of everyday experience, Signer's 'actions' resolutely belong to the here and now. As the sculptures contain their own dissolution or destruction, their ephemeral existence can only be captured through photography or video. In their spatial and

Fischli & Weiss
The Way Things Go
1986-87



temporal contingency, Signer's actions evoke Walser's practice of walking: rambling along the same path never yields the same experience. Where Signer's works have ended up forming a series, Fischli & Weiss's approach starts from the idea of 'a simultaneity and a selection'. In fact, they use the device of the list – a set of items plucked from a potentially endless field of possibilities and temporarily brought together on a piece of paper – as the very model for their works. *Suddenly this Overview*, 1981-2006, is a comically self-defeating attempt to model in clay all the major events in the history of religion, science and culture, as well as illustrations of central categories of Western thought. 'We like this sense of walking through the world together and trying to explain it, of using our time in this way,' explains Fischli. As viewers, we are sucked into this use of time, as we have to choose how long to spend looking at each item in these groupings. Similarly, images, signs and objects compete for our attention in many of Rauschenberg's Combines. This kind of temporal dimension of viewing is also dramatised in Signer's work, as we are compelled to wait, often restlessly, until the bitter end (of the event) – however long it takes.

If making time for things is the first step in any examination of the everyday, it also participates in Walser's ideal of 'devoted self-effacement and self-surrender among objects'. Genuine engagement with the world, it emerges, requires a radical questioning of the artist's authority as a unified, mark-making subject. The ways in which Rauschenberg lets the materiality of each object come through in the Combines parallels his friend John Cage's call for composers to 'let sounds be themselves rather than vehicles for man-made theories or expressions of human sentiments'. Signer's insistence on foregrounding natural forces by 'giving them the last word' evidently stems from a similar outlook. Indeed, when Signer talks about his work, he can't help but imitate the very noises made by the objects themselves – a burning fuse, an explosion, a whirring engine. These involuntary interruptions capture the real excitement of dealing with physical phenomena: firsthand experience obviously exceeds verbal descriptions.

Fischli has explained how *Quiet Afternoon* 'relieved' the artists of issues of authorial choice. 'The only criterion

shaping the composition was balance,' clarifies Weiss. In other works, however, the artists' desire to let objects 'be themselves' seems less straightforward. For one thing, we all know that in everyday life things blatantly don't go the way they do in *The Way Things Go*. By displaying the 'making of' video next to the film, the Tate exhibition allows us to get a glimpse of the long hours spent 'training' the objects to perform the hilarious chain of falling, spinning, spilling, rolling, burning, exploding, boiling forces that make *The Way Things Go* one of the best action movies of all time. A different conception of artistic experimentalism sets Fischli & Weiss apart from Signer and Rauschenberg. Rauschenberg belonged to a generation that opened their works to the apparent chaos of lived experience as a means of reflecting changing realities and an increasingly decentred subject caught up in flows of capital and power. Experiment suggested change, possibilities and freedom. Signer's experiments, like those of other process and conceptual artists in the 70s, exemplify a shift away from the creation of objects to the setting up of systems through which to access reality in more direct ways. The figures of the hobbyist and amateur photographer held the promise of a democratic art no longer weighed down by the constraints of institutional display and the rules of the art market. This approach's potential slippage into forms of compulsive repetition comes through in Signer's work. (Signer admits the possibility that his often dangerous experiments have become a form of 'addiction'.) In contrast, Fischli & Weiss's adoption of the experimental mode seems to be more like a default option that they can switch on and off at will. In a world in which experience cannot be conceived outside the mediation of images and commercialisation, Fischli & Weiss posit permanent experimentation as the only available means of making art. All systems are always already undermined; the world is as empty and superficial as their 'phantom' objects made out of painted polyurethane and weighing next to nothing.

Two dangers threaten Walser's dream of a 'science' of the everyday: on the one hand, the subjective distortion of our own personal gaze and on the other, the reduction imposed by a universalising approach. A recurrent debate in the



Robert Rauschenberg
Monogram 1955-59

literature on Rauschenberg's Combines concerns the extent to which the selected objects refer to the artist's private biography, whether it is his move from Texas to New York and his relation with his family back home, or the end of his marriage and his relationship with Jasper Johns. Instead of random fragments of urban reality, individual items have thus come to be read as coded messages or explorations of the artist's personal dilemmas, fears and desires. This points to the difficulty of 'self-effacement' – biographical interpretations all too readily rush in to fill the small gaps left open by even the most minimal of compositional decisions.

The way conceptual artists circumvented this problem was to adopt the more visibly neutral language of scientific enquiry. Signer's actions certainly mimic the protocols of scientific experiments, calling to mind the thrill of school laboratory exercises. By privileging action over typed descriptions or diagrams, Signer avoided the bureaucratic aura associated with other conceptual practices of this period; the works cannot be fully subsumed by a linguistic system. Signer's new *Video Installation*, 2006, probes precisely this relation between action and language, as each of the ten 'action' films is paired with a video of a woman describing the corresponding event in sign-language. The signer's exaggerated gestures vividly translate words such as 'explosion' to comic effect – the redundancy of the translation becomes all the more apparent, and only redoubles the evident futility of Signer's experiments (and art in general). Both films are played in a loop on their respective monitors, but the length of the sign-language descriptions (above) does not necessarily match that of the filmed actions (below), explanations of which require varying quantities of signs. This disjunction is intriguing, as viewers unfamiliar with sign language will find themselves trying to guess which piece of information has been prioritised, and which has been left out. And, since the signer is in fact translating the artist's retrospective accounts of his 70s actions, the disjunction becomes a temporal one as well, mirroring the ways in which historians seek to retrieve the details of events lost in the past.

The belief that moments of transfiguration can still occur within highly mediated experiences constitutes the central

ambivalence at the core of Fischli & Weiss's work. 'It's OK to be schizophrenic, it's the only solution we have,' explains Fischli. This 'schizophrenia' is a source of both delight and irritation. My annoyance at being presented with a dozen blatantly boring images (such as the *Airports*, 1987-2006) on the feeble pretence that since they are there I might as well look at them, shifts to admiration when the duo manage to conjure a miniature light show from the simple combination of a plastic cup, turntable and electric torch (*Son: et lumière – Le rayon vert*, 1990). Both reactions operate beyond my knowledge of Fischli & Weiss's biographies, and beyond critical discourse itself. I certainly cannot guess from the photographs whether the artists are closet plane-spotters, but who am I to tell anyone that they should not enjoy looking at airport photographs?

Caught up between a universalising, all-encompassing inventory, and the most particular of idiosyncratic, contingent detail, the study of everyday life embodies, in my opinion, the plight of a contemporary subject that can never fully embrace any unifying discourse, let alone political ideology. The threat of failure, nowadays, seems to put an end to any project even before it has begun. Fischli & Weiss's ongoing desire 'to create a system that works but nearly doesn't work' is what makes their practice so resonant today, and the current interest in Signer's entropic processes exemplifies the increasing appeal of forms of conceptual art focusing on instability and failure, such as that of Bas Jan Ader, Robert Smithson, or Bruce Nauman. That Thomas Crow's catalogue essay on Rauschenberg's Combines zeroes in precisely on the theme of elevation and fall in these early works is all the more revealing in this context. Crow's remarkable analysis brings out Rauschenberg's exploration of the dynamics between sublimation and debasement, and between the general and the specific. In all the practices I have discussed, an aesthetic of change and uncertainty becomes a means of engaging with and simultaneously distancing the ultimate point of death and decay implicit in the everyday. Rauschenberg does this through the potentially redemptive space of painting, Signer by drawing on the cyclical repetitions of nature. Fischli & Weiss have created their own ironically detached sphere of endless experimentation. All these dodging manoeuvres, like most survival strategies, require a good dose of humour. And, as Rauschenberg pointed out 45 years ago, humour's combination of 'love and brutality' may ultimately provide the most objective access to the vicissitudes of the everyday. ■

Robert Rauschenberg: Combines is at Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris October 11 to January 15 and travels to Moderna Museet, Stockholm February 17 to May 6. **Peter Fischli & David Weiss, Flowers & Questions: A Retrospective** is at Tate Modern, London October 11 to January 14 and travels to Kunsthaus, Zurich June 8 to September 9 2007 and Deichtorhallen, Hamburg November 16 2007 to February 3 2008. **Aller-Retour 3: Roman Signer** is at Centre Suisse, Paris September 10 to November 12.

ANNA DEZEUZE is working on a book entitled *The Almost Nothing: Dematerialisation and the Politics of Precariousness*.

Roman Signer, celui qui aime les explosions

Art contemporain Le Centre culturel suisse de Paris offre à l'artiste saint-gallois sa première exposition personnelle. A 68 ans, le sculpteur a renoncé aux performances dangereuses. Mais pas au mouvement



Roman Signer: «J'aime ce qui bouge, ce qui change.»

Isabelle Rüf

Soufflés par un ventilateur, des ballons blancs se poursuivent sur le sable d'un caisson en bois. Une machine à fumer comique exhibe une cigarette dans une sorte de confessionnal. Un public nombreux se presse autour de ces objets intrigants et comiques: le Centre culturel suisse de Paris (CCSP) accueille la première exposition personnelle de Roman Signer dans la capitale. L'artiste appenzellois est aussi hôte de l'exposition «Une seconde, une année» au Palais de Tokyo (LT du 15.09.2006); le Kunsthaus d'Aarau présente ses photos de voyage. Enfin, une importante monographie retrace sa démarche depuis les années 1970 (Phaidon, 2006). Roman Signer n'aime pas trop théoriser sur son travail: des ballons qui s'envolent et éclatent si souvent dans ses œuvres, il dit seulement: «J'aime ce qui bouge, ce qui change. Ils coulent comme de l'eau.»

Ces événements sont

minutieusement préparés, insiste-t-il, inquiet qu'on ne le prenne pas au sérieux

Le mouvement, la force, la vitesse mais aussi la lente montée vers l'explosion, le travail d'érosion ou de remplissage laissé à la nature: Roman Signer est un «sculpteur de temps». Pour élaborer les événements qui forment l'essentiel de son œuvre, il négocie avec le feu, le vent, l'eau, le sable, les lois de la physique, les tensions, la souplesse du caoutchouc, la fluidité du sable, la force de gravité. Et avec l'énergie de la dynamite, souvent, quitte à se mettre en danger.

Il naît à Appenzell en 1938. Son père, musicien, l'emmène dans les montagnes. Avec son grand-père, ferblantier, il bricole des machines fabuleuses. Un enfant sauvage qui joue dans les eaux de la Sitter, rétif à l'apprentissage. Il en abandonne plusieurs, manque finir ouvrier dans une fabrique de cocottes-minute, décroche une place de dessinateur-architecte qui ne satisfait nullement sa créativité. «J'ai perdu dix ans.» En 1966, une grave maladie lui fait prendre conscience de la finitude: il s'autorise enfin un destin d'artiste.

En 1971, il part pour la Pologne, froide et archaïque mais aussi libératrice. C'est là qu'il rencontre Aleksandra. Il la fera venir en Suisse et l'épousera en 1977. Aujourd'hui encore, c'est elle qui édite les films de son mari. Il n'aime pas le mot performance qui renvoie au théâtre. Non, ce sont des événements – minutieusement préparés, insiste-t-il, inquiet qu'on ne le prenne pas au sérieux.

Des événements, donc. Qui mettent l'artiste en danger, le forcent à réagir juste: «Il faut penser, se protéger, prévoir», dit celui qui travaille avec le feu, la dynamite, les mèches. Et se tenir prêt à accueillir l'accident, l'échec – «ce n'est pas si tragique» – l'intervention de la nature. Pendant longtemps, le public pouvait assister aux courses dérisoires entre la fusée qui part à l'horizontale et l'artiste, le voir affronter la rivière dans un kayak qui explose, suivre le feu qui brûle lentement la mèche. A 68 ans, l'artiste évite d'impliquer les spectateurs dans la prise de risque, il ne veut plus de cette responsabilité: ils doivent se contenter des vidéos.

Au Centre de Poussepin, une douzaine d'écrans font revivre des expériences anciennes: un sapin parcouru de secousses abandonne son manteau de neige; des empilements de sable vacillent; des explosions ratent. «Je suis un sculpteur, dit Roman Signer, je me mesure avec des forces élémentaires. La peur fait partie de l'expérience, surtout juste avant l'action.» Au-dessus de l'écran, une femme muette commente l'action en langage des signes: «Vous aimez cela?, s'inquiète l'artiste. «Je voulais créer un deuxième plan, montrer l'absurdité.»

Pas de quoi s'amuser: l'enjeu est



tragique même s'il déclenche le rire. On a souvent comparé cet art à celui de Buster Keaton: un petit homme dérisoire qui incarne tout seul l'absurdité de la condition humaine.

Pendant longtemps, Signer a élaboré ses «sculptures» dans une grande solitude, entre Saint-Gall et Appenzell. On prenait volontiers pour un fou cet apprenti sorcier. Au temps de la guerre froide, ses achats d'explosifs éveillaient les soupçons. Il devait ruser ou

prendre soin d'être parfaitement en règle avec les lois.

Des galeries comme Attitudes à Genève se sont intéressées à son travail. Aujourd'hui, Roman Signer est mondialement connu. Il a été l'hôte de la Documenta de Kassel, de la Biennale de Venise. Désormais, c'est lui qui invite: dans le cadre du concept «Aller/retour», il accueille le travail d'un jeune artiste japonais, Jiro Nakayama qui, comme lui, travaille avec les élé-

ments. Si le CCSP figure aujourd'hui à la première page d'un guide des grands lieux de l'art contemporain à Paris, c'est grâce à des artistes comme Roman Signer, Fischli et Weiss ou Thomas Hirschhorn.

Aller/retour 3 Roman Signer. CCSP, jusqu'au 12 novembre. www.ccsparis.com



Installation vidéo (2006). Ces écrans font revivre des expériences anciennes: des empilements de sable vacillent; des explosions ratent...

Le Journal des Arts

L'ACTUALITÉ DE L'ART ET DE SON MARCHÉ À TRAVERS LE MONDE

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PAROLES D'ARTISTE **ROMAN SIGNER**

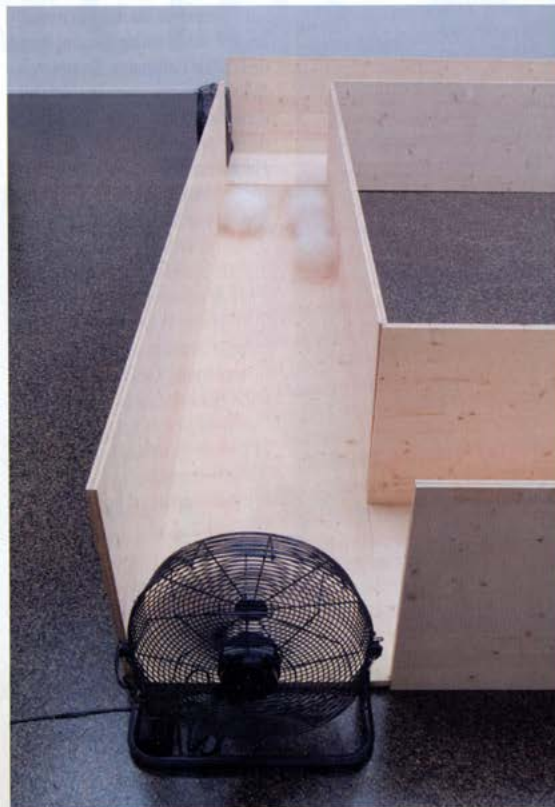
« Je crée des situations sculpturales »

ROMAN SIGNER, ALLER/RETOUR 3, du 10 octobre au 12 novembre, Centre culturel suisse, 32-38, rue des Francs-Bourgeois, 75003 Paris, tél. 01 42 71 44 50, www.ccsparis.com, tj sauf lundi et mardi 13h-20h, jeudi 13h-22h.

Une piscine en plastique aspirée vers le plafond (*Bassin*, 2006), un carré de bois où deux ballons propulsés par des ventilateurs se livrent à une course sans fin (*Kanal*, 2006), une table où une cigarette attend d'être allumée par un bâton de dynamite (*Table fumeur*, 2005), un pommier soumis à une traction permanente sous l'effet d'une corde et d'un moteur (*Zittern*, 2006)... En quelques œuvres récentes Roman Signer, délivre au Centre culturel suisse, à Paris, une leçon de sculpture concentrant les caractéristiques de son travail.

En visitant l'exposition, et dans votre travail en général, on perçoit comme une opposition entre ce qui se passe et un sentiment d'attente de ce qui pourrait advenir...

Je travaille avec le temps et il y a chez moi trois choses importantes : celles, immédiates, qui passent devant vos yeux, tels les ballons (*Kanal*), celles qui peuvent se produire, comme la *Table fumeur*, et celles passées, que l'on retrouve dans mes films. Le passé est important car dès que vous faites quelque chose, que vous parlez, c'est déjà le passé, non ? J'aime aussi le futur, l'idée que ça peut arriver ou non. On pense toujours que je ne fais que des installations spectaculaires, des explo-



Roman Signer, *Kanal*, 2005, sculpture, bois, ballons, sable et ventilateurs, 4 x 4 m., Centre culturel suisse, Paris. © Photo : Marc Damage

sions, mais ce n'est pas vrai. J'affectionne aussi beaucoup ces tranquilles sensations d'attente.

Pourquoi ?

C'est optimiste, vous ne croyez pas ? Vous avez le choix. Par exemple, lorsque vous recevez un paquet, est-ce que vous l'ouvrez tout de suite ? Moi non, parfois j'attends une heure. Attendre pour savoir ce qu'il y a dedans crée une joie. Attendre

Noël est une plus grande joie que le jour lui-même... qui est déjà passé. Ouvrir les paquets et regarder, c'est déjà triste pour moi.

Vous utilisez souvent des forces contraires voire antagonistes. Est-ce pour dynamiser l'œuvre ?

Je ne peux pas l'expliquer de manière théorique, mais j'aime les forces, qu'elles soient puissantes ou faibles. J'aime travailler avec

Vous avez besoin que les forces se confrontent ?

Oui, et qu'elles changent aussi. Confrontation, changement, transformation... il y a souvent un passage d'une forme à une autre. Je ne veux pas seulement détruire des choses, c'est le changement d'état qui m'intéresse.

Puisque le temps est très important pour vous, diriez-vous que vous créez des événements sculptés ?

Je crée des situations sculpturales. Que je fasse des objets, des installations ou des films, c'est toujours un problème sculptural dans l'espace.

À propos d'Installation vidéo (2006), où vous superposez des films d'actions passées avec une lecture actuelle faite en langage des signes, s'agit-il de réactualiser vos anciennes performances ?

Ces vieux films reçoivent, avec cette femme qui les explique en langage des signes allemand, une nouvelle perspective. Ce langage varie selon les langues. Il est pour nous très drôle de le regarder dans ce contexte. J'ai demandé à cette femme si ça l'était aussi pour les sourds. Elle était fâchée et m'a répondu que pas du tout. Pour eux, c'est tragique, c'est la vie !

Avec Zittern ou Kanal, des œuvres qui sont comme un déroulé sans fin, faites-vous une recherche sur l'absurde et le dérisoire ?

Je ne trouve pas que ce soit absurde. On parle toujours de l'absurdité chez moi...

Vous n'êtes pas d'accord ?

Non parce que pour moi c'est sérieux. C'est étrange, ce sont des recherches, et elles sont impor-

tantes. C'est peut-être irrationnel pour le spectateur mais pas pour moi.

Sur quoi porte l'essentiel de vos recherches ?

Je n'ai pas de programme strict. J'ai un sentiment, une idée dans mon lit, dans ma baignoire... et je veux essayer de voir si ça fonctionne. Par exemple pour *Bassin*, je trouvais intéressant de savoir si ça pouvait fonctionner. J'ai été très étonné de voir que oui, ce fut une surprise ! Je suis un peu joueur aussi.

Une part de la forme que prend votre œuvre résulte donc du hasard ?

Il y a beaucoup de hasard mais pas seulement. Je ne veux tout de même pas être trop chaotique. Je souhaite garder une certaine forme, mais je laisse toujours au hasard la possibilité de se manifester.

Vous ne cherchez donc pas à tout contrôler ?

Non. J'aime quand les éléments ont aussi un langage et se manifestent. Je ne veux pas tout faire moi-même. Je fais une construction et je laisse une ouverture pour ces forces. C'est comme une trappe pour la nature.

Y a-t-il de votre part une volonté manifeste de faire rire ?

Il est vrai que les gens rient beaucoup, mais ce n'est pas vraiment intentionnel. Je ne me dis jamais : « Je vais créer quelque chose pour que les gens éclatent de rire. » Ça vient naturellement. Finalement pourquoi pas ? Je ne fais pas de cabaret, mais rire fait du bien.

Frédéric Bonnet

LUDOVIC POULET >>> ROMAN SIGNER / MAREK ROGOWIEC
DE ROMAN SIGNER ET DES PARADOXES MUSICAUX

D'une paire de bottes en plastique posée sur un sol sablonneux jaillit une gerbe d'eau, comme une constellation anarchique instantanée brutalement stoppée en plein élan, au moment même de son paroxysme, c'est-à-dire juste avant de s'effondrer pour n'être plus qu'une tache d'humidité. De la même manière que les photographes sportifs saisissent des postures improbables de corps en mouvement, la photographie de Marek Rogowiec, à la fois absurde et dramatique, isole ce moment d'une œuvre vidéo de Roman Signer intitulée *Wasser Stiefel* (1986). Cette image sert de couverture à l'album *Upgrade & Afterlife* (1996) du groupe Gastr del Sol (sur le label Drag City). À l'époque, achetant le disque, je me rappelle m'être instantanément dit à moi-même : « *Wahou, géniale, la pochette !* », et depuis je l'ai souvent observée, perplexe, cherchant le rapport que cette image pouvait avoir avec la musique du groupe. Mais sans plus.

Quelques années plus tard je rencontrais à nouveau le travail de Signer, par ce plus grand des hasards qui peut récompenser le zappeur noctambule démuné d'informations sur les programmes. Un plan fixe tourné en vidéo cadre de face un lit monoplace, d'hôpital ou de pensionnat, dans une pièce vide et silencieuse. Rien ne se passe jusqu'au moment où l'oreiller explose, rendant leur liberté aux plumes tassées dans le carré de toile qui s'éparpillent en centaines de douces ondulations. Silence figé, explosion libératoire et, littéralement, explosion formelle, gratuité du geste, plaisir post-impulsif à la contemplation de la dispersion aléatoire de ces fragments livrés à eux-mêmes. En somme, une magnifique définition du geste créatif musical après laquelle je cours depuis longtemps et qui s'incarne ici.

Dans ce que je connais du travail de Roman Signer, dans ce que j'en vois, il y a un aspect comparable à l'aspect « *live* » de la musique. J'imagine de nombreux tests d'explosifs, des expérimentations sur les charges, les volumes et les matériaux, que l'on pourrait comparer à un travail de studio. S'ensuit une mise en place forcément minutieuse, l'installation précise d'un dispositif qui n'est au service que du moment de l'action, moment qui seul fait « œuvre ». Temps fugace, ne laissant d'empreinte que dans la mémoire, comme un concert qui ne serait pas enregistré, de même que je n'ai, par exemple, jamais enregistré mes concerts.

Revenons à la pochette du disque et à cette image, qui n'a jamais cessé de m'intriguer. En creusant un peu, elle me met face à un bien joli paradoxe, qui, pour personnel qu'il soit par rapport à la création musicale, s'illustre parfaitement dans cette photographie.

Cette image d'eau jaillissant de bottes peut être ainsi considérée comme l'exact milieu d'un triptyque (bottes inertes, explosion-jaillissement, bottes renversées sur le sol taché d'eau). Cet exact milieu, cruellement figé sur le papier, coupé de son « avant » et de son « après », esthétique et spectaculaire, n'est qu'un instant arbitraire capturé par un photogramme, et en tant que « moment pur », il est irréproductible. Un peu comme dans *Peeping Tom*, le film de Michael Powell, où un cameraman obsessionnel et psychopathe tue des femmes en les filmant afin de saisir l'instant *t* de leur mort. Cette photographie entre alors en contradiction avec l'essence même du déroulement du travail de Signer (je rappelle ici que l'artiste n'est pas l'auteur de la photo de la pochette; il s'agit là du regard de quelqu'un d'autre). Donc, une musique idéale, imaginée comme une subite rupture du silence libérant des millions de fragments qui s'en vont brutalement peupler un espace-temps fugace, inouï et qui ne serait que cela, devrait être infixable. Voici donc le paradoxe que révèle cette image: la musique enregistrée entre en contradiction avec le geste et la pratique musicale, et ce que l'on entend de la musique lorsqu'elle est inscrite sur son support n'est qu'un souvenir (si précis qu'il soit) d'un moment magique à jamais terminé.

Né en 1971 à Troyes, Ludovic Poulet est musicien. Il a fait paraître, sous le nom de Portradium, l'album *Autopuzzle* sur le label deco [www.portradium.com].



Photo de Marek Rogowiec, extraite de *Wasser Stiefel*, œuvre vidéo de Roman Signer (1986).

Roman Signer

Art:Concept

10 SEPTEMBER - 29 OCTOBER

Fans of Roman Signer's comic-violent spin on 'event-sculpture' will find little to get their blades turning at this tiny, hyper-ventilated exhibition of the Swiss artist's recent work. Absent are Signer's signature elements – bombs, fire suits, crash helmets, forage blowers, black rubber boots, bicycles, guns, toy remote-control helicopters and kayaks. Absent, too, is the artist himself, who, since the 1970s, has used his Buster Keaton-like persona, and a penchant for light explosives, to blow a small niche for himself in the international art-scene edifice.

Unlike the vast gunpowder orchestrations of the Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang, Signer's work has always been modest and intimate. Four pieces in two rooms, however, is, perhaps, too modest. Still, traces of Signer's eccentric wit and obsession with gratuitous causality are in every piece, from the three-photograph series of two red balloons suspended on a flimsy wooden T-bar (in the first photo, the balloons are equipoised at both ends of the horizontal cross-piece; in the second, one balloon has popped; in the third, the arm holding the un-popped balloon has risen, while the arm holding the popped balloon has fallen) to the two stand-up electric fans blowing wind at each other while holding a red flag in perfect stasis.

Air has an elemental force that influences events: it moves Signer's objects about, or, in the case of the two big fans, holds them still. The struggle and tyranny of equilibrium is a dominant theme, especially in *Espace Rond* (2005), in which a Chinese paper lantern performs endless laps around a ring of metre-high sheet metal. The poor object is cruelly thrust ever forward by a dozen powerful electric fans, until, once a day, battered to bits, it is unceremoniously tossed in the bin and replaced by another. Meanwhile, the gallery-goer watches from the sideline, enjoying the stiff breeze.

Existential metaphors, political statements or just a lot of wind? There is a quietly vital poetry in Signer's repertoire of elements, even here, where the vocabulary has been reduced further than usual. And there is certainly beauty. Perhaps the best piece is the large-format photograph of a pair of cross-country skis – similar to those the artist used in *Zakopane* (1994), a video 'action' in which he skied across a field in Poland with flares strapped to his heels trailing

pink smoke. This time, the skis are skier-less, and held securely buoyant on the surface of an alpine lake by two sets of blow-up plastic water wings. The skis, like the photograph, like the show as a whole, are safe; the comic *faux*-danger one associates with art's great pyrotechnician of the absurd is entirely missing. The four artworks Signer has produced from his 'actions' are nice, easy to consume. This is not a criticism, just an observation; it must be maddening for Signer that people have such explosive expectations of his work, and he, of course, has every right to create nice objects and offer them for sale. Yet one can't help wishing that there were an accompanying video of him wearing the skis, in his protective suit and silly helmet, and traipsing across the water like some sort of Swiss holy clown. Perhaps chased by a big red balloon. One looks forward to January's giant retrospective in Santiago de Compostela and the new Phaidon book devoted to his 30-year career for a more substantial and satisfying viewing. CM



From above
Roman Signer, *2 ventilateurs avec drapeau*, 2005, 2 fans, flag, dimensions variable
COURTESY ART: CONCEPT, PARIS

Les coulisses de l'exploit

Importante rétrospective Roman Signer à Saint-Gall

■ ROMAN SIGNER, jusqu'au 12 octobre. Sammlung Hauser und Wirth, Grübergstrasse 7, Saint-Gall, Suisse, tél. +41 71 228 55 55, www.lokremitte.ch, mercredi 14h-20h, jeudi et vendredi 14h-18h, samedi et dimanche 11h-18h, fermé lundi et mardi.

Fontaines, fumées, fusées, hélicoptères... l'art de Roman Signer interroge sans cesse les lois de la physique, et ce non sans une certaine dose d'humour. La Sammlung Hauser und Wirth, à Saint-Gall, propose actuellement une importante rétrospective du travail de l'artiste, réunissant une quarantaine de sculptures et installations du début des années 1970 à aujourd'hui, pour découvrir les coulisses de l'exploit.

SAINT-GALL. Depuis le début des années 1970, Roman Signer explore de nouveaux champs pour la sculpture, dans sa relation à l'espace comme dans sa forme. Héritière de l'art conceptuel et de l'art minimal, sa démarche s'inscrit aussi résolument dans une histoire de la performance. Ici, les dimensions sociale, identitaire et sexuelle sont évacuées au profit d'expériences physiques qui transforment l'artiste en véritable Géo Trouvetou. La référence au héros de Walt Disney n'est d'ailleurs pas fortuite tant les actions et pièces de Roman Signer sont empreintes d'une certaine innocence juvénile : bottes en caoutchouc fixées sur une échelle, bicyclette dont la roue arrière projetée de la peinture sur un mur, valise munie d'une fusée... Dans une tradition largement

répandue depuis les années 1960, la plupart des performances de Roman Signer sont documentées par des films, en Super-8 pour les plus anciens. L'exposition organisée par la Sammlung Hauser und Wirth en réunit un grand nombre, des années 1975 à 1989, présentés dans une salle de projection. Parfois muets, d'une qualité d'un autre âge, ces films nous permettent de suivre les premiers exploits de l'artiste, sculptures éphémères réalisées avec de l'eau, des explosifs... L'exposition



Roman Signer, *Trip to the Moon*, 2002, courtesy Roman Signer

Ainsi, dans la *Lesezimmer* (2001) (chambre de lecture), du vent fait bouger les feuilles de journaux, rendant ainsi leur lecture difficile. L'humour est également patent dans une sculpture où du papier journal est aspiré pour être propulsé dans un second espace. Jouant encore sur la notion de gag, un dispositif permet au visiteur de se voir quand il se penche sur un tonneau bleu. Au fil des salles se succèdent les dernières créations de l'artiste, depuis une réactualisa-

tion de *Tonneau bleu* conçu pour la Biennale de Venise 1999, jusqu'à *Installation avec kayaks* (2003). Malgré une fraîcheur et une inventivité toujours renouvelées au fil des années, les dernières œuvres de Roman Signer déçoivent un peu. L'utilisation récurrente des mêmes accessoires (kayaks, bidons, fusées, et récemment hélicoptères...) a tendance à systématiser la démarche de l'artiste, qu'une présentation muséale – pour ne pas dire propre – ne fait que renforcer. Il faut dire que les maîtres des lieux ne sont autres que les galeries zurichois de l'artiste. Heureusement, le bonheur suscité par les expériences souvent loufoques de l'artiste reste intact.

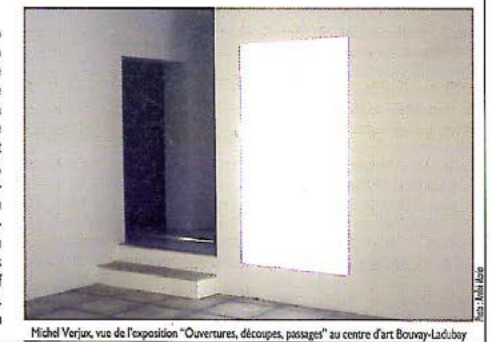
Philippe Regnier

Signer dans l'espace public

Saint-Gall, la ville où vit et travaille Roman Signer, abrite six de ses œuvres réalisées dans l'espace public. Pour l'école d'Oberzül, il a conçu en 1983 *Wasserobjekt* (objet d'eau), une porte dont le limbe supérieur est matérialisé par un jet d'eau haute pression. Près de la station du funiculaire qui conduit au quartier Saint-Georges, l'artiste a installé en 1998 une vitre qui permet de voir les tourbillons d'un ruisseau dans une canalisation. Dans le Grabenpark, l'eau est encore à l'honneur avec *Wasserturm* (château d'eau) (1987), un tonneau rouge perché qui déverse un petit filet d'eau. Vingt-cinq tonneaux, bleus cette fois, composent *Fasslager*. Cette œuvre est présentée depuis 1996 devant le siège de l'EMPA, le Laboratoire fédéral d'essai des matériaux et de recherche, situé Lerchenfeldstrasse. Deux autres pièces ont été financées par des entreprises privées. La première consiste en un kayak suspendu d'où s'écoulent des gouttes d'eau, installée depuis 1997 dans la cage d'escalier d'un bâtiment sis Schibenerstrasse. Elle appartient à Patria, Société mutuelle suisse d'assurances sur la vie. La seconde, le *Wassertunnel* (1985) (tunnel d'eau), un don de l'UBS, se trouve dans l'enceinte d'une école professionnelle, Militärstrasse. Alors, qui a dit que nul n'est prophète en son pays ?

Michel Verjux l'éclairé

"Ouvertures, découpes, passages" : ces termes, qui pourraient tout aussi bien avoir été empruntés au vocabulaire d'un architecte, d'un sculpteur, voire d'un photographe, s'appliquent ici à la démarche de Michel Verjux. Cet artiste de l'éclairage se situe au croisement de la grande tradition de la peinture occidentale et des théories de l'art minimal. Comme un peintre d'abord, Verjux sait qu'il n'y a de chef-d'œuvre sans une parfaite maîtrise de la lumière. Tirant les conclusions de réflexions sur l'art nées dans les années 1960, il peut affirmer qu'"une œuvre d'art peut [...] aujourd'hui être réduite à un simple éclairage". Verjux est ainsi un éclairé, dans tous les sens du terme, un artiste de l'avant-garde, pour rester dans la métaphore militaire. Invité au Centre d'art contemporain Bouvet-Ladubay (jusqu'au 22 octobre, Saint-Hilaire Saint-Florent, 49400 Saumur, tél. 02 41 83 83 82), il propose un parcours rythmé par ses mises en lumières et jeux avec l'architecture du lieu, créant des résonances, donnant à voir tout en mettant à nu son processus même. Parallèlement à cette exposition, l'artiste a également conçu un dispositif pour l'agence des architectes Valode & Pistre à Paris (jusqu'au 26 décembre, tél. 01 53 63 22 00). Cette fois, il partage les espaces avec Felice Varini, le maître du point de vue. Ph. R.



Michel Verjux, vue de l'exposition "Ouvertures, découpes, passages" au centre d'art Bouvet-Ladubay



Above: Roman Signer, *Beobachtungskiste (Observation box)*, 2000. Performance view, Weissbad, Switzerland, 2000.

gunpowder, battery, release button, 43 1/4 x 70 1/4 x 25 1/4"



A THOUSAND WORDS

Roman Signer TALKS ABOUT *OBSERVATION BOX*, 2000

Once, I spread a load of dynamite over the ground and positioned a Super-8 camera very close to it. The film shows the fuse burning down, and then everything turns black. But Super-8 cameras are much tougher than video cameras, whose electronic mechanisms are distorted by the waves from the blast. The picture loses color; it becomes "pale from fear." After a few seconds of black-and-white images, the color slowly returns. I am interested in camera positions that record what the eye can't see—the "suffering" camera that participates, not just the viewpoint of the bystander.

Observation Box is a kind of laboratory situation designed so that the participant (me) can witness a huge fireball up close; the human eye thus becomes a substitute for the camera. To conduct my experiment, I transported the box out to Weissbad, a remote area in the canton of Appenzell, where I often execute ideas that can't be performed in the studio. I didn't intend a juxtaposition of peaceful nature and violence; the countryside was merely a practical testing ground. More important to me is the contrast between the apparent security the object represents and the actual danger it's intended to protect against. The box is a deceptive refuge, like the fragile windowpanes of our homes—what makes us feel so safe is in reality a thin membrane separating man from nature.

I sat inside *Observation Box* wearing a flameproof hood and special visor meant for looking directly into a fire. For a brief instant, the box was like the cockpit of a plane, or the driver's seat in a race car, with an external combustion "engine," if you will, which I sat behind, as if piloting into the explosion. I suppose *Observation Box* has a certain malevolent emanation. The hood and visor remind me of military gear

designed for protection from a nuclear blast. Perhaps these types of actions are an elaborate way of working through certain fears. Physical risk, however, is not an element of the work, and I protect myself as well as I can. Injuries are simply the result of miscalculation. Other artists, like the Vienna Actionists, often invited the presence of blood, but to me that would be a mistake. For each piece, I choose specific safety measures, like flameproof suits or helmets, which also have an aesthetic appeal.

It has been mentioned, in terms of my developing interest in the properties of combustion, that I used to work in a pressure-cooker factory. Indeed I did once; it was my job to assemble release valves and pack the cookers. My experience at the factory didn't influence me so much as my mother's cooking with a pressure cooker, and pressure-cooker mishaps and explosions—as happened to my aunt, resulting in barley soup on the ceiling. Perhaps I even caused such accidents by incorrectly assembling the valves.

Explosions can be highly aesthetic. I understand them as a complex form of sculpture because an infinite number of forms are produced within extremely short periods of time; every moment looks different. The perfect sculpture is a transformation, a process. An explosion in water produces a transformation. A column of water is merely transient. But at the same time it is a sculpture that progresses and then collapses back into itself. The sculpture exists only for a moment. But caught on video or film, this moment is frozen.

I make a distinction between actions performed in front of an audience and those that are only recorded on film. For the former I have to rehearse and test everything in advance; I'm exposing myself, and the action has to work

on the first try. When an action is performed and filmed without an audience, the process is more open and relaxed. Nevertheless, I still execute dozens of practice runs by myself before a photographer or cameraman records the work. For *Observation Box*, the explosion occurred without an audience. I had the operation filmed and photographed not with the intention of treating the event as an action that would be recorded, but more as documentation of the transforming process that completes the work. A star pattern was burned into the top of the box as a result of gunpowder I carefully configured before the explosion. Everything was meticulously planned and mea-

sured, yet one can never be certain whether the gunpowder will merely burn (to form the star) or detonate, which would be quite dangerous. *Observation Box* is a sculpture whose creation was, to a certain degree, left to chance.

I rarely do actions in front of an audience anymore. Over time I have become suspicious about whether the actions were adequately understood or mistaken for entertainment. Without an audience but documented on film, the work has a longer life, a different quality, and isn't exhausted as quickly. My notion of sculpture has moved toward the vicissitudes of process itself. The transient sculpture has outgrown the action. □

Since the early '70s Roman Signer has been conducting and documenting self-described "sculptural events" in the Swiss countryside, employing a limited repertoire of objects (blue barrel, red balloon, Christmas tree, dynamite) to produce various physical phenomena. Effects range from the pink smoke of flares trailing Signer's skis as he crossed a pristine snowfield (*Zakopane, 1994*) to the subtle roving of a camera's-eye view from a tabletop raft as it floated past vivid riparian scenery (*Table with Camera, 2001*), to more dramatic outcomes, like the controlled explosion of *Observation Box, 2000*—a simple pine construction designed to give Signer front-row seating to a quick, smoky combustion. Two types of work resulted: the box, unchanged save for a delicate symmetrical pattern of gunpowder burns, exhibited with the artist's fireproof hood; and photographs of the explosive event. Considering them autonomous works rather than linked artifacts, Signer never exhibits the sculptural object and photo documentation together.

If the meticulous planning in Signer's Alpine cause-and-effect experiments, the economy of his prop list, and the cool, "straight man" role he plays amid the chaotic actions all seem rather Swiss, the transformations he effects are, to the contrary, poetic and absurd. While structured within the parameters of systems, Signer's events allow for unruly outcomes that continually undermine the rigorosity of setup. But if there's madness to his scientific method, his investigations are after something understated and abstract: a glimpse of the ephemeral.

—RACHEL KUSHNER



This spread, video stills of Roman Signer's *Kayak*, 2000, in which the artist is towed along a country road in a kayak; outside St. Gallen, Switzerland. All Signer works this article, unless otherwise noted, are actions documented on videotape by Aleksandra Signer.



Roman Signer's Acts of Wonder

Though little known in the U.S., Swiss artist Roman Signer has been making his "temporary sculptures"—actions that he documents with film and video—since the 1970s. These events, which can involve anything from amplified snoring to small rockets, are usually short-lived, often funny and always cathartic.

BY GREGORY VOLK

Outside St. Gallen, Switzerland, in the Rheintal district at the edge of the Alps, a dirt road runs alongside a small canal that leads through rolling pastures and herds of grazing cows. This bucolic locale is a prime site for Swiss artist Roman Signer, one of several in the area that he visits for what he likes to call his "experiments," essentially actions that he considers to be temporary sculptures and which eventually come to his audience through documentation in videos, Super-8 films and photographs. Recently, Signer undertook a new experiment. It was a brief kayak trip, not in the canal, as you'd expect, but directly on the road (*Kayak*, 2000). The kayak was attached to a small van via a towline. In the video, taken from the back of the van, you see Signer wearing a leather jacket and strapping on his motorcycle helmet. He climbs into the kayak, gives the thumbs-up signal, and takes off, to start careening down the road at about 20 miles per hour. The noise is frightful, and you think that the kayak is about to veer off into the trees, tumble headlong into the canal or break into smithereens. Hunched there, hurtling along, Signer reminds you of some lonely astronaut navigating an alien planet.

At one point, Signer passes some wide-eyed cows which, inexplicably, do not scatter, but instead start frantically galloping beside him at the edge of the road, as if they can't get enough of this astonishing rift in their routine. Finally, Signer reaches his destination down the road; he slows, then stops. In the kayak, he is up to his waist in gravel and dirt, for a gaping hole

has been ripped in the bottom. He gets out, dusts himself off, turns the kayak over and inspects it; it's almost ruined, but not quite.

After you stop laughing—and many of Signer's works can be downright hilarious—the complex power of this piece begins to sink in. For one thing, Signer himself, kayak, curving towline, accidental cows, country lane and quiet Swiss countryside add up to a luscious ensemble that rivets your attention. In general, Signer's idiosyncratic events-as-sculptures are strikingly, at times dazzlingly, visual. For another, there is the work's poetic resonance, involving multiple associations and layers of meaning. It juxtaposes speed and stasis, exuberance and danger, accident and precision, and there is more than a hint of mortality in its imagery—someone rushing through a life as the body wears down. It also takes a perfectly normal activity and transforms it radically; a pleasant excursion on a sunny afternoon near the Alps was never quite like this. Moreover, for all this work's verve, there is something unnervingly lonely about it, too: a single person making his eccentric way through a local environment that also serves as a stand-in for the cosmos.

If you wanted to make a list of major contemporary artists who, for whatever reason, are comparatively little known in the U.S., Roman Signer should be right near the top. During the past few years there has been a surge of interest in his work in Europe, but he has exhibited rarely in the U.S., and his work has been written



Using a variety of means, Signer constantly seeks out the exact moment of volatility when one body or form abruptly changes into another, in the process fusing creation and destruction.



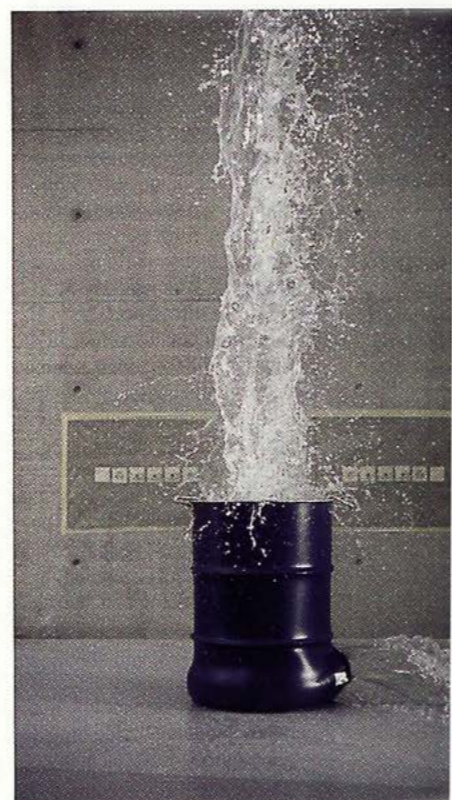
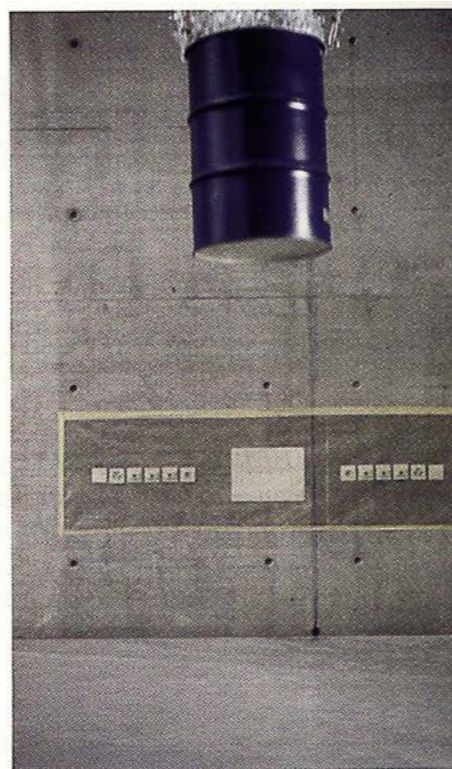
Water Boots, 1986, an electrical current causes water to erupt from a pair of rubber boots; in Weissbad, Canton Appenzell, Switzerland. Photo Marek Rogowicz.

about even less. This neglect is unfortunate, because since the early 1970s, Signer, now 62 years old, has been developing an extraordinary body of work, consisting of brief, transitory pieces and durable sculptures that are evidence of a process as well as an event, along with drawings and endless documentation. Many of his projects mix an air of quasi-scientific research (although of a decidedly homemade variety) with an impish, pranksterish humor. Sometimes this "research," this desire to see what happens if a brief chain of events is set into motion, can be wildly funny, with slapstick

mishaps, moments when things break down or veer off unexpectedly into mini-disasters. For *Sink* (1986), a table, each of its legs in a metal pail, sailed forth on a precarious voyage into a river, only to tilt and sink two minutes later in a kind of tragicomic denouement—certainly among the most short-lived, fragile and awkward outdoor sculptures that you are ever likely to see. At other times, Signer's events-as-sculptures yield images so beguiling that it's easy to forget that they were more or less instantaneous and not painstakingly made over weeks or months. For *Falling Barrel* (1996), a metal barrel filled with water was dropped from the ceiling to the floor. As the barrel plummeted, silvery water flew up in a ragged column, and at the point of impact more water jetted from the barrel's punctured side. The whole ensemble, including a rising and falling spray of droplets and the thudding impact that contorted the barrel, is heartbreakingly beautiful—and it also took about one second to execute, tops. That's Signer at his best: a sculptor whose works embody pure transformation. Using a variety of means, he constantly seeks out the exact volatile moment when one body or form abruptly changes into another, in the process fusing creation and destruction.

A number of historical sources feed Signer's unorthodox art, including post-Minimalist austerity, Fluxus high jinks, various kinds of process or performance art and elements of land art. Signer first made his mark in the early to mid-1970s with outdoor sculptures such as spare geometric forms blasted into snow fields via explosives; a gridlike structure of vessels that collected, and then spilled over with, rain-water; or an explosion in a metal box in a forest sending smoke out of four openings to make a cross shape. Works such as these suggest that Signer is very much an heir to land artists like Michael Heizer, Robert Smithson, Walter De Maria and the early Dennis Oppenheim. However, Signer rarely alters the landscape in any lasting sense and typically eschews anything monumental in favor of brief actions or events in dialogue with their surroundings, finally to disperse into the environment altogether, leaving only the scantiest of traces, or none at all.

No trace, that is, except for documentation in photographs, videos and films. Right from the beginning of his career, Signer has assiduously documented just about all of his actions in a before-during-and-after manner reminiscent of the laboratory. Photographic documentation, of course, was also important for the first generation of land artists, and was in fact the primary way that most viewers encountered their works. With Signer, however, documentation is central to his oeuvre. It reveals his process—little cause-and-effect vignettes—and it also captures and preserves the startling beauty of



Falling Barrel, 1996, a water-filled, 50-gallon metal container drops from ceiling height; in St. Gallen. Photo Stefan Rohner.

his actions. While Signer has had many collaborators through the years, since 1994 his chief documenter, in videos, has been his Polish wife, Aleksandra Signer, herself a compelling artist whose medium is video. For all his eccentricities, Signer remains an image-maker par excellence, which his trove of documentation clearly reveals.

One thing I noted in conversations with Signer, and in traveling with him to some of his favorite outdoor sites where he's been working for years, is how deeply felt his engagement with nature really is. Working outdoors in the landscape has a particular importance for him. It's where he feels most free as an artist, most concentrated and unencumbered, and it's where, in his terms, "poetry" happens, albeit his kind of quirky poetry, which can involve surreptitiously flinging a bundled Christmas tree off a bridge like a spear into the void (the tree spiraled to the ground far below with surprising elegance), or sprinting across a field trying to outrun a small rocket.

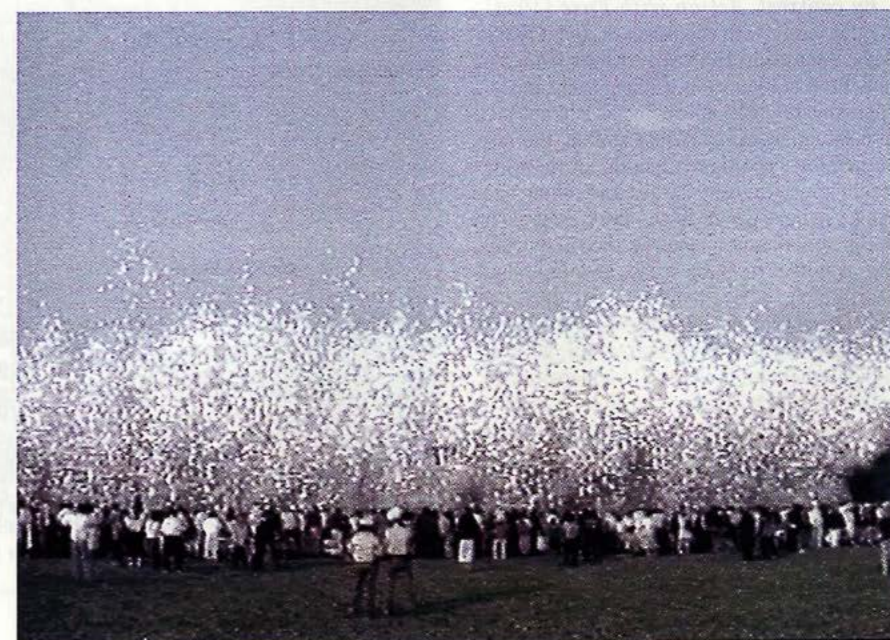
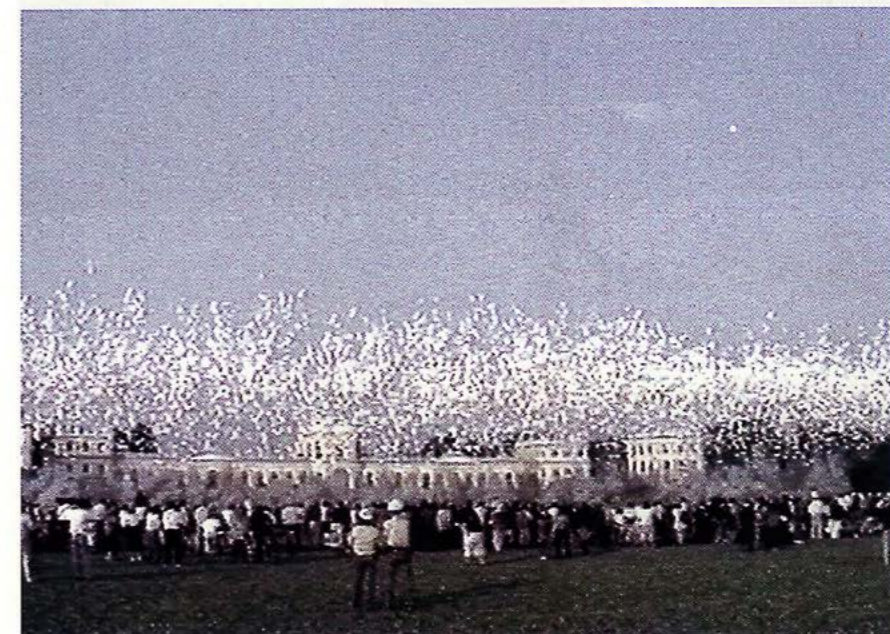
Some of Signer's actions occur in remote and dramatic locales—volcanoes or mountaintops, for example—but they can also involve things near at hand, like an electrical tower in a field on the outskirts of town. For *High-Voltage Electrical Tower* (1996), Signer inflated a large red balloon with helium, then released it inside an electrical tower, where it rose to the top and stuck, as if in a cage. Suddenly this balloon, with delightful suggestions of children's play or of raising a flag atop a ship's mast, became a focal point in the landscape, an aerial burst of pure color.

Occasionally during the 1970s, but increasingly during the 1980s and continuing to this day, Signer has appeared in his work, and when he does it's as both instigator and subject. He's like an inscrutable Everyman going about his odd business in lonely places, his slightly rumpled appearance, deadpan expression and deliberate motions all a signature part of his aesthetic. In other respects, he is famously reticent, adverse to showmanship and actually something of a camera-shy recluse. Once, Signer went up to a remote part of Iceland, pitched his tent, set up powerful loudspeakers outside, hooked up a mike inside it, went to sleep and then snored into the bleak, yet haunting landscape, producing an earthshaking roar (*Snoring, Iceland, 1994*), all of which is recorded in a sustained, head-on video shot. Another time, in Poland, he made a vivid yet fleeting sculpture (or, one could equally say, a painting) by cross-country skiing across a field while flares fixed to his heels trailed pink smoke; the wavering line they left in the air suggested exhaust from a rocket or an airplane (*Zakopane, 1994*). Both works temporarily mark Signer's position in time and

space. Implicit here is a personal dialogue with vastness—with huge empty landscapes, with the sky and geologic formations, ultimately with the universe itself. At the same time, there is also something clownish or foolish about these works, but then again, Signer's antics can easily shade into a profundity tinged with spiritual largeness or openness that seems more Eastern than Western, his St. Gallen kind of Zen.

As much as Signer has been associated with temporary pieces like these in the landscape, he has also been identified with explosions, which frequently occur in his work, leading others to categorize him—somewhat erroneously—as "the explosion artist," even though they're just one part of his repertoire. He is one of the few people in St. Gallen, and probably the only artist, to have a license to keep explosives, which he has to itemize for

Closing Action for Documenta 8, 1987, stacks of paper are dispersed by explosives; in Kassel, Germany. Photo courtesy Documenta Archives.



local officials each year: how many blasting caps he has used, how much bomb fuse, how much dynamite. In order to make a series of self-portraits, Signer (wearing his requisite protective gear) once hunched over an exploding paint bomb in an oil drum (*Portrait Gallery*, 1993). The paint erupted, covered his

To venture fully into Signer's work is to encounter dozens, possibly hundreds, of explosions, which, over the years, have shattered tables, chairs and crates; sunk kayaks; toppled small towers; reverberated through studios and galleries; and sent various objects soaring into the sky. However, Signer is not

enthralled with pyrotechnics for their own sake. Rather, working with explosives allows him to effect the kind of decisive transformation he favors. For *Black Cloth* (1994), a piece of fabric was draped over a mysterious object. Fastened to the edges of the fabric were several tin cans and on the ground were four metal pails filled with water. You watch the video for a while, and nothing happens. Suddenly, everything erupts: the cloth flies upward with an aerial splendor like some dark spirit bird ascending, water flies from the pails, the cans fly off in different directions and the object is revealed to be Signer himself, wearing one of his protective suits and a helmet while calmly sitting in a chair.

This is one of many instances when Signer's experiments obliquely suggest enigmatic myths or ambiguous rituals—some spiritual birth or rebirth, perhaps a reference to folklore or a fairy tale, maybe a scrap of magic from pre-Christian rites which have long since vanished from memory. It's also one of many instances, like Signer's kayak trip on the road, when he put himself in what could have been a very dangerous situation. The possibility of bodily harm, however, is not something Signer seeks out, and his works have nothing to do with physical punishment or endurance. On the contrary, he does everything possible to shield himself from danger, and his work is devoid of bravado altogether. In fact, if it is possible to make discreet explosions, or cause humble moments of destruction, that's precisely what Signer does.



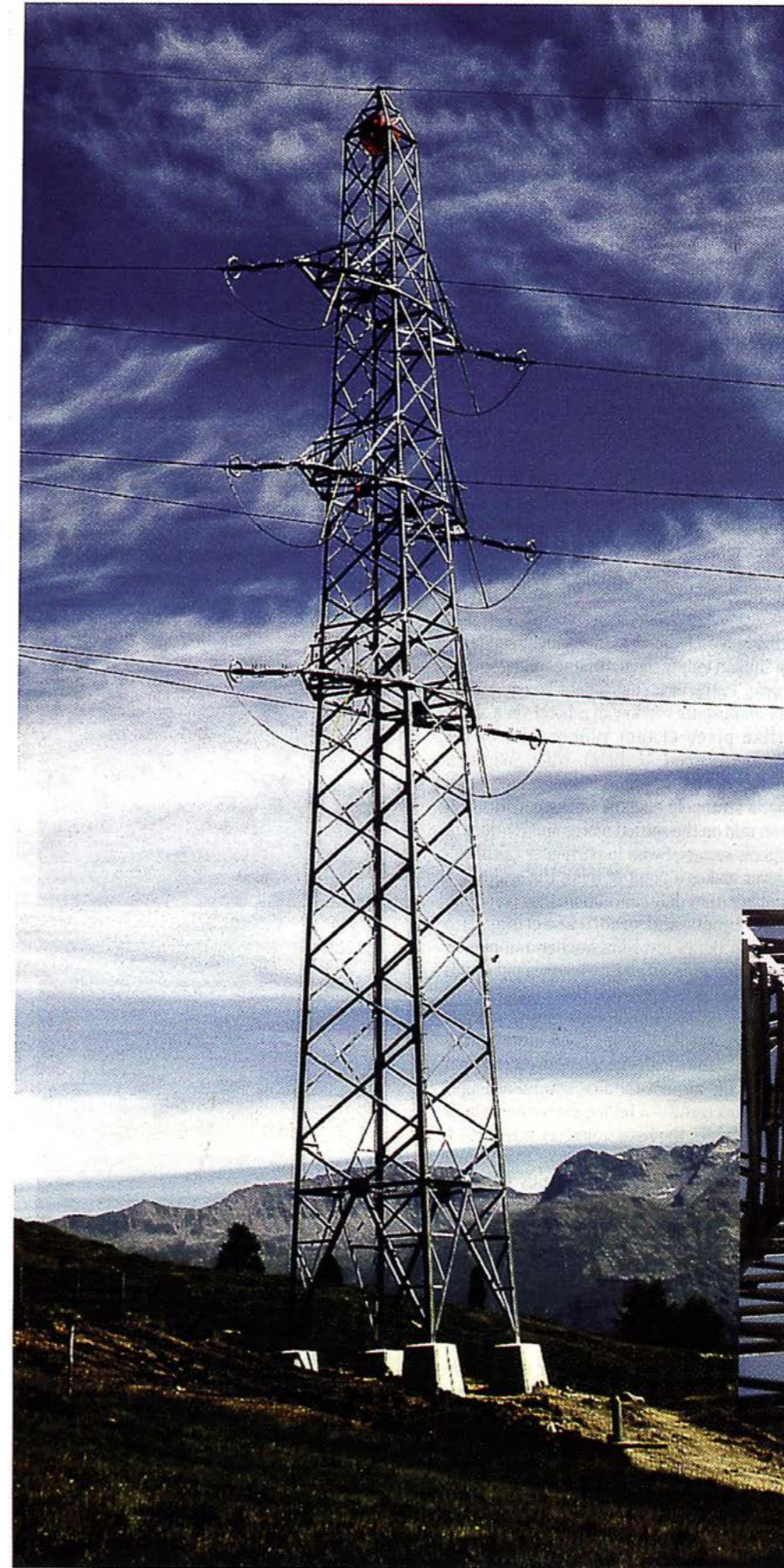
Zakopane, 1994, the artist cross-country skis with flares strapped to his heels; outside Zakopane, Poland.

face in a flash and turned him into a weird alien creature from another galaxy; the documentary photographs were then hung as legitimate portraits.

By contrast, *Action with Fuse* (1989), another event with explosives, lasted a full 35 days. Alongside the train tracks from the Appenzell station to St. Gallen, a distance of approximately 12½ miles, Signer laid out fuse in 328-foot segments. When ignited, the fuse burned for more than a month, all the while yielding intermittent flashes and mini-explosions as one segment lit the next: excitement in the hinterlands, a lonely festival in the middle of nowhere. This work, accomplished shortly after the death of Signer's mother, had an intensely personal dimension. It connected Appenzell, where Signer grew up, with St. Gallen, where he lives now, in a memorial act linking himself and his mother, a kind of slowed-down, by turns wispy and fiery voyage parallel to the train tracks, along which he's presumably traveled hundreds of times. This precisely calibrated venture, once again unfolding in both time and space, also hauntingly evoked the truly vast time that extends beyond one's own brief life.



Panorama 2000, 1999, a loudspeaker housed in a red box broadcasts the voices of visitors in a nearby belfry; in Utrecht, Netherlands.



Vivid images emerge from Signer's humble objects, and you can't help but notice how an irrepressible humanity seems to course through them, alluding to various states of being.

Still, danger is often a factor, and it's an integral part of the whole way he conceives sculptures: not as things laboriously made in the studio but as in-process constellations of forces which contain his signature flash points of crisis, catharsis or both.

Over the years, Signer has also developed a significant body of object-based works designed to be shown indoors, some of which, while hardly traditional, are more immediately recognizable as sculpture per se. But even with these works, which can be at once scruffy and elegant, you see how attuned Signer is to his process. A 1999 exhibition at Secession in Vienna featured a waist-high rectangular stack of two-by-fours on the floor bound by two bands, an upright bicycle on one side jutting into the stack and several boards protruding from the other side (*Bicycle and Wooden Boards*, 1997-99). From this sculptural evidence you could deduce that Signer rode a bike

Left and inset, High-Voltage Electrical Tower, 1996, a helium-filled balloon is trapped inside a power-line tower; outside St. Gallen. Photos H.J. Ruch.

To venture fully into Signer's work is to encounter hundreds of explosions, which, over the years, have shattered tables, chairs, crates, and sent various objects soaring into the sky.



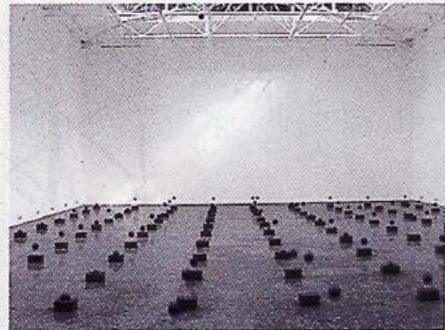
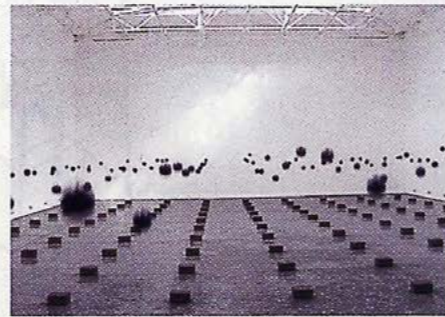
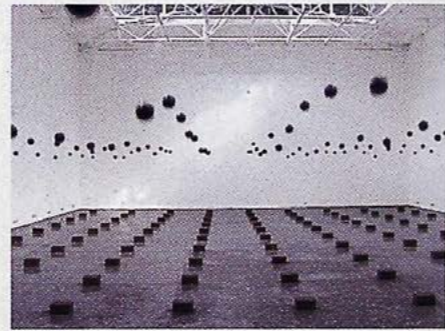
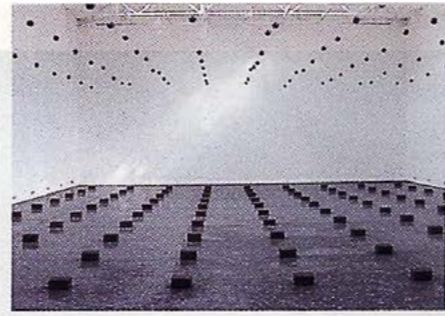
Shift, 1995, a box explodes out from under the artist, leaving behind his suspended hat; at de Appel Foundation, Amsterdam.

into the stack, kept pedaling to push the boards out on the opposite side, and then left everything just as it was. Many of Signer's "instant" sculptures (such as this one) do actually require a great deal of planning, measuring and preparation.

Whether working indoors or outdoors, Signer has a personal lexicon of objects that he recycles into different works, including bicycles, buckets, metal barrels, ladders, balloons, toy helicopters, a three-wheeled truck and various types of secondhand furniture, among others. These common household objects can seem humble to the point of banality, but when subjected to the various pressures Signer has concocted for them, they take on a new kinetic life as intensely sculptural but also poetically vital forces and, indeed, as unpredictable forces of nature. Vivid images emerge from these objects, and you also can't help but note how an irrepressible humanity seems to course through them, alluding to different states of being: fear, shyness, keyed-up energy, agitation, grace.

A flying bicycle, for instance, might suddenly burst into an empty room, trailing roiling smoke (*Bicycle*, 1991), or a chair might be catapulted out of an upstairs window in a hotel via a sling-shotlike piece of taut rubber (*Action in Kurhaus Weissbad AI*, 1992). When you see a piece like the latter, you also realize how much Signer's strangely elegant works constitute a brazen raid on the settled mores and routines of bourgeois society, Swiss in particular (although he never makes a point of this). His sculptures misbehave, they defy convention, they turn utilitarian objects and practical actions into outlandish things involving wonder and humor. Signer, after all, is an artist who once put on his own hat via explosives (*Hat*, 1997). The hat was on the ground, on top of an explosive charge, and Signer was leaning out of an upstairs window. When the small bomb went off, the hat shot into the air, but the first several attempts were unsuccessful—a bit too far to the right or the left. Finally, the hat's trajectory was perfect. It was right there in the air before him. Signer clutched it with two hands, abruptly put it on his head and that was the end of the action. Delivered in Signer's typically deadpan, expressionless way, this coolly ludicrous action (captured on video), with its rhythms of long-ing, futility and—finally—success, winds up as something surprisingly touching.

Signer is an artist's artist par excellence, and he has long been a kind of cult figure. There have been many lean years, with relatively few chances to exhibit, little money and scant attention from the art-world establishment. Only since 1995 or so has Signer begun to be much more visible, thanks to major



Above, *Simultaneous*, 1999, the synchronized release of 117 blue-painted iron balls onto 117 slabs of clay; at the 1999 Venice Biennale.

gallery representation through Hauser & Wirth in Zurich and participation in important international exhibitions and museum shows. It was also in 1995 that Peter Liechti's excellent fea-

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Bed, 1996, the sleeping artist is "buzzed" by a remote-control toy helicopter; in Wil, Canton St. Gallen.



Art in America

Signer

continued from page 98

ture film *Signers Koffer* (Signer's Suitcase), comprised almost entirely of scenes of the artist engaging in his actions, appeared to considerable acclaim in Europe, significantly extending Signer's audience.

The past couple of years, in particular, have afforded a lot of opportunities in Europe to see new works by Signer, including his series in the Swiss pavilion at the last Venice Biennale. It's not that Signer is making up for lost time; he has long been a ferociously diligent artist. Rather, the art world is belatedly catching up to this trailblazing figure.

A brief survey of some recent works suggests that Signer is making good use of his newfound visibility. Hauser & Wirth also has an impressive, if unorthodox, museumlike space in a converted train depot in St. Gallen. On the grounds, there is a circular water tower, which housed a recent installation by Signer (*Installation in Water Tower*, 2000). As you entered this darkened space, you saw a video projection on one wall: two blue metal barrels slowly revolving, drifting, sometimes touching and moving apart as they spun about in perpetually circling water. From above, you heard the occasional metal clanking as the barrels struck one another. It took a while to realize this video-and-sound piece was not a recorded work at all, but a live feed from the water tower above, where those barrels were actually floating, drifting and colliding. What's more, the sound wasn't from loudspeakers, but from the actual barrels bumping into one another. The work was marvelously simple and straightforward. It also created a distinctly meditative aura, giving the water tower a chapel-like peacefulness. When I attended, several elderly people were sitting on benches, staring and listening with a kind of rapture.

For an exhibition in the southern German city of Singen, Signer contributed another water-and-sound piece with much the same effect. In a small, circa 1903 neo-Romantic building in the botanical garden that once housed a spring, he installed a simple metal table beneath droplets of water falling from the ceiling (*Spring Room*, 2000). As the drops struck the table, they softly resounded: an elemental music with a suggestion of bells. For most of the century, the building had been sealed off. Signer opened it up, and his "water music," together with the cool air, made it seem as if one were crossing some threshold into a purified corner of the world.

Signer's less-is-more elementalism does not always result in this kind of meditative sublime, however; on the contrary, it can also

be frantic, obsessive, manically repetitive and psychologically conflicted. For the influential "Sculpture Projects in Münster" exhibition in 1997, he contributed a walking cane suspended above a canal on a sloping cable which also functioned as a pumping system (*Walking Cane*, 1997). Electronically wired, Signer's magical cane periodically twitched, jerked, shuddered, whipped about in the air and went into attack mode—spewing water at startled onlookers. The result was a tragicomic rendition of an irascible old person raging in anger, helplessness and pride. The work also effectively mimicked an Action painter like Jackson Pollock, but instead of applying paint to canvas, it applied water to water, so as to make an endlessly materializing and disappearing "painting" on the surface of the canal—one of numerous references to painting that crop up in Signer's oeuvre.

Another work consisted of a toy remote-control helicopter caught in a small room with no possibility of escape (*Floating in a Box*, 1999). The helicopter flew up and down, back and forth and occasionally collided with the walls, each time with more serious damage. In the video, it's both captivating and disconcerting to watch the helicopter slowly smash itself to bits while trying to fly. In the end, when it's lying on its side, twitching like an animal in its last agony, you're ready to weep, except for an insistent rational voice in the brain announcing that this is only a ridiculous toy helicopter.

Whether you're seeing videos of transient events or physical installations, you note how Signer consistently develops situations marked by a balance or a juxtaposition of large opposites: plenitude and emptiness, sound and silence, violence and peacefulness, presence and absence—that St. Gallen Zen thing again. For a recent museum show at Villa Arson in Nice, France, a radial layout of tubes ending in boxes resulted in explosions on the hour: each time the clock struck the hour, over the course of one day, another box exploded (*Time Installation*, 2000). In an era of brand-name excesses and high-cost production, Signer's low-tech, frequently unstable objects are the proverbial breath of fresh air, in this case not a work destined for the auction block but one which calmly and patiently blew itself to bits.

For many viewers, the last Venice Biennale was the first opportunity to see a significant group of works by Signer. Curated by Konrad Bitterli of the Kunstverein St. Gallen, who has long been one of the most astute and sympathetic observers of Signer's art, this exhibition featured a linked selection of Signer's works in different genres, including sculptures, installations and videos of events [see *A.i.A.*, Sept. '99].

The centerpiece was a grid on the floor consisting of 117 blue iron balls nestled into small

clay blocks (*Simultaneous*, 1999). A nod to Minimalism, one thought, until the next room disclosed a slow-motion video of the event which yielded this sculpture. The balls were originally attached by strings to a construction on the ceiling, with a blasting cap fixed to each string. When the blasting caps were ignited, the balls fell en masse through the air like a descending, but slightly ragged, plane into the wet clay, which eventually dried and hardened. Here was evidence of an event that only lasted a split second but that encompassed the whole volume of a room, making its space almost palpable. More videos showed other projects, like another of Signer's remote-control toy helicopters perched on a raft in a stream (*Helicopter on a Board*, 1998). When the raft tumbles over a waterfall, you think disaster is imminent, but in the nick of time the helicopter nervously takes flight, only to land again on the raft downstream and continue the shaky voyage. With *Blue Barrel* (1999), Signer rolled a barrel down a ramp into a room full of upright sticks. Before stopping, it cut a swathe through this "field," flattened everything in its path, and effortlessly joined physics and poetics.

Signer's inventiveness seems inexhaustible. Consider another action with a toy helicopter, for which Signer went to sleep in a bed (*Bed*, 1996). In the video you see him motionless, peaceful, a picture of perfect relaxation, but then suddenly a helicopter flies into the room. It comes nearer, then darts away. It moves up, descends and then inquisitively comes within inches of Signer's head, as if it were some way wild creature overcome by curiosity. Signer never twitches, shifts position or lifts his head—fortunately, because one false move here could have left him seriously injured or dead, as this was a powerful device. (When questioned about the danger, Signer merely says that the person operating the helicopter via remote control was the best "pilot" in Switzerland.) A certain tension is apparent in the video, but then so, too, is tenderness, vulnerability, joy, stupidity and acceptance.

Roman Signer's achievement over the last 30 years constitutes one of the great idiosyncratic forays of the era. Pushing the idea of what a sculpture can be to extremes, he has consistently come up with "experiments" that fuse formal intensities, a deadpan craziness and an equally deadpan wisdom. Meanwhile, this artist who has often stuck close to St. Gallen and environs is increasingly being recognized as among the most important artists around. □

"Roman Signer: Drawings and Films" is on view at the Kunstmuseum Solothurn, Switzerland, through June 10. The show then travels to the Westfälisches Landesmuseum, Münster, where it opens Sept. 28. New works by Signer will be exhibited at Hauser & Wirth Gallery, Zurich, June 11-July 28.

Author: Gregory Volk is an art critic based in New York.

SANS TITRE

ZONDER TITEL UNTITLED OHNE TITEL SENZA TITOLO

NOVEMBRE - DÉCEMBRE 2000

Bulletin d'Art Contemporain publié par l'A.C.R.A.C., Lille France N° 51

MAASTRICHT

ROMAN SIGNER : BIEN SÛR !

Les fusées, les armes à feu, les explosifs mais aussi l'eau, l'air ou le sable constituent les éléments du vocabulaire plastique de l'artiste suisse Roman Signer. Depuis 1973, il réalise des « actions-sculptures » à l'aide d'explosions calculées, de chutes programmées, de jets d'eau ou d'inondations volontaires. Ces micro-événements, ces petites catastrophes que l'artiste met en scène et filme, semblent échouer et produisent des résultats dérisoires et absurdes ; en même temps, ils libèrent une énergie latente ou invisible aux yeux du spectateur. Roman Signer donne à des objets aussi familiers et banals qu'une table ou une paire de bottes en caoutchouc des talents quelque peu magiques à se rebeller contre leur sort habituel et leur octroie ainsi des qualités oniriques et poétiques insoupçonnées.

SANS TITRE : Peut-on parler de rétrospective pour votre exposition de Maastricht ?

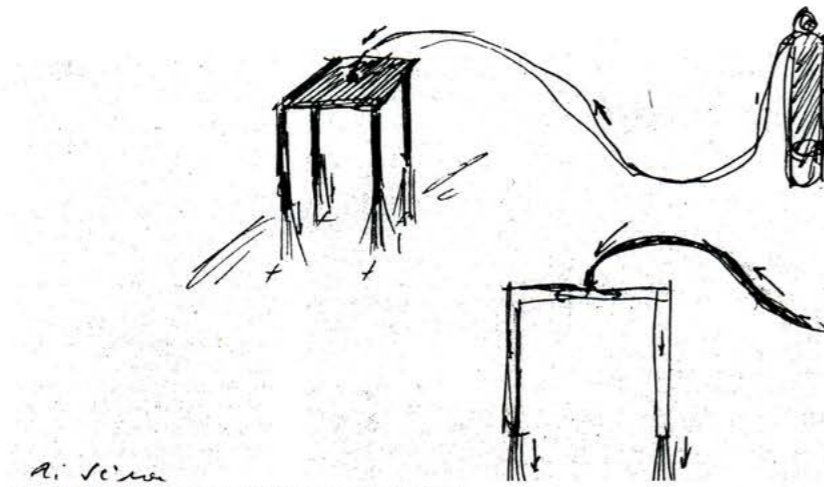
Roman SIGNER : Oui, le musée l'a souhaité. J'aurais pu faire des choses entièrement nouvelles, bien sûr. Mais ils ont voulu des travaux des années septante à quatre-vingt-dix. Alors on pourrait dire que c'est une sorte de rétrospective. Il y a des travaux très anciens et des travaux récents. Cela donne un parcours. Et il faut dire que c'est la plus grande exposition que j'ai jamais faite, surtout à l'étranger. J'en ai eu une à Saint-Gall, où j'habite, en 1993 mais plus petite que celle-là. Alors, pour moi, c'est une très grande chance.

SANS TITRE : Votre travail est souvent découpé en plusieurs parties : la conception d'une œuvre, avec les dessins préparatoires, une action, ce qui reste de cette action et, enfin, des films, des photos, qui seraient plus documentaires : est-ce que ce sont quatre aspects d'une seule œuvre ou est-ce qu'il s'agit d'éléments qui composent la même œuvre ?

Roman SIGNER : Je pense qu'il serait trop facile de dire que je réalise une action et que ce qui reste, c'est l'œuvre. Ce n'est pas tout à fait ça. Parce que, lorsque je fais une action sans spectateurs, ce n'est pas une performance ; et ce qui reste, ce ne sont pas des reliques. Par exemple, quand je fais une sculpture au moyen d'une explosion de couleures, au moyen de la pluie, du feu, on ne peut pas dire que le résultat soit une relique.

SANS TITRE : Et les dessins sont-ils toujours des projets d'actions ?

Roman SIGNER : Oui, ils sont préparatoires ; mais avant, je faisais des dessins, des aquarelles, avec



Roman SIGNER, dessin original pour SANS TITRE, encre sur papier, octobre 2000

des projets que je ne pouvais pas réaliser. J'ai fait pas mal de dessins il fut un temps ; j'ai arrêté et maintenant je fais seulement des esquisses, sur du papier quelconque, quand j'ai une idée, quand un problème se pose : ce sont de simples esquisses.

SANS TITRE : Votre travail est un peu comme un iceberg : il y a une partie qu'on voit et la plus grande partie est à imaginer...

Roman SIGNER : Oui, cette image est intéressante. Certains spectateurs ne voient que la partie émergée, ils ne regardent que cela, surtout quand ils ne sont pas très sensibles. D'autres voient peut-être davantage la partie immergée de l'iceberg, ils vont plus loin avec leur propre vision. Le spectateur doit faire travailler son imagination. Moi, je ne fais que l'inciter. S'il ne comprend pas cela, il ne peut pas entrer dans

mon travail. Mais s'il a compris une de mes œuvres, il peut les comprendre toutes, parce qu'elles sont à mon avis toutes reliées les unes aux autres, comme avec une ficelle.

SANS TITRE : L'élément commun à vos œuvres ne serait-il pas l'aspect dérisoire ou quelconque des objets utilisés et le côté absurde des actions ?

Roman SIGNER : Oui, cela peut paraître absurde. Et quand j'y réfléchis, ce n'est pas ce que je recherche ; pour moi, c'est un jeu, je joue avec les choses ; mais cela peut avoir aussi un côté mélancolique, un peu triste. Quand je fais la course avec une fusée accrochée à un fil, je sais très bien que c'est la fusée qui va arriver en premier. C'est parfaitement voulu de ma part. Ce n'est pas un échec. J'ai voulu montrer que la fusée irait plus vite que moi ; je

sais que c'est une absurdité mais je pense que ça ne se discute pas.

SANS TITRE : C'est un mélange d'absurde et d'humour...

Roman SIGNER : Je fais des choses et je pense que c'est très sérieux ; quelquefois les gens rient, ce n'est pas cela que je recherche. Il n'y a pas de volonté d'être rigolo. Je ne suis pas un clown.

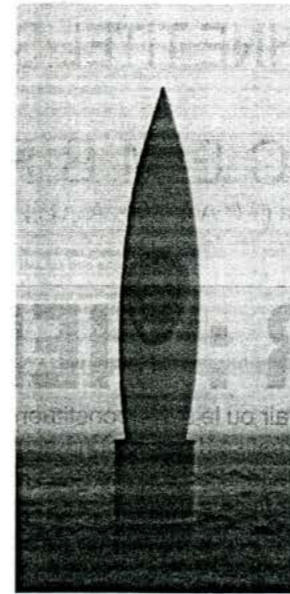
SANS TITRE : Dans ce cas, y aurait-il une dimension politique dans votre travail ?

Roman SIGNER : Chaque forme d'art devient un peu politique ; c'est juste, mais chez moi, ce n'est pas voulu. Je ne travaille pas tellement de manière intellectuelle, c'est plutôt de l'ordre du sensible, de l'émotionnel. Je sens quelque chose et ça m'intéresse, et ça

(Suite de l'entretien page 2)

SUITE DE LA PAGE 1

ROMAN SIGNER



Roman SIGNER, *Kajak II*, 1988.

m'occupe aussi dans les rêves, même dans les rêves. Ça peut m'occuper pendant très longtemps. Et souvent je réalise les choses très vite. Alors, par exemple, poser un kayak dans un bidon se fait très vite mais pour y arriver, il me faut beaucoup de temps.

SANS TITRE : Donc il y a un long temps de maturation...

Roman SIGNER : Oui, pour arriver à l'essentiel.

SANS TITRE : Avant de décider d'être artiste, vous avez été pendant longtemps dessinateur en architecture. Comment le passage vers une carrière artistique s'est-il fait ?

Roman SIGNER : En fait, je ne savais pas quoi devenir quand je suis sorti de l'école. Je voulais être un aventurier qui découvre des pays, des rivières encore inconnues, etc. ; je ne rêvais que de cela. Puis, j'ai pensé devenir radioélectricien parce que les ondes me fascinaient... Mais je n'ai pas pu le faire. Alors j'ai débuté comme apprenti dessinateur en architecture et, après l'ap-

prentissage, j'ai travaillé partout en Suisse, en France aussi. Je suis allé à Nice, Cannes, Mougins-Sartoux parce qu'il y avait là un architecte qui m'a attiré : il était complètement différent des autres architectes, il s'appelait Jacques Couëlle (1). Il faisait des maisons comme des grottes... Il ne dessinait pratiquement pas de plans, il les modelait. C'était très intéressant. Et puis, je suis tombé très malade pendant presque une année. J'ai eu beaucoup de temps pour moi, pour lire, voir des expositions, je me suis intéressé à l'art. C'était devenu très fort, cette volonté d'aller dans une école d'art et je suis rentré à l'école des Arts et Métiers à Zürich ; j'ai travaillé à nouveau dans un bureau, à Lucerne ; après, je suis allé à Varsovie parce que je n'avais plus d'argent : j'avais entendu qu'il existait des échanges avec la Pologne. Chaque année, deux Suisses pouvaient aller à Varsovie et deux Polonais en Suisse. Et quand je suis revenu de Varsovie, j'avais plein d'idées en tête ; j'ai beaucoup voyagé et quand je suis revenu, j'ai reçu une bourse et une galerie de Saint-Gall s'est intéressée à moi. Alors je me suis dit, je reste à Saint-Gall, je travaille là et j'y suis encore, à vingt kilomètres seulement de ma ville natale.

SANS TITRE : Est-ce que vous revendiquez votre ancrage dans le paysage et le terroir suisses ? Est-ce que le paysage suisse est important pour vous ?

Roman SIGNER : Ce n'est peut-être pas la mentalité suisse qui m'inspire (rires), c'est le paysage qui m'inspire, la nature. On le voit dans mon travail. C'est l'influence de la nature ; je ne suis pas né au Brésil, au bord de la mer ou dans le désert ; si c'était le cas, je ferais peut-être d'autres choses, je travaillerais sûrement avec les dunes, le sable, la mer, les vagues. Mais, je travaille en Suisse dans la situation telle qu'elle est ; il y a la neige, les ruisseaux, les montagnes et les forêts.



Roman SIGNER, *Mütze mit Rakete (a-d)*, 1983.



SANS TITRE : Il y a aussi une dimension sonore dans votre travail : est-ce que la musique est importante pour vous ?

Roman SIGNER : J'aime beaucoup la musique moderne mais j'aime aussi la musique classique ; dans la musique moderne, j'aime beaucoup la musique minimaliste, Steve Reich, Phil Glass, etc., ou John Cage. Mais j'aime aussi les bruits, les bruits comme ça dans la nature. Souvent dans mon travail, il y a du bruit.

SANS TITRE : On a l'impression que vous êtes un artiste un peu solitaire...

Roman SIGNER : J'ai toujours été seul, je n'ai jamais participé à un groupe de gens qui travaillent dans la même direction. Chaque artiste est un peu solitaire, je pense.

SANS TITRE : Pourriez-vous évoquer le projet que vous aviez imaginé pour le tunnel sous la Manche ?

Roman SIGNER : C'est un projet qui n'a jamais été réalisé. C'était un aller-retour avec des gerbes d'eau. Je voulais faire deux lignes parallèles de fils électriques, sur l'eau avec des flotteurs, et tous les cent mètres, une boule de dynamite, avec un détonateur électrique dans une capsule. Alors, chaque détonateur aurait allumé le suivant très vite, cela aurait fait toc, toc, toc, toc, et cela aurait mis à peu près une ou deux minutes pour traverser la Manche.

De l'autre côté, cela aurait démarré en même temps et les deux lignes se seraient croisées. Et quand les gerbes seraient arrivées en France, les autres seraient arrivées en Angleterre, comme deux parois d'eau, et ça c'était mon projet. L'autre projet était d'utiliser deux très grandes mèches, des mèches sous-marines ; deux petits tuyaux auraient été fixés au fond de la Manche, ils seraient ressortis, l'un en Angleterre et l'autre en France, et on aurait allumé les deux mèches en même temps. Pour

parcourir les trente-trois kilomètres, cela aurait duré environ deux mois. En sortant de l'eau - peut-être pas en même temps - il y aurait eu une petite explosion. Techniquement, c'est absolument réalisable.

SANS TITRE : Lorsque vous parlez de vos œuvres, vous les décrivez toujours sous l'angle technique...

Roman SIGNER : C'est vrai, je parle souvent de l'aspect technique de mon travail, j'évite l'autre côté, parce ça, ce n'est pas mon travail. C'est le côté sombre, profond. Je ne fais rien par hasard, mon travail est très « existentiel » : toutes les choses que je fais ont quelque chose à voir avec ma vie.

SANS TITRE : Une question tout à fait anecdotique. Est-ce que votre goût pour les explosifs vient du fait que votre arrière-grand-père avait une usine d'allumettes ?

Roman SIGNER : (rires) Je ne sais pas. L'un de mes grands-pères était forgeron, il avait une quincaillerie, il vendait des explosifs. Il était chef des sapeurs-pompiers. Comme il vendait des explosifs, j'ai longtemps acheté la poudre chez lui, déjà enfant. Peut-être, y a-t-il là une influence...

Vous savez, on me demande toujours d'expliquer mon travail ; c'est difficile pour moi, je n'aime pas ça, expliquer mon travail dans le détail. Je peux vous donner une réponse quand vous demandez comment j'ai fait telle chose mais je ne peux pas expliquer l'art ; je ne dois pas l'expliquer.

(1) Jacques Couëlle, architecte français autodidacte (Marseille 1902 - Paris 1996).

Maastricht, le 13 octobre 2000. Propos recueillis par Yves Brochard et Godeleine Vanhersel.

□ Roman Signer, Maastricht, Bonnefontenmuseum, voir calendrier page 4.

bricorama

A 61 ans, **Roman Signer** pratique avec obsession l'art du geste inutile et de la cascade pour rien. Grandiose et désespéré.



Courtesy ART : CONCEPT

C'est une planche de bois enrobée d'une corde qui tourne sur elle-même, en travers d'un chemin de campagne. Une bicyclette reliée à l'installation s'en éloigne lentement, tirant toujours plus sur l'objet qui se révèle, au bout de quelques minutes, un kayak posé sur pieds. La bobine continue de se dévider, le vélo disparaît à l'horizon, le fil tombe à terre. Puis plus rien. Fin de l'action de Roman Signer, filmée dans une campagne silencieuse. Un geste inutile, sans éclat et sans but, sans résultat. L'art du rien. Depuis



près de vingt-cinq ans, Roman Signer multiplie les anti-performances, les interventions absurdes et bricolées. Au fil des vidéos qui conservent la trace de ses expérimentations, on le découvre aux commandes de pétards qui explosent, de caisses qui s'affaissent, jetant des livres dans un cours d'eau, actionnant une botte en caoutchouc clouée à un tronc d'arbre, dynamitant une boîte de chocolats, ou encore propulsant son chapeau depuis la rue vers le premier étage d'une maison par le truchement d'un dispositif explosif concocté par ses soins. Autant d'actions qui ne valent que par ce qu'elles montrent, ne laissant derrière elles que de pauvres traces de suie ou de brûlure. Artificier du bricolage, il s'équipe de casques, de vêtements protecteurs, de combinaisons de cascadeur pour suivre les scénarios délirants qu'il s'impose avec obstination. Peu d'artistes travaillent à ce point dans l'instant, tout entiers tournés vers l'immédiateté du geste, sans souci de suite ni de progression. Ce qui fait de Roman Signer une personnalité tout à fait à part dans le champ de la création contemporaine. Et sans doute l'un des plus désespérés. Un artiste suisse qui cultive les clichés liés à sa culture nationale jusqu'à prati-

quer ses actions dans une nature de carte postale, les pieds dans un torrent ou sur un gazon vert pomme. Un décor immuable, qui a le temps pour lui, histoire de souligner encore davantage l'urgence qui hante les tentatives de Signer. A Cahors, il s'est emparé des restes d'une porte médiévale, trans-

formée en piège à curieux, par le biais d'un seau d'eau qui se renverse sur une 2 CV ouverte aux quatre vents et aux passants. Il fut un temps où l'on y déversait des chaudrons d'huile bouillante sur les envahisseurs. Il faut une certaine légèreté d'esprit pour faire d'une blague aussi rustaude un commentaire postmoderne sur l'absurdité du dispositif et, par-delà l'installation citée, sur le non-sens de l'exposition.

Jade Lindgaard

Roman Signer, Les Docks. Projection dans la cour de l'Archidiaconé pendant les Nuits Blanches, les 18, 19, 25 et 26 juin jusqu'à 1 h du matin.



Kamcor, 1986

ROMAN SIGNER

NÉ EN 1938 À APPENZEL (CH).
VIT ET TRAVAILLE À SAINT-GALL (CH).

L'artiste en pyrotechnicien de l'absurde. Pour ses actions, Roman Signer apparaît fréquemment en tenue ignifugée et utilise volontiers des explosifs et armes à feu. Mais les déflagrations et détonations qui jalonnent son œuvre sont anti-spectaculaires. Elles sont bien souvent médiatisées par le document photographique, super-8 ou vidéo, restituant dans un après-coup leur temporalité diluée au spectateur. Avec le plus grand sérieux, il s'y livre à des expérimentations dont les tenants et aboutissants nous échappent. Les « sculptures » de Signer résident dans l'organisation de micro-événements qui jouent avec l'idée de ratage, de fiasco magnifique. Les petites catastrophes se succèdent, comme une éternelle répétition de ce qui est à venir.

Fast Changes, 1993 : enfermé dans une cabine hermétique et transparente, équipé d'un masque et d'un tuba relié à l'extérieur, il déclenche un fumigène qui rapidement emplit de son nuage toxique l'espace exigü, jusqu'à faire disparaître le corps de l'artiste. Tranchant de haut en bas à l'aide d'un cutter la surface de plastique transparent, il se libère enfin. L'éventuel suspense est évacué, même s'il peut être impliqué par l'apparente mise en danger de l'intégrité physique du « performer ». Les codes et le sérieux habituels de la performance sont ici détournés.

Allumer une fusée fixée sur un fil tendu dans une clairière et, coiffé d'un casque, engager une course sous sa trajectoire. Tirer avec un pistolet dans un bidon. Peindre, filmer, photographier à l'aide d'un hélicoptère radiocommandé. Par leur gratuité et leur non-sens, ces sculptures-actions se transforment de démonstration implacable en un « spectaculaire désintégré », comme le note Jean-Yves Jouannais.

Il ne faut cependant pas résumer le travail de Signer à une succession d'explosions. Tout d'abord parce qu'à la fumée répond souvent l'élément aquatique, comme dans cette vidéo où, assis dans un canoë-kayak se fendant en deux, il s'enfoncé inexorablement dans l'eau, jusqu'à disparaître. Ou encore dans cette sculpture sérielle et minimale réalisée dans un port et constituée de ballons de baudruche blancs, coincés entre les marches d'un escalier puis libérés progressivement par la force de la marée montante. C'est bien sûr dans ce temps ralenti de la libération des ballons que réside la « sculpture ». Et c'est dans la production d'une temporalité propre à chaque événement – et dans son observation – que réside le travail de Roman Signer.

Le temps d'un déplacement tout aussi bien : pour *100 fois autour d'un pilier*, il tourne en vélo autour d'un pilier, relié à celui-ci par un ruban qui se déroule au fur et à mesure depuis le portebagages. Frôlant le dérisoire et l'absurde, cette action est paradigmatique du travail de Signer. Pour *Mon voyage au Creux de l'enfer*, en 1992, il parcourt dans un triporteur « Piaggio » les 800 km séparant son domicile du centre d'art de Thiers où il produira une explosion. Intégré dans l'exposition, le triporteur atteste de ce lent voyage qui permet à l'artiste de « découvrir le paysage, de voir les irrégularités de la route. » Et Signer de préciser : « Il faut regarder l'ensemble, comme chez un homme. »

Pascal Beausse.

The artist as artificer of the absurd. In his actions, Roman Signer often dresses up in fireproof gear and makes use of explosives and firearms. However, the explosions and blazes that punctuate his work are anti-spectacular. What we see of them is often just photographs, super-8 films or videos of the event shown in a more relaxed time-frame. With the utmost seriousness, Signer busies himself with experiments whose ins and outs escape us. His "sculptures" consist in the organisation of micro-events which play on the idea of failure, of the magnificent fiasco. The succession of tiny catastrophes is like an eternal rehearsal for what is to come.

In Fast Changes (1993), we see the artist inside a sealed, transparent booth equipped with a mask and a breathing tube so as to take in air from outside. Suddenly, he sets off a smoke bomb and the toxic cloud fills the tiny space, making his body disappear from view until, cutting through the plastic with a Stanley knife, he at last manages to free himself. Although the "performer's" physical safety is apparently threatened, the sense of suspense is deflated; the usual codes and seriousness of performance are subverted.

Setting off a rocket with a string attached from a clearing and then running under its trajectory; shooting into a can; painting, filming and photographing using a remote control helicopter – all these action-sculptures become, by virtue of their unsignifying gratuitousness, so many implacable demonstrations of what Jean-Yves Jouannais calls the "disintegration of the spectacular".

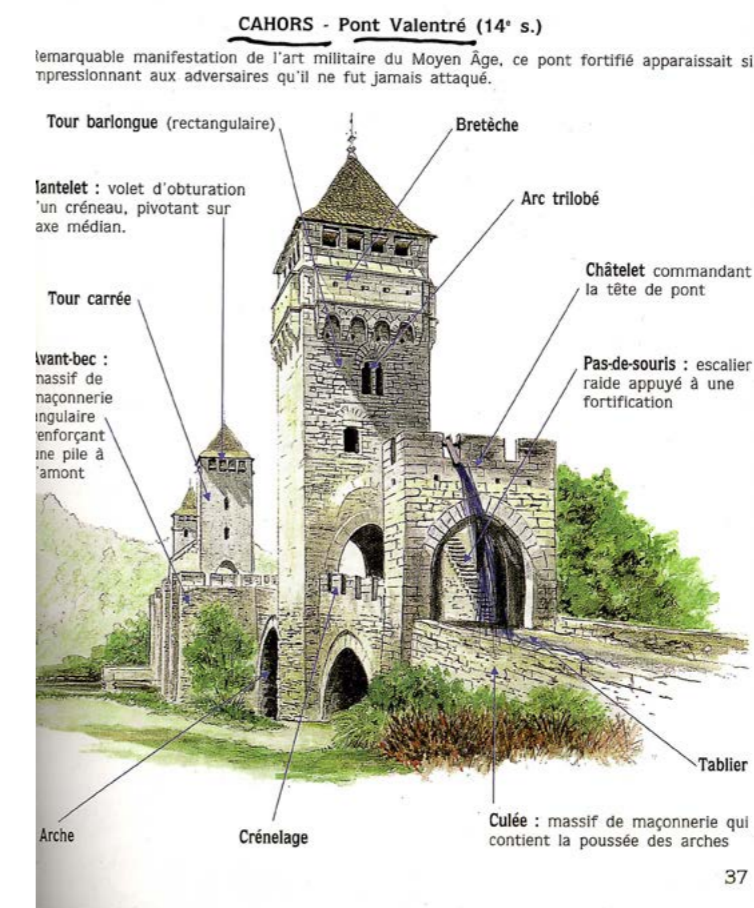
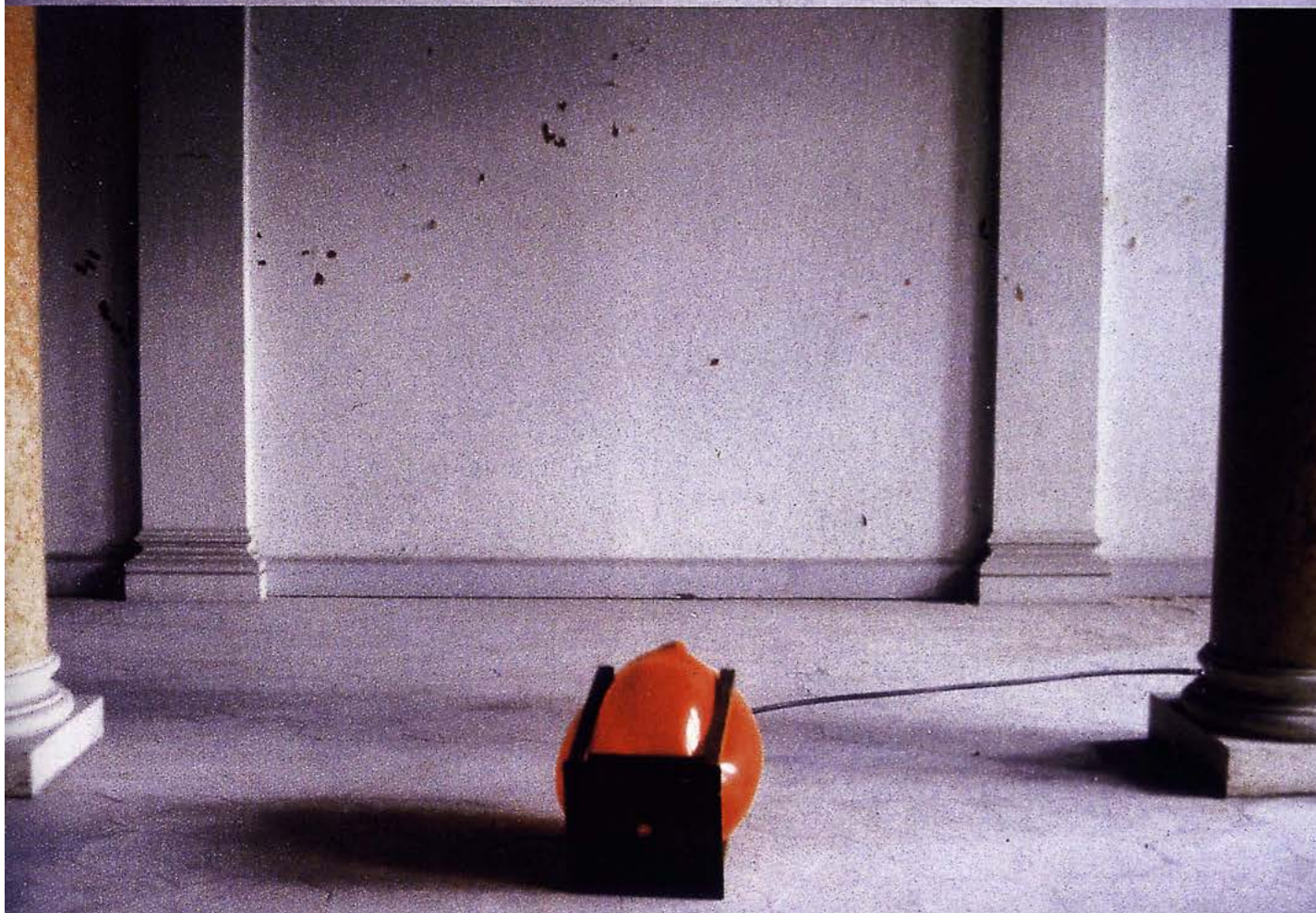
But it would be wrong to reduce Signer's work to a succession of explosions. For a start, water is as frequently present as smoke. In one video, he sits in a kayak and sinks ineluctably as it splits in two, finally disappearing beneath the surface. A minimalist serial sculpture made in a harbour consists of white balloons jammed between the rungs of a stairway and gradually freed by the rising tide. The sculpture part, of course, is temporal, consisting in the slow liberation of the balloons. Signer's work is all about observation, about producing a specific temporality for each event.

This event may also consist in a specific movement. In 100 fois autour d'un pilier, for example, he cycles around a pillar one hundred times, reeling out a ribbon fixed to the bicycle rack. This work verging on the ridiculous is paradigmatic. For Mon voyage au Creux de l'Enfer (1992), he travelled the 500 miles distance from his home to the art centre in Thiers on a Piaggio delivery tricycle. As part of the exhibition at the Creux de l'Enfer, where Signer produced one of his explosions, the Piaggio bore witness to the artist's slow journey, during which he was able to "discover the landscape, to see the irregularities of the road." Of his work, Signer advises: "You have to look at the whole picture, as you do with people."

HOCKER MIT BALLON, 1981 ;

2 photographies couleur, série de quatre, 24 x 36 cm chaque ;
photo : Ernst Schär ; éd. 1/10 ; collection Ruedi Bechtler, Herrliberg ;
courtesy Art : Concept, Paris.

LE PRINTEMPS DE CAHORS 1999 ✦ EXTRAORDINAIRE ✦ INSIDE ✦ ROMAN SIGNER ✦ CE OUTSIDE P. 116





Roman Signer, STIEFEL (boots), 1995, photograph: Stefan Rohner

Roman Signer's performance at the Swiss Institute during the opening of his first one-person exhibition in New York was called *I WAS HERE* and lasted about three minutes. Wearing his notorious black rubber boots (which in other works become grotesquely animated objects on their own) Signer entered the room carrying before him a flat box with a black ink pad inside, almost like a liturgical tray. He proceeded to a thick rope hanging from the ceiling near the center of the gallery, placed the box on the floor, and wiped his feet on the ink pad, as on a doormat. He jumped onto the rope, climbed up to the top, dipped his head down, swung his feet up, and stamped two black footprints onto the white ceiling. Righting himself, he slid down the rope and landed on the floor (not before two gallery employees had assiduously put down a few newspapers), got out of the boots, and exited the room in socks.

There was something very ceremonial about this short, peculiar act but also something exceedingly normal—as if it were a simple every day move, like hanging a towel on a towel holder. One can, in fact, find such a combination of the ritualistic and the casual throughout Signer's works, be they his actions before an audience or those events without spectators that he devises in his studio or in the surroundings of his hometown St. Gallen, Switzerland, which are documented in videos, Super-8 films, or photographs.

The black footprints on the ceiling were not a demonstrative, attention-begging sign, but rather an act of making a discreet mark, perhaps the mirror image of a trace that would be overlooked on the floor. Besides its subtle humor, the performance also seemed to laconically comment on the often cursory ways that we enter exhibitions and quickly perceive things, consume them, and exit in a matter of minutes. The remainings of *I WAS HERE*—the dangling rope, the ink pad in a box on the floor, and the footprints—were left as a sculpture from which one could deduce the action.

Most of the situations created by Signer, or objects transformed by him, appear in the form of sculptures in which the process of "slow, medium or fast changes" (as Signer distinguishes them) is inscribed. These so-called "action/sculptures" can result from precisely calculated explosions, flame and smoke development, floods and instantaneous jets of water, or other manipulations of natural forces, and they frequently include Signer's own presence. They thoroughly oppose our ingrained notions of functionalism and efficiency, and this is one reason why they can have such a bewitching and cathartic effect. Everyday objects like chairs, barrels, bicycles, headgear or rubber boots reveal an unexpected, rebellious potential and act with magical obstinacy, while water, fire, and wind assume bizarre tasks. Relations to Fluxus and Endurance-Performances can be found in his works as well as aspects of Conceptual Sculpture and even Land Art; his reduced and clear esthetics also point to the influence of Minimalism. In any event, Signer's highly individual vocabulary and fierce commitment to the phenomenon of transformation have made him one of the most influential artists in Europe.

Signer is mainly known as the "explosion artist". This exhibition with photographs and videos documenting actions from the last twenty years (selected by the artist himself) included a number of works with explosives, but it also showed that the range of his undertakings is considerably wider. There is an interesting parallel between the medium of photography and Signer's events, for the triggering of the latter often takes no longer than releasing the shutter of a camera. Several of the works here only needed a single photograph to convey the measured drama of the situation, in images that were both spare and poetic. In *ROCKET* (1978) a knife-sharp ray of fire shoots horizontally between tree trunks and cuts the perfect winter woods in half without showing a beginning or an end. In *PILLOW WITH SPIRITS AND CANDLE* (1983) a burning candle sits peacefully on a plastic pillow filled with gasoline—one of Signer's precarious settings that's filled with a palpable tension.

Many of Signer's actions have a dreamlike quality, things are out of plumb, magic and alchemy seem to come into play. The soundlessness of the scenes brings them all the more close to dream images (or nightmares, as with an action documented in blurry photographs that show Signer, seemingly drowning, submerged in ice up to his chest). In *BOOTS* (1995) a pair of empty rubber boots with strong cables connected to them put on an odd and ghostly dance. At first they're properly resting on a small wooden pedestal, but then they fling themselves more and more wildly and violently into the room, as if possessed by a spirit suddenly gone mad. It is fascinating how well the sequence of five still photographs expresses both the aggressive and playful dynamics of the motions. A lot of Signer's inspiration is drawn from his childhood in Appenzell, Switzerland, and the traditional peasant life there with its local myths, fairy tales, and superstitions.

In *BEDSIDE-TABLE* (1994) one sees a clumsy, brown '50s bedside-table hunched beside the bed(!) of a river. In the next photo, the furniture almost passionately implodes (not without a masochistic inner glow) while the third scene shows its heaped-up skeleton enveloped in fluffy smoke clouds. These images are of such hypnotic power that one wants to laugh out loud and bless the unfortunate table at the same time. To blow up this symbol of peacefulness and relaxation (and the most likely of all furniture to contain the Bible) suggests a rebellion against *die Bergesruh* (mountain quietude) and the unavoidable cuckoo of the cuckoo clock. Switzerland is not a country that you'd immediately associate with rockets, detonations, or wars, but Signer's works have in many respects indicated deposits of explosive power in the mountain idyll. Indeed, some of them take on an added relevance in light of the disturbing news that's recently come out concerning how Swiss neutrality was not nearly so benign during World War II, in terms of the holocaust. It's also interesting to note that Signer's great-grandfather owned a small match-factory which exploded twice and burned down, that his grandfather sold hammers, clothes, and gun-powder in his shop, and that Signer grew up with

ghosts and invisible forces as real enrichments of his childhood. In practicing destruction as a liberating and creative act, Signer asks substantial questions of his own country, while he also embraces elemental experiences in his personal biography.

With other works, an inveighing against tradition is more directly expressed. In *CHRISTMAS* (1993), a sequence of six photographs, one sees Signer buying a Christmas tree (he and the salesman slink around a corner in the nursery as if they were conspirators in a crime movie). Carrying the fir, which is handily squeezed into a cover, under his arm, he walks across a tunnel-like bridge, presumably on his way home. Suddenly Signer hurls the tree (which, thanks to its wrapping, is well suited to fly) like a spear over the railing into the depths, while he appears to let out a maniacal roar. The last two pictures are like a concise, slow-motion glimpse of the tree in its inexorable fall.

One of the high points of the exhibition was a wonderfully cheerful, Chaplinesque, slapstick video titled *HAT* (1997). In front of a building's wall there's a water-filled bucket covered by a black hat, and a small wooden construction connected to some kind of primer (Signer uses explosives not at all as agents of destruction only). From the third floor of the house, he opens a window and drops a stone onto the wood, whereupon the hat leaps up to the window, at which point Signer bends far outside in order to catch it. This experiment, lasting only a matter of seconds, is not immediately successful and is repeated several times—in the video in ritualistic and mesmerizing slow-motion. Finally, the window opens again, the hat shoots upwards, Signer, quick as lightning, grabs it, and, looking very contented, puts it hastily on his head. You then see his silhouette as he stands motionless, seemingly for ages, at the window in the darkened room, while simply looking outside.

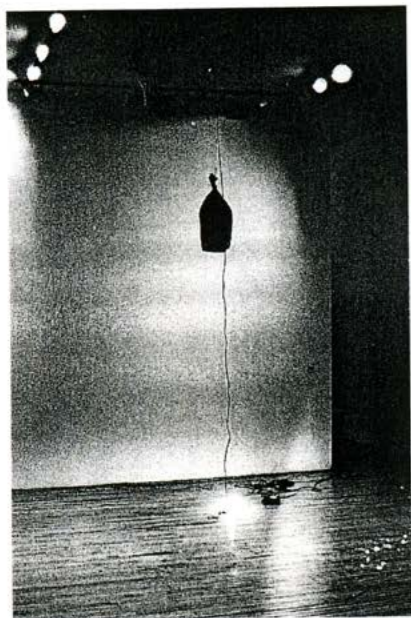
There is probably no more awkward way of putting on a hat, as there are far less arduous ways of leaving a footprint somewhere. Signer's audacious and whimsical works erupt notions of proper, practical behavior, while they leave you spellbound and enthralled (as well as perfectly entertained). Quite casually, he lures us into a territory where the most simple and easy-to-ignore-objects and acts are still sources for discovery, where time is not money, where destruction releases creative power, where the daredevil, the oddball, the charlatan, the fool is, once again, the wise.

Sabine Russ
Brooklyn, New York
1997

Translated from the German by Sabine Russ and Gregory Volk.

Re: Learning Signer

"The anti-art impulse, the will to destroy, like revolution, is generally a fine thing—but this isn't it."
BERNHARD MARKE



ROMAN SIGNER, SCULPTURE MADE BY TELEPHONE, 1990.

COLIN DE LAND is the director of American Fine Arts, Co. in New York City.

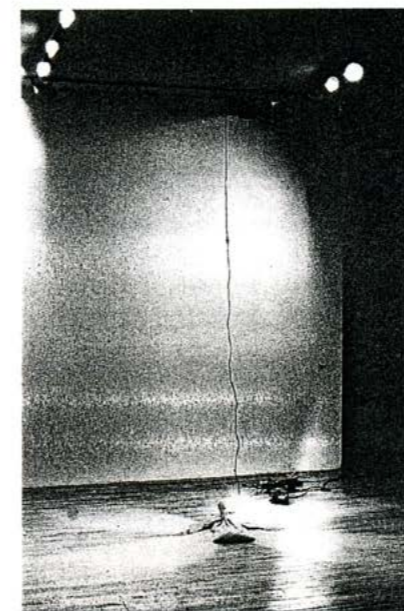
SCULPTURE MADE BY TELEPHONE: "I WILL CALL AMERICAN FINE ARTS, CO. ON WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 17TH, 1990. AT 2:00 PM FROM SWITZERLAND, AND AT THAT TIME THE SAND BAG WILL FALL TO THE GROUND AND BURST." AT 1:30 SOME PEOPLE BEGAN TO COLLECT IN THE FRONT ROOM AT 40 WOOSTER STREET. THEY REGARDED FOR A PERIOD OF TIME A 50 LB. SAND BAG HANGING FROM THE CEILING BY A PIECE OF NYLON ROPE. ON THE FLOOR WAS AN ANSWERING MACHINE, A LIGHT BULB, AND AN EXTENSION CORD GOING TO A SOLDERING IRON WHICH WAS ATTACHED TO THE ROPE AT THE CEILING. AT 2:00 P.M., THE PHONE RANG. THE LIGHT BULB WENT ON, ROMAN SIGNER INTRODUCED HIMSELF OVER THE ANSWERING MACHINE, AND THE SAND BAG FELL 10 FEET TO THE FLOOR.

Someone said something about a Swiss guy who was blowing himself up in the Alps. That he wasn't a young guy, and had been sort of doing it for years. The sense was that whatever it was, it was beyond Swiss nationality, and a direct rejection, if not transcendence, of the normative codes of artistic valuation and exchange. The promise that this was something against something—against something like the totalitarian demand for the perpetual play of the consumer-friendly game of conventional manners.

NOT MÜESLI COWBOY

With some qualification, Signer is a sculptor in the classical sense. Despite what might be misconstrued as sensationalistic picnic theater with homicidal trajectories, his is in fact a systematic investigation that culminates in the mastery of a variety of tools and forces, resulting in a deliberate modeling of material—like chisel to marble, motor to machine, dynamite to tabletop. There can be subtleties so pronounced as to seem deliberately constructed to be missed: This is the crux of Signer's contrivances. His events contain the illusion of elemental sim-

"When you're driving a car at 80 mph, you're not really driving it, you're aiming it."
DRIVING MANUAL,
NYC DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES



plicity—an object falls, water spills, paper flies, and so on—but they are the disproportionately simple results of detailed and elaborate organization. Balletic choreography in advance of a broken arm.

ROMAN SIGNER'S REFLEXIVE MICRO-SPECTACLE

The Signer event breaks down to unit of process: *aktion/skulptur*. A bomb, a detonation, a sequence of explosions: something goes off and when the mushroom cloud clears—voilà, material at rest, not as performative residue but as sculpture hovering between abstraction and *schlachtbild* narrative. This *aktion/skulptur* presents spectacle at its lowest frequency. A rocket shoots off; in its wake an umbrella opens. The rocket is a homespun special effect. Signer's more complex sequences of explosions or other effects are equally homespun; the more elaborate they are the more the impact heightens around the nonevent. In its clarity of articulation and origins of logic, however, *aktion/skulptur* is the transformation of sideshow into art.

The control of forces directed to productive ends characterizes the industrializing impulse of humankind. The reflexivity of Signer's events turns particularly on this issue of productive ends. For Signer the artist, this disciplined construction of nonevent is productive artistic form; but the form—complex representation of disciplined machinations in the service of absurdity—is commentary (if not critique) on the dogged insistence on appropriateness and practicality in contemporary life.

The Signer project is a claim against spectacle with a capital S or, more particularly, the economy of spectacle. Why else would a person direct all his years of education and intellectual development to the perfecting of a complicated form of absurdity which, for the most part, occurs exclusively in Berkeley's empirical forest and seems designed to thwart in every way any of the so-called benefits to the spectacle producer?

NOT ALPINE ANARCHIST

Anyone taking the time to review the contents of the catalog production around the work of Roman Signer is likely to be left with the solid conviction that here is a world-class artist. Not a remotely located naïf but rather the quintessence of regionally secure, teleological self-development aimed directly at the often rightly discredited notion of mastery. Barring material and temporal stability, this is the hyperarticulated refinement of a history of art problematics: from the precision and mechanical perversity of Tinguely to the humor, levity and elegance of Calder, with clear cognizance of Kaprow, Fluxus and Land Art. Signer is without qualification a virtuoso of complex simplicity, irony, and absurdity: slapstick at the level of the sublime.

A wooden beam floats down the Rhine Valley Canal. Its length spans nearly the full width of the canal. It collides with a tripod, placed in the middle of the canal, to which an underwater camera is attached.

Rupture or Continuity

The weight of the beam causes the tripod to topple over onto the canal bed. During the event the following series of photographs are taken automatically at regular intervals by the camera attached to the tripod.

1)

The instant before the beam and the tripod collide: The image is taken close to the surface of the water, which is as white as the glare of the sky and as blue-black as the surrounding trees; the beam appears in the foreground. The perspective of the canal is enhanced by a row of trees on each bank. The trees are black in their shadow and the grass-covered banks stretch green to bluish towards the horizon. There are a few drops of water on the lens.

2)

As the tripod and camera tip over: The vertical rhythm of the black tree trunks is revealed by the abstract nature of the image taken in motion, out of focus, black, blue and green, against the contrast of the white sky.

3)

Underwater: The image shows the density of the water, a particular dim green and yellow hue, the naturally filtered light revealing the still obscurity of the canal bed.

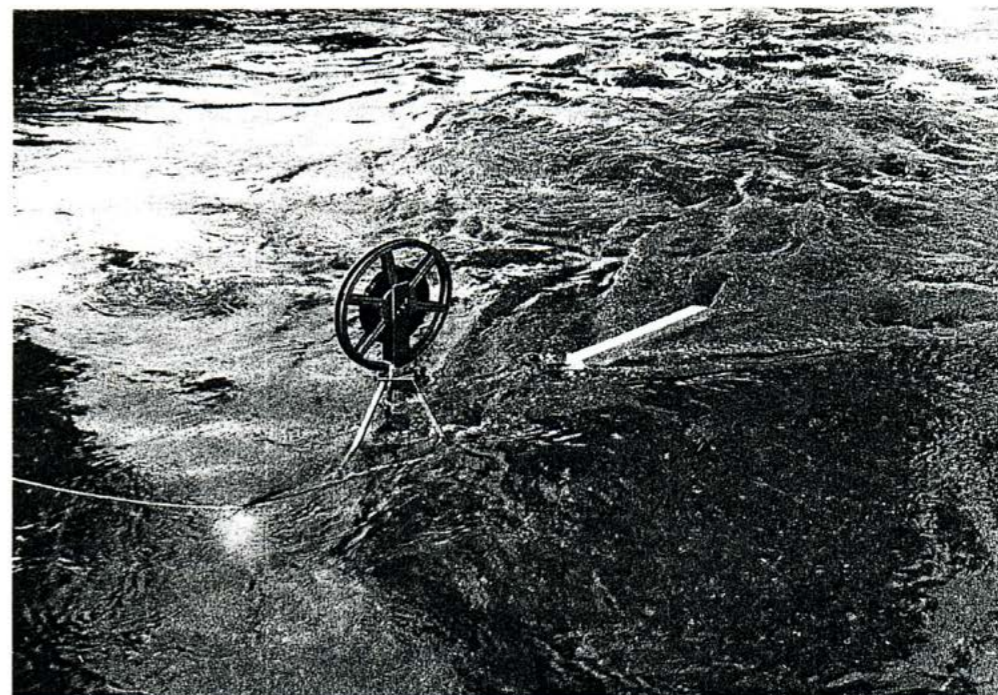
PIA VIEWING is an art historian and curator who lives in Rennes, France.

Here, there, close by or further away, FILM TAKE (1985) comes to a "natural" ending. A natural ending like its beginning. The wooden beam floats further down, its trajectory influenced by diverse currents. The tripod and camera disappear; sunk, they witness both the event itself and the state of things. The physical state, indeterminable, displays the verb: the action past, present, and future. The actual event: the transfer of energies creates a rupture, a break in the fluidity of experience. Time acknowledges change.

Change signifies evolution towards and away from, not only the experience in itself, but also the forming and deforming, the appearance and disappearance: part of a continuous motion. Here, as with other works by Roman Signer, motion is punctuated and displayed, even though at some point the sculpture is silent, still.

During FILM TAKE the photographs taken by the camera constitute elements of the work itself. These photographs are therefore a remaining part of the work, while all other elements no longer exist after the completion of the event. The work is also recorded by an "external" video camera. The viewer is faced with an artwork which has not been totally captured or which cannot be entirely transgressed. The photographs show fragments of the event and the video

ROMAN SIGNER, FILMROLLE IM FLUSS, 1984 / FILM SPOOL IN A RIVER.



shows the continuity; however, each event is unique and the existing traces of the events reflect the necessity and the meaning of its ephemerality. The work's entirety may only be appreciated through reflection, and reflection is partial in each case. "Of course, the familiar experience of seeing often seems to lead to possession; in seeing something we generally have the impression of gaining something. But the modality of the visible becomes ineluctable—in other words destined to the matter of being—when to see is to feel that something ineluctable escapes us, moreover: when to see is to lose."¹⁾

The work exists in the making and particularly at the point of rupture between mobility and immobility, as Signer himself declares, "I consider my events to be transforming sculptures. Spectators may be present while the event takes place. However, I can also make an event without any audience being present and only exhibit the result. In fact the initial

sculpture is exhibited in another form." This sculpture, FILM TAKE, is one of a series of events/sculptures composed of similar materials which manifest variation and mobility. The displacement and interaction of the components which the artist activates in order to form a work that takes place during a certain lapse of time, is unique in its realness and in the impossibility of its conservation. It is this form that is essential and singular to the character of Signer's work because the making or the changing is not literally illustrated in/by the work but is an enduring force present in the work, a force intrinsic to universal existence.

Temporary yet infinite, specific yet universal, such notions may describe the disturbing, basic truths that Signer's oeuvre portrays through a humorous precariousness that is so close to inventive curiosity.

1) Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1992), p.14.

Roman Signer's

Perhaps I have a different concept of sculpture.

Sculptural

It's one that has developed in the course of my actions. I've always thought of myself as a sculptor.

Events

The problems are always related to space, to events in space, to temporal processes. Roman Signer¹⁾

A modern-day knight in a protective suit and a visored helmet ignites a fuse with one foot, while bending deep over a metal barrel. A violent explosion ensues; a fountain of white paint shoots up into the air, spattering helmet and suit and obstructing the figure's vision. An enigmatic, absurd ritual? A destructive blinding of the self? What we have here is a description of one of Roman Signer's actions.

PORTRAIT GALLERY (1993) is the title of a work that comprises a row of four barrels. The exploded paint has long since dried up. Framed, black-and-white photographs on the wall are portraits of the artist taken after each explosion. The remains of the action have solidified into an enduring sculpture, the playful act of the moment has been frozen into a frightening image, the portrait has been robbed of

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its face. A vehement gesture transforms the idea of a moth-eaten gallery of ancestral portraits into an urgent "monument of the moment," into a contemporary metaphor.

Action and sculpture, dynamics and stasis in Roman Signer's oeuvre do not oppose each other but are rather different states of the same structure. It is a structure that displays the potential of future, energetic change; it is transformation as transient shape; it is detritus as traces of past events. The sculptural form in Signer's oeuvre, the static object in space, is expanded—liquefied, as it were—to include the dimension of time. The visualization of process is a defining element in a concept of sculpture that recalls the artistic positions of the sixties and seventies. The mutually blurred boundaries of time and space and the dematerialization of the artwork into temporal structures, characteristic of these traditions, profoundly changed the entire organization of

ROMAN SIGNER, WASSERSÄULE, 1976 / WATER COLUMN.

(PHOTO: EMIL GRUBENMANN)



Roman Signer

sculpture. Roman Signer has given them an equally profound and contemporary impact by defining not only the static object but also the moment itself as a sculptural process.

Roman Signer's oeuvre in the early seventies began with works that visualize natural phenomena with near-scientific precision. His artistic research into fundamental principles of plastic art was devoted to the nature of immanent forces, to the potential energy inherent in the elements of our environment—in sand, stones, or water. Thus, the narrow metal bases with plastic funnels in RAIN FIELD (1975) collect the precipitation until the rising water gradually displaces the funnels and the wooden floats. Seen outdoors, this work acquires the aspect of a playful measuring device that makes visible the changes in natural forces over the course of time. Natural forces—in this case, the rain—are not reduced to standardized forms of measurement or to abstract vectors of energy but are instead manifested in their unmistakably physical materiality. In the museum space, these same processes are precisely perceptible as potential manifestations of an experimental artistic construct. In addition to works which expand the dimension of time, Signer also produced structures of the moment with the help of fuses or explosions, as in SMOKE CROSS (1975) or WATER COLUMN (1976). Common to these early works is the explicitly restrictive choice of materials and objects used over and over again—water, sand, stone, balloons, tables, stools, barrels, and so on—as well as the visualization of potential energies. These elements are essential to the evolution of Signer's work. Nature is both his material and his partner in the process of creation: "I leave many of my objects half finished so that nature can do the rest, so that it flows somehow into the work and becomes manifest. (...) I play in and with nature."

Signer has kept a record of all his ephemeral sculptures on celluloid or tape; these records now form a substantial, self-contained branch of his oeuvre.²⁾ What started out as the filmed documentation of time-space structures developed in the early eighties into independent artistic acts and actions in which the artist himself appears as the actor. He subjects himself directly to the natural forces unleashed

by his actions. This logical move "stage center" heightens the significance of the processual aspect of his work in contrast to the other, nonprocessual states of his pieces. In these actions—Signer calls them "events"—potential is compressed into the moment of explosion, the past coagulates in the split second, playfulness becomes existential, and life is manifested in confrontation with the elemental thrust of natural forces. The challenge of violent forces, the direct encounter with danger has been diagnosed by the artist himself as being "almost like an addiction. I have to undergo these experiences, I have to go through the tunnel, through the danger, through the eye of the needle."

Direct exposure to danger in such actions compounded by concrete experiences, such as the death of a friend while the two were kayaking together, lent an intense focus and an existential charge to Signer's oeuvre in the early eighties. This is most explicit in the extensive group of kayak pieces, sculptural metaphors for life's journey and death, but also in the PORTRAIT GALLERY and in one of Signer's key works, ACTION WITH A FUSE (1989). This latter, a quiet time-space sculpture, is not only a dramatic embodiment of the process of departure; it is also Signer's own metaphorical leave-taking from his hometown and the past, following the death of his mother.³⁾

Roman Signer's oeuvre—his precise choice of objects charged with personal experience, his sculptures that explode the dimensions of space and time—combines current plastic thinking and subjective living. It emerges at the interface between contemporary sculpture and existential token, uniting them in binding metaphors, in compelling emblems of entangled human life at the end of the twentieth century.

(Translation: Catherine Schelbert)

1) All quotes are from the artist's conversation with Lutz Titel in: *Treffpunkt Bodensee* (ex. cat.), Städt. Bodensee Museum, Friedrichshafen, 1984, pp. 83–93.

2) In addition to sculpture, actions, and film, Roman Signer has also produced an oeuvre of drawings. Cf. Konrad Bitterli, "Grundlagen skulpturalen Denkens" in: *Roman Signer Skulptur* (ex. cat.), Kunstmuseum St. Gall, 1993, pp. 36–60. This catalogue also contains a complete listing of Signer's oeuvre through 1993.

3) For a detailed description of this piece, see Max Wechsler's article in this issue, p. 147.

ACTION WITH A FUSE: Modifying the Denotation of Detonation

When speaking about Roman Signer's work, the talk generally turns to its spectacular and explosive "fast changes." It is as if our deep-seated, almost archetypal fascination with sensations of this kind has obscured a more contemplative perception of space, of prolonged temporal sequences or the many moments of silence in some of his other sculptural works. I am thinking, for example, of various installations that involve regularly dripping water or steadily trickling sand, since—aside from the unmistakable intent of their artistic goals—they may also be seen to represent a more or less accentuated continuous flow of time. But also of relevance in this connection is the aspect of inertia, of potential energy, as manifested in elastic ropes stretched taut, in charges of explosive, or in the height of fall. A sense of accentuated time is, of course, also intrinsic to the moments of tension and release before and after the above-mentioned "fast changes," for they are in effect the essence of the fulminant danger of Signer's events and actions.

MAX WECHSLER is an art critic and lecturer at the School of Art and Design in Lucerne.

A very special manifestation of the more serene sculptures invoked here is to be found in the legendary ACTION WITH A FUSE, an undertaking of exceptional spatial and temporal dimensions. On September 11, 1989 at 4:00 p. m., Roman Signer launched an event at the railroad station in Appenzell by lighting a small cone-shaped heap of black powder on a table, which in turn ignited a fuse and thus set in motion a spark, perceptible only as a thin wisp of smoke and a softly sizzling sound, which was to burn its uninterrupted way for twelve and a half miles along the tracks of the Gais Railroad until reaching the St. Gall station thirty-five days later on October 15 at four minutes past noon, and there bringing this time-space sculpture to a close by igniting the final cone of black powder. Over two hundred brief but bright flashes of flame articulated the long journey between the flaring beacons of overture and finale, a rhythmic sequence of near-musical breaks underscoring this protraction of time and space. The artist had no conscious musical intent; the composition of the rhythm was given by the materials. The fuse was laid out in commercially available, 100-meter lengths (328 feet), joined at the ends by small, three-cham-



ROMAN SIGNER, ZEIT, 1977 / TIME.



bered metal boxes. As each stretch of fuse burned out, it ignited a little heap of black powder in the middle chamber of the box, thereby setting fire to the following stretch of fuse and sending the spark off on the next leg of its journey.

These defined and delimited sections of the long journey also represented experienced units of time, as they divided the overall distance into lengths of about four hours. And this aspect of time—the subject, incidentally, of an earlier work, TIME (1977), in which a fuse laid in a spiral burned down from outside in—is not only of great significance in terms of its musical impact but also as regards the actual execution of the piece. Through the process of laying out the fuse, connecting the sections, and later collecting the burnt-out lengths again, Signer and his helpers experienced this action as a wondrously protracted event, as a measured shift in time and space governed completely by the presence of the tiny bit of fire propelled by the powder in the innermost core of the fuse. On the fringes of regular rail traffic and the hectic locomotion on the expressway, always hard by and sometimes even crossed by the fuse, the progress of the spark produced such an intense perception of slowness that, in a reversal of values, people sometimes even experienced it as aggression.

With this fuse, Roman Signer placed a subtle sculpture of duration in the landscape, which merged the concepts of distance and time in the unbroken presence of that ceaselessly propelled spark. Yet one might also read the "fuse," commonly associated with explosive destruction, as a kind of drawing instrument with which the artist inscribed something like a visualization of time, in turn expanding our perception of space in the reality of the circuitous foothills of the Alps between Appenzell and St. Gall—a route that passes stations with such suggestive names as *Hirschberg* (Stag Mountain), *Sammelplatz* (Collecting Point), *Steigbach* (Steep Brook), or *Lustmühle* (Pleasure Mill). But there is also a personal twist to this sculpture: The spark traveled from the artist's place of birth to his present home, a fact that has a bearing primarily on the artist's motivation and less so on the interpretation of the piece. To wit: Roman Signer is entertaining visions of Calais—Dover. (Translation: Catherine Schelbert)

SCULPTURAL LABORATORY EXPERIMENTS

THE METHOD IN ROMAN SIGNER'S PYROTECHNIC MADNESS

Oh, the things we did as children in order to explore the world! We dropped stones and pine cones from a bridge—which object hits the ground first? We set fire to dry meadows next to the railroad tracks—how do ants and grasshoppers react to mortal danger? We made hot air balloons and watched them soar—what ever makes hot air lighter than cold?

Our knowledge of the natural sciences was rudimentary, our approach unencumbered and naive, our curiosity unbounded. And as often as not our experiments failed miserably. But we wanted to gather our own empirical evidence; we wanted to make our own personal discovery of connections regardless of the physical and chemical ground prepared by centuries of scientific research; we wanted to explore cause and effect by ourselves and acquire our own insight into the mysteries of the universe.

CHRISTOPH DOSWALD is an art critic and free-lance curator who lives in Baden, Switzerland.

In Roman Signer's sculptural pieces there lurks a similar spirit of exploration that puts to the test all over again assumptions long taken for granted as givens by a positivistic society. To him, the self-evidence of scientific logic is an artistic challenge and an opportunity to engage in field studies with an aesthetic actionist bias. Fireworks send ordinary kitchen tables flying through the air; wooden crates dropped off bridges burst into a thousand fragments on impact. The artist races a rocket or explodes a charge of dynamite in the water of an old gravel pit; he transforms sand cones into craters by detonating explosives or fills a balloon with gas under the ice of a frozen pond until the buoyancy of the fragile rubber membrane cracks the ice.

Signer follows a strict procedure in carrying out his sculptural laboratory experiments. The tests are divided into three aggregate states—before, during, and after the action—which are meticulously documented through photography, video, and film. The documents themselves become works because, on one hand, the sense of process inherent in his sculptural experiments can only be recorded chronologically and, on the other, the original composition of the piece self-destructs once the irreversible process sets in. The fact that Signer logs his experiments, always listing the materials used, the place of execution, the forces involved, and the length of the action, is also indicative of his protoscientific approach. His procedure is basically indistinguishable from that fol-

lowed in the conventional laboratories of research institutes, the only difference being that Signer leaves it up to the viewer to evaluate the results. Reception and interpretation are the responsibility of the scientist and not of the artist.

No matter how distinctive each of Signer's sculptural laboratory experiments may be, he has characteristically worked with the same clearly defined vocabulary of materials in untold variations for the past twenty years: water, sand, air, and explosives are the greatest constants. Kayak, elevator, chair, and table also make regular appearances. Finally, unlike the analytical, detached attitude of the scientist, the artist's own person is involved and is therefore a constitutive part of the experiments. Sometimes he uses visitors as his guinea pigs, putting them at the service of his experiments. He has, for instance, installed time bombs in his exhibitions without informing the public when they will go off. The uncertainty, the fear and respect with which visitors treat the work is not merely a question of reception: When physical distance is maintained, the existential reaction of visitors becomes a constitutive part of the work's own aura.

Signer's method in this context might, of course, also be read as an astute appropriation of scientific methodologies. But his sculptural laboratory experiments are neither critical nor hostile in attitude. His activities pursue no functional goals, nor are they intended to emerge as a production process. And finally, the experiments, although meticulously prepared and executed, rarely take place behind closed doors; the artist is oblivious to patent infringements or oaths of secrecy. His works are inspired by an attitude whose overriding trait is an unquenchable personal curiosity. Only secondarily do the sculptural laboratory experiments target an art public, where their impact on the viewer's mechanics of perception is all the more forceful.

Should one have to define the motives behind Signer's research, the most conspicuous would be his preference for untried experience, his interest in the paradoxical, his obsession with allusion, and above all, his devotion to energetic processes. He has a way of taking things literally and subjecting them to conceptual hyperbole; their significance often acquires a

humorous twist through the novelty of his gaze. By decontextualizing the vocabulary of his works, he comes up with inventive solutions. The kayak is a sled or a projectile; tables are turned into flying objects but also function conventionally as static supports. The form, function, and reception of the most ordinary items must reassert themselves in Signer's laboratory experiments, just as viewers are in turn forced to reassess supposedly proven patterns of perception and to call into question once again the essence of things, of technology, and of nature.

(Translation: Catherine Schelbert)

ROMAN SIGNER, KAJAK MIT GUMMISEIL, 1984 /
KAYAK WITH ELASTIC ROPE. (PHOTO: PETER LICHTI)



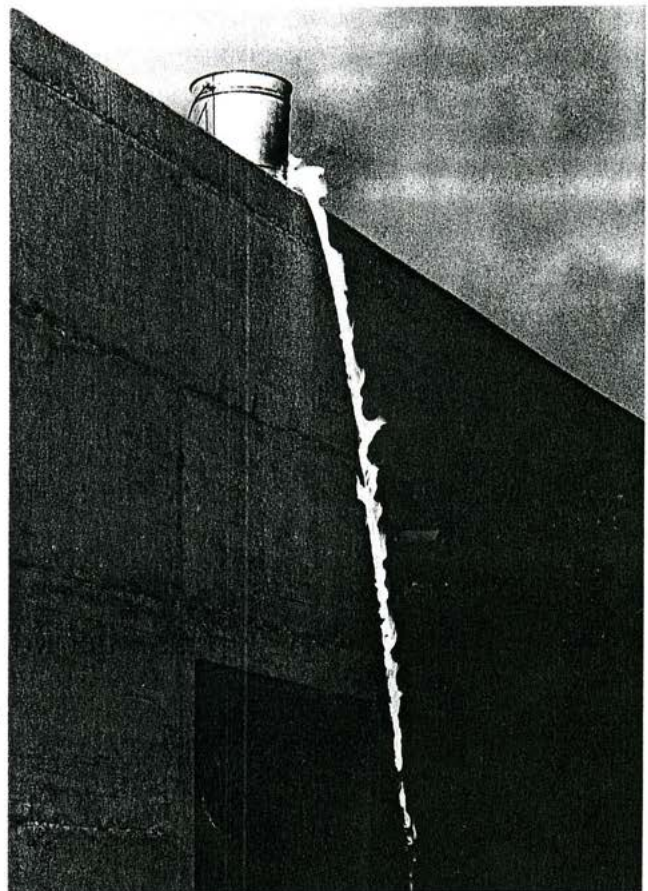
ROMAN SIGNER— PROMETHEUS'S DELAY

ROMAN SIGNER, *EIMER MIT BENZIN*, 1984 /
BUCKET WITH FUEL. (PHOTOS: PETER LIECHTI)

In 1981, Roman Signer put on a performance entitled RACE near St. Gall. Having stretched a cable in the air between two trees in the middle of a meadow, the artist attached a rocket to it which he then lit. Wearing a red plastic helmet that clashed with the bucolic landscape, he dashed under the flying rocket: one saw, from behind, the artist-sprinter running off, desperately struggling at a race that was lost from the start. And indeed he did lose, finishing far behind the projectile. He is late with regard to the work. Let us recall that in a famous note included in *LA BOÎTE VERTE* (The Green Box, 1934), Marcel Duchamp suggested using the word "delay" in the place of "artwork" or "painting." Thus the performance of Roman Signer would be simply, to paraphrase the author of *LE GRAND VERRE*, a delay in acts—the same way one speaks of a poem in prose or a silver spittoon.

The image, moreover, is also reminiscent of the old happy endings in movies, though here the happy ending is paradoxically compromised by its own failure. For what is being staged on this Swiss lawn is some kind of derisory remake of the Promethean

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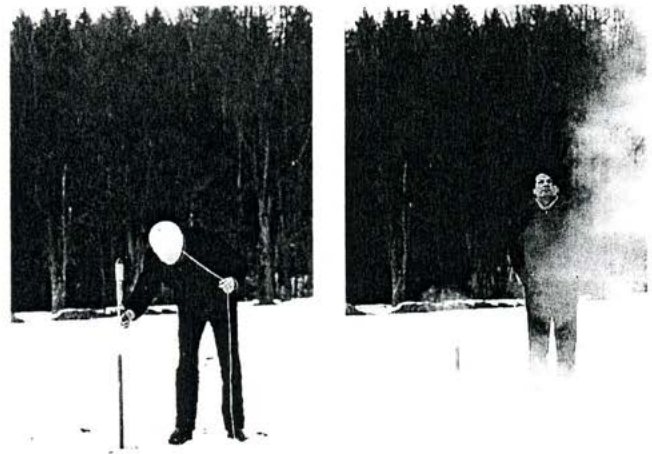


tragedy. Often, too often perhaps, the figure of Prometheus has been used to define the position of the artist in modern human History—as stealer of fire. Prometheus is above all a precursor of Christ, a pre-Christian figure of sacrifice suffered for the love of the human race: a savior. But the mythological version favored by Roman Signer is that of a savior incapable of saving, chasing after the fire that he is supposed to give to humanity, without ever being able to catch up to it. A little Sisyphian Christ running late, condemned to this lateness, a delay that saves him at once from all moralism and all academicism. His is an ironic, even cynical, point of view, which echoes the utterance of Gioran: "Society: an inferno of saviors!"

A collection of catastrophes with necessarily imperfect results: This fairly well sums up the performances that the artist has realized since 1974, which he calls FAST CHANGES, a series of experiments within the framework of which he develops an aesthetics of the accidental, a poetry at once festive and deceptive.

I know of nothing more convincing than these works that choose fiasco, not so much as an aesthetic ambition, but as a poetic *raison d'être*. The important thing being, in this case, not that the artist lose or fail, but that he acquiesce to the idea of not achieving perfection. The works of Roman Signer tend, indeed, toward imperfection, aiming at the aleatory nature of games, favoring combustion over construction, relegating to heaviness and the forces of mechanics the concern for recreating in ephemeral fashion a few forms or ghosts of forms in space. The imperfection at stake in RACE—vital and serene and devoid of any nihilistic or masochistic connotations—is closely related to that which Takeno Jōō and Sen no Rikyū introduced in the sixteenth century into the Tea Ceremony, which was at its apogee at the time. According to them, the ceremony was intended to prove that spiritual richness can be achieved not through luxury and perfection, but through simplicity and imperfection. At that time, Chinese woods were being replaced by Korean woods and by pottery in the Hakeme, Ido, and Komogai styles of the Yi period, objects less precious in appearance, with imprecise roundings, rougher forms, less regular col-

ROMAN SIGNER, ZIPPELMÜTZE MIT RAKETE, 1983 /
KNITTED CAP WITH ROCKET. (PHOTO: ERNST SCHAR)



ors. It was with such unpretentious objects that the *shanyu* of the Wabi style, marked by simplicity and serenity—*wabi-cha*—was established and eventually achieved its definitive form. It's an imperfection very similar to that which Jean Cassou saw in the work of Ramon Gomez de la Serna. "We might be tempted," he wrote, "to call the work of Ramon a catastrophe, if we were unable to imagine that one might wish to attempt something other than what appears to us to be the highest goal of art: order, order—that's the only word that comes to our lips."

Order, order, indeed: the "return to order" is once again the order of the day, the program of the reactionary waves crashing down on France since the Right's return to power. In the artistic sphere it has been encouraged by the manifesto-exhibition of Jean Clair at the centenary celebration of the Venice Biennale; in the social sphere by the new questioning of the right to abortion; in the literary sphere by the revival, in the press, forty years after the fact, of the trial of the New Novel, and so on.

It is in such a context as this that Roman Signer magnifies his own libertarian virtues. And his RACE, obviously, is not an escape, but on the contrary is much closer to a celebration of the freely lived forms of Immaturity, that immaturity which links him across the century to Gombrowicz, Jarry, Picabia, and Filliou. It is a delay on the road to the "return to order." (Translated from the French by Stephen Sartarelli)