

Stefan Brüggenmann (Mexico City, 1975) is a multidisciplinary artist whose text based practice provides a humorous critique on contemporary culture. Made out of neon lights, vinyl lettering, or painted texts, Brüggenmann's work has been exhibited internationally in the most reputable institutions such as the Centre Pompidou and The Venice Biennale.

"In order to resonate in a society defined by rapid movement we cannot afford ourselves the luxury of too much language." -S.B

As part of our journal, LVH has decided to feature an ongoing series of interviews with artists, collectors and art industry leaders. Due to his extensive participation with LVH art, it comes as no surprise that our first interview be dedicated to the work and career of the artist Stefan Brüggenmann.

Brüggenmann's works have been included in five of our What's Up exhibitions and, earlier this year, we had the pleasure to visit him in his studio in Mexico City during the first LVH Art Trip on the occasion of Zona Maco. Today we are thrilled to count on him once again for the launch of this new series of interviews.

Lawrence Van Hagen: Can you give us some insight on your path to becoming an artist?

Stefan Brüggemann: Well I think this is largely beyond one's control; becoming an artist means finding something inside of you that you somehow have the need to express.

LVH: What are the main differences you see in being an artist today compared to ten years ago? How do you think globalisation and the Internet have influenced the role of the artist?

SB: Even one day can be a long time. Questioning my role as an artist is part of my daily life and my practice. One constantly has to reinvent oneself in the creative process. As societal contexts shift, Art is both a reflection and an agent of that change. In this way, artists' participation in culture allows them to shape the future.

LVH: I recently read that your creative process is divided into two steps: the first is reversal -a statement turned back on itself or a declaration that declares its own failure; the second is erasure, for example, partially blacked-out neon or over-painted surfaces. Could you walk us through your creative process?

SB: The process you describe is facilitated by two key factors. The first is trust in intuition and the second is quiet reflection. I allow myself to move through the world like a sponge, absorbing moments and ideas that I can set free in the creation of an artwork. I allow the passage of time to be a part of my process because, after all, time is the only judge.

LVH: Throughout your career, you have worked in a variety of mediums; however, the presence of text in your work has persisted all these years. Could you tell us more about your relationship with language?

SB: The core of my work is text. I have always been fascinated by the interdependent relationship between abstraction and language. It is this relationship that generates meaning:

"Language is the tool that simultaneously creates, illuminates and obfuscates reality."

LVH: In an interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist you mentioned Ed Ruscha being one of your biggest inspirations, could you further develop on how Ruscha has influenced your artistic career?

SB: Ed Ruscha's economy of language has been very influential on my practice. Laconic text, generating greater meaning with fewer words, is of vital importance. In order to resonate in a society defined by rapid movement we cannot afford ourselves the luxury of too much language.

LVH: A lot of your work is in black and white, I am curious to hear your thoughts on this.

SB: I enjoy tension and contradiction. Just as Baroque painters believed in the ability of chiaroscuro to reveal mystical thoughts, I am fascinated with contrast. Power is written in black letters on a white background.

LVH: In the summer of 2018 I had the pleasure to visit your exhibition in Ibiza. Many of your works in this exhibition talked about the concepts of speed and time. Could you tell us more about your relationship with these two?

SB: The series of paintings on display in Ibiza were my HI-SPEED CONTRAST PAINTINGS. These paintings look to combine the speed and plasticity of the digital with the intervention of gesture.

"My work more broadly is interested in the pace of modernity and the effect that it has on our experience of the world."

LVH: You often use social critique, irony and sarcasm in your work, is there anything that you are specifically trying to point out?

SB: My work draws attention to our experience of capitalism. As a society we are condemned to chase our immediate future and my work acts and reflects on this point in a poetical way.

LVH: I am interested to learn about your mirror paintings. Could you tell me more about this series and the use of a mirror as a surface?

SB: My decision to use mirrors stems from a conviction that the material that best embodies the concept of 'speculation' is the mirror. There is a human obsession with deciphering the immediate future that extends to all parts of life, be it economic, social or political. In my own work, the need to speculate is what drives me to keep making work while I am alive and free.

"I believe that reality exists so that we can speculate on it."

LVH: In 2019 you had a monumental painting exhibited at Pompidou with the title “Headlines and last lines in the movies (Guernica)”. I would love to hear more about this project.

SB: This work is about centring the throwaway messaging we are subjected to as we move through digital and urban space. Whether these messages are political slogans, newspaper headlines or advertising jingles they all accumulate to form a cacophony of language. I am interested in this onslaught of information as a kind of fabric of our present.

"These words, easily dismissed, could have a subliminal power to shape us. Appropriating this language allows us to check that power."

This installation at the Pompidou reproduced the scale of Picasso’s Guernica. The works share a theme of the human condition but they also spring from headlines as the germ of an artwork. Picasso did not experience the suffering in Guernica first hand, he actually painted his seminal landscape of dehumanisation after reading George Steer’s account of the bombing published in l’Humanité.

LVH: Can you tell me about the last exhibition you did at Hauser & Wirth London on 2019?

SB: The installation, Hyper-Palimpsest, brought together two existing bodies of work: the Text Pieces (1997-2019) and Headlines and Last Line in the Movies (2019). In the space, the audio installation Text Pieces Read by Iggy Pop (2019) played for fifteen minutes of every hour. These elements were overlaid in a process of 'obliteration'. This is a process of layering that correlates with the unfettered accumulation of information in the digital age. In much the same way that an over saturation of all the colours tends to black or white (an absence of colour), Hyper-Palimpsest played with the idea that an excess of inputs leads to an erasure of content.

"The work posited that the aesthetic of our control-copy control-paste, 24-hour news society is an ever-obliterating palimpsest of digital white noise."

The installation challenged the audience to engage, to walk right up to the work, so that they could see past the initial impression of black to the mark making and the layers of work. Within the space of visual obliteration, Iggy Pop's reading of the almost indiscernible Text Pieces interplayed with that which we

can and cannot see. I knew that I did not want to put my voice to the words, as it is not about the artist as an author, it is about the words themselves. Iggy Pop's iconic voice was my first choice. The array of intonations and textures in his speech ultimately added a sculptural dimension to the sound and successfully preserved my distance from the work.

LVH: Are there any upcoming projects for 2020 you would like to tell us about?

SB: I am planting and building a botanical garden in Ibiza, a project I am developing in collaboration with Mexican architect Alberto Kalach. The garden will be a space for sculptural interventions. These works will respond to the rhythms of nature, which will present an interesting challenge to me as an artist and contrast with the body of work I have developed in response to the unnatural speed of urban and digital space.

<https://www.lvhart.co/journal/lvh-in-conversation-with-artist-stefan-bruggemann>