

Exhibition // Fabian KNECHT March 14th - April 25th 2015 opening saturday march 14th

_UNG



FREISETZUNG, 2014, Action, Neue Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin

DAMAGE ACTIONS, a text by Marie de Bruggerolle

A breach in the white cube

Fabian Knecht's *_UNG* exhibition at the Galerie Christophe Gaillard creates a breach in our usual aesthetic experience while addressing humorously the atmosphere of disaster of our time. If today it is all about «damage control», the artist aims at throwing stones in history's windows so that it won't repeat itself.

As we approach the gallery, we can see a backpack laid close to the entrance, as an omen of forgetfulness or a flaw in anti-terrorist regulations. It contains the remains of an action that resulted in the destruction of one of the gallery walls, the debris of which now constitutes the raw material of a brand new whole. One could see this gesture as a common feature to all the presented projects : to destroy to create, to work with what remains, to fetishize the action... **ENTFERNUNG** is the title of this first visible work that immediately raises the question of the crossing from inside to outside, in one radical move. What happens in the street is as important, but doesn't necessarily make an art work.

To dance on our ashes

Remains of stones coming from Hillah (Iraq) or Berlin are also exhibited in the gallery, displayed on a shelf, like relics. Bringing together two moments in history, via objects calling to mind the liberating fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and a murderous suicide attack in 2014 could induce a leveling principle : all action could potentially be artistic, just like to Duchamp «Tout objet était dard» - a play on words between «d'art» (artistic) and «dard» (sting) : «All object was art / sting». However, when the artist walks through New York on an imaginary meridian going from

the city in Irak to the Freedom Tower that filled the gap left by the World Trade Center at Ground Zero, it is as much an artistic gesture as a pilgrimage. Like a penitent covered in ashes, he walks with his face, hair, hands, feet sprinkled with dust from Hillah. The suit he wore as well as a video and a photograph become the traces of the action. A walk through New York, almost 15 years after 9/11, is it a symbolic memory act or a reminder of the indifference to the isolated element ? Indeed, people walking by don't seem to turn around on the ghost wandering amongst them. When we watch Tony Oursler's piece (9/11, 2001), an artist who filmed in length the 2001 terrorist attack and the surrounding life right after the tragedy, we realize that panic wasn't immediate, and that even after the towers were hit the first time, the pedestrian flow continues imperturbably. It is only with the second impact and the beginning of the collapse and smoke cloud, that the crowd starts panicking. Pompei, Herculanium, Nagasaki come to mind... and the artist's figure becomes that of a shadow or a Bûto dancer. The hanged suit calls to mind the rags of the average man's condition, as well as the «Moules Mâliques» in Marcel Duchamp's *Grand Verre* (1923), or Joseph Beuys' felt suit (*Performance Isolation Unit*, 1970) or even Larry Bell's suit covered with metal dust (*You can't clean snof off suede*, 1974), it becomes a sculpture after having been acted. This whole (photograph, video and suit) is entitled **VERACHTUNG**. Should we see it as a hint to Godard's *Le Mépris* (1963), in which the male character never takes off his hat ? It is a veiled reference to Dean Martin's hat in *Some came running*, 1958. The hat, the suit, these are recurring accessories that are here to point out to the spectator that the actor isn't fooled, he knows he's playing a part.

I will burn your museums

To work with what remains, isn't that the everyday lot of a museum? But to create with the smoke coming from a museum, to create a cloud with the illusion of a treasure box? The smoke series coming from the roof of the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, entitled **FREISETZUNG**, consists of sketches, drawings, photographs and a video. A white smoke rises from the building and fades slowly in the surrounding city. The aerial views could make us think of a bomb attack while the video shows us the peculiar attitude of the passers-by, taking pictures with their phone or stopping by the side of the road. The opacity contrasts with the modern glass architecture. From afar, one might think of a fire. The feeling of discomfort arises from the formal associations with both the bombing of European cities during the last World War, and also the use of a form that conjures up gas. Of course we will think of the minimalists' invisible or steam sculptures (Robert Morris, Robert Barry), of the vaporous clouds of the *Grand Verre* Bride, but also certainly of the original use of gas as a weapon of mass destruction during World War I and particularly of what Peter Sloterdijk mentions in *Sphären I - Blasen*. Admittedly Hitler, himself a victim of mustard gas, still allowed for the gas chambers to be conceived.

What kind of smoke is it? White in Berlin but black in Zagreb (**ENTFACHUNG**, 2013). If the first title induces a sense of liberation, the second evokes ignition. We are witnessing something being set in motion, but what? Setting a museum on fire signifies a symbolic act, a renewed modernity in Duchamp's lineage, but with the bite of the one who will throw a stone at the master's window, that of the «fresh widow» or «french window», of the house in Normandy in which the author of *Air de Paris*, 1919 or *Elevage de poussière*, 1920, was born. **ZERBRECHUNG** is a photograph of this sacrilegious act committed by the artist with a stone that is said to come from the Picasso Museum in Paris. Thus the story has come full circle, a Picasso leftover breaking into the eye of the father of art «without turpentine»... A little while beforehand, the artist had committed another artistic crime through a window.

ERHEBUNG, *Komposition Nr. 2* is an unusual «prepared piano». The artist appears in the frame of a window open onto a luxurious garden. He overlooks a workshop in which he directs and then drops a black piano on a white piano, thus reenacting a famous Fluxus action, maybe as a remote tribute to Joseph Beuys whose style of clothing he seems to appreciate.

Could Fabian Knecht be creating himself a character in some kind of self-fiction, a «portrait of the artist as a saboteur»?



WÄHREND ZERBRECHUNG, 2013

Fabian Knecht is a German performance artist. Born in 1980 in Magdeburg, he lives and works in Berlin. Through his art, he pursues a resolute itinerary with no compromise, that endeavors to disconcert, to bring out the unseemly in the monotonous everyday flow, and to erode our society's thinking scheme. He expresses himself through timed and temporary actions he sets in specific places, sometimes with historical meaning, in urban environments or outlying neighborhoods.

The borders between White Cube and living spaces burst, the Museum is no longer a Mausoleum, but turns into a generator. Knecht's hope is that art also represents a means of breaking power, that art can take paths beyond convention. His art can be seen as an obstacle that sharpens our senses, that associates the peremptory statement of the exclamation mark to the socratic question mark, that calls for answers on every question. Art is his way out, a provocative commentary against nothingness, inanity and decadence.

The titles of his actions come from the nominalization of the verb that describes them (-UNG in German). It isn't so much of a futuristic utopia than a liberating restructuring of the present. Knecht's artistic activism doesn't aim at making things better (Groys) but at breaking down the barriers between the living world and the art sphere, at encouraging us to reflect on what we are and what normality could be.

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