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Opening Hours
Tue, Thu–Sun 11 – 5pm
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STEFAN BURGER

Runaway Sculptor

Stefan Burger (born in 1977 in Müllheim, Baden/Germany, lives in Zurich) is one of the most promising young regional artists. He has taken part in several "Regionale" exhibitions and group shows, such as "The Art of Failure". Kunsthaus

Stefan Burger, Genova-Boccadasse/lunedi 12 Maggio 1975, 2008

Baselland has now put on the artist's first solo show.

The exhibition title "Runaway Sculptor" suggests two things: Burger started his artistic career with photography (he studied photography at the Zurich University of the Arts), and after acquiring this basic knowledge he is now branching out into other media. His art spans installations, objects, large-format photographs applied directly onto wood or cardboard walls, videos, 16-mm films, as well as performances. The exhibition title may be read as an ironic comment on the media focus of art critique and on its difficulties experienced whenever a particular work doesn't fit into a specific category.

But the title is also a tongue-in-cheek allusion to Polish artist André Cadere, who died in 1978 in Paris, and his Barres de Bois rond. In the early 1970s Cadere developed his concept of mobile wood bars whose cylindrical parts he made, drilled, and painted himself. He connected these individual parts by means of wood dowels, and strung them together according to a color-based "permutation system" devised by himself. As a secret code of sorts, he also included a number of errors in this system. Invited or not, Cadere brought these wooden bars to exhibition openings of well-known artists and put them down in a carefully chosen place or, temporarily, at pre-selected non-exhibition venues. Such an outdoor placement performed by André Cadere on the beach in Genoa became the point of departure for Burger's large-format photographic re-enactment "Genova-Boccadasse/lunedì 12 Maggio 1975" (2008). Burger not only recreated the wooden bar, he also traveled to the place where Cadere had conducted a contextual assessment of the beach environment. Conceptually speaking, Burger now fills the void in the documentation of Cadere's work, appropriating not only the wooden bar putatively placed there but also the questions and points of criticism inherent in the work. Similarly to Cadere, who leveled subversive criticism at the art scene and its exhibitions, Burger also raises questions pertaining to the connections between producers, artworks, viewers, institutions, and the definition of values. What is the significance of appropriations, and how are they evaluated? To what an extent is a reconstitution of a historical artistic act—presented in the manner of an installation and captured by means of photography—an example of appropriation? Cadere refused to comply with market mechanisms, and produced no photographs to chronicle his oeuvre. Stefan Burger, by taking a picture of Cadere's wooden bar presumably left at this location on a beach in Genoa and by hanging this photo on a predetermined wall at his exhibition venue, questions the validity of contemporary conceptual strategies. Says the artist: "In light of the radicalism and consistency of the historical model, the work concedes its own perplexity. By re-enacting the Cadere piece in Boccadasse,

enveloped in the romanticizing aura of a sunset drama, I wanted to cast a contemporary, and possibly even wistful, glance at an era in which such radical concepts were somehow still valid and followed their own logic. And then I also take an ironic look at the concept of "soft eroticism" that has been diluted to a purely aesthetic language and attitude. I challenge the validity of contemporary conceptual strategies and looks in view of a result in sync with the system. Should we just leave Conceptual Art where it is? Wouldn't it have been better if I had simply left the bar there and sailed off into the sunset like Bas Jan Ader?"

In his work "Davon gelaufener Bildhauer" (Runaway Sculptor, 2007), an inkjet print on a wall, Burger quotes and appropriates his own works. Concrete sculptures that had been shaped by filling plastic bags and containers and exhibited in 2006 in Zurich's exhibition venue Les Complices were recreated by the artist for a staged performance that was later also photographed. The sculptor—either himself or another person—seems to have run away, put down his work, or abandoned sculpting altogether, provided we lend credence to the title. Burger comments on a statement made with regard to art production and puts it into perspective by staging this statement as a life-sized photograph. By doing so, he denigrates the act of absconding: "Is it really possible that the sculptor has run away, considering that life-sized fragments of his work in its production stage are in full view?" In this work, Burger takes stock of his past oeuvre, which is why the picture is in black-and-white. If we regard the act of putting down one's work as a possible and meaningful end to a production process, it is conceivable that all further works are also divested of their physical product character.

In his work "Analoges Denkmal" (Analog Monument, 2008), the artist picks up on the demolition of the Agfa building in Munich to address the era of analog photography and its disappearance. A 16-mm film projector is used to project a film that shows the demolition process, and to drive an umbrella printed with the name of the company Ilford. This ironic assembly of two main ingredients that allude to two

major imaging companies turns "Analoges Denkmal" into a melancholy witness of transience. By converting elements reminiscent of the analog era into a kinetic sculpture, the work also champions the cause of "extended photography".

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