

BASEL

Stefan Burger

KUNSTHAUS BASELSTADT

This past February, the Munich factory of Agfa met its downfall in a spectacular but quite deliberate explosion, thanks to the unprofitability of film-based photography. The monument's demolition became an allegory for a vanishing era of analog technology, all the more so because video documentation of its collapse was distributed on digital platforms such as YouTube. Stefan Burger takes this collapse as the topic of his elegant and theatrical installation *Analoges Denkmal* (Analog Monument) (all works 2008). A 16-mm projector plays a looped silent film of this very explosion onto the wall. The explosion is announced fractions of a second before it happens by a flashing signal recorded on the film image, which almost appears to come from the projection apparatus itself, and which unremittably appears to bring down the building. At the same time, the projector's mechanism starts to whirl a promotional umbrella for the competing film brand Ilford and is thus transformed into a moving photographers' kit with flash umbrella. The configuration humorously represents the law of the free market, thanks to which Ilford can profit from Agfa's troubles. But the work can also be read as a wistful homage to the analog era, as a floodlight theatrically frames the composition. This investigation of production and consumption in the system of art forms the linchpin of Burger's work. But his works also take up existential themes, like the fear of collapse, with wit and incisiveness, as evinced in the other two works in this concise exhibition.



Stefan Burger, *Several suggestions on how to behave in front of a wall and one recommendation on how not to behave in front of a wall*, 2008, inkjet print on wall, 10' 10" x 18'.

The subtlety with which Burger explores his ideas is exemplified by the large photograph *Genova-Bocadasselunedì 12 Maggio 1975*, a reenactment of one of André Cadere's intentionally undocumented placements of his painted wooden staffs. Cadere used to set them down unnoticed at gallery openings or in noninstitutional settings as an artistic gesture. Not only has Burger remade the staff and positioned it on the Genovese seafront, he has also filled in the documentary gap with a photograph, which shows the deserted staff leaning on a rock against the sentimental backdrop of a sunset. In this way, Cadere's criticality and radicalism are formally appropriated and a melancholy homage rendered to the logical imperative of his practice (amplified by Cadere's historical lack of recognition). However, this doubling and antithetical restaging raise a quandary about Burger's treatment of institutional critique, of concept and context art. Either Burger recognizes his work's own collapse into escapist mimicry and the manufacture of a laughable substitute, or else the very essence of performance art must lie in its posthumous reproduction, which creates space for new imaginings.

Burger's almost longing approach to the predicament of collapse is also brought to bear on the work *Runaway Sculptor*, which lends its

title to the exhibition. A black-and-white ink-jet print on a wall shows only the site of construction of several concrete sculptures that had been made for an actual exhibition in 2006. The title suggests that the artist, perhaps unable to handle the pressure, has deserted or renounced his work. This scenario of abandonment seems to empathize with those artists who have run away from their work, freely or unwillingly, but in doing so have left behind a telling residue.

—Valérie Knoli

Translated from German by Emily Speers Mears.

MILAN

Michael Fliri

GALLERIA RAFFAELLA CORTESE

An American football player hurls himself against a wall of soft, colored Plasticine, which absorbs the impact—at which point he inevitably falls to the ground. The wall is indented by the blows of his helmet. The stadium is deserted. There is no game under way. The gesture is meaningless, the action futile, all the more so because it is repeated and always produces the same result.

Thus the content of the left-hand screen in Michael Fliri's three-channel video projection *Getting Too Old to Die Young*, 2008. Once this action was concluded, the video on the central screen began, and finally the last one, on the right. The three videos are not connected by a narrative thread but are variations on a theme. In the central video Fliri presents another, equally futile action: A young punk attempts to hook a makeshift anchor to a tree branch. The anchor is connected to a hand-cranked winch, which the young man ties to his waist and turns so that he raises his body up from the ground until it reaches the tree branch. The punk then rocks there, happily. All Fliri's videos are based on this kind of performance and last more or less the duration of the action. The artist himself is the actor or performer. Disguised and unrecognizable, he invents grotesque situations, worlds made up of images and characters he interprets, worlds out of a cartoon. Fliri is not interested in investigating the body. He is not challenging himself seriously—probing his ability to withstand pain or capacity for resistance. He carries out tests, assigning his characters tasks to complete, but these are as mild and innocuous as a child's prank. The football player does not really hurt himself; the punk does not fall from his improvised swing. The actions are often inspired by sports, but what interests Fliri is the mechanical nature of sports movements; he extrapolates gestures or rituals from their context and isolates them until they become empty and ridiculous.

In the third video, the artist wears a bulletproof vest made of beer cans. Someone positioned off-camera shoots at him; the bullets pierce the cans, causing the beer to spill out. Fliri falls to the ground with every hit, then gets up again, soaked and dripping liquid. The faux terrorist is transformed into a walking fountain. Fliri's videos are sketches, half-serious jokes. The actions remain suspended in a void, because

