

Dividing his time between Mexico City and London, Stefan Brüggemann's "conceptual pop" can be found in exhibitions and collections worldwide. Only weeks after closing his third solo show at Yvon Lambert, Brüggemann opened his second one at Parra & Romero entitled Text Pieces, Obliterated Mirrors & Tautological Paintings. Brüggemann's work is full of contrasts and contradictions but when I speak to him, he emphasizes on the conceptual continuity of his practice. That is not to say that he is an artist recognized oeuvre, which is quite unusual for someone who is represented by some of the world's most prestigious dealers. "Personally, I like to put myself in difficult positions", Brüggemann says with a twinkle in his eye.

Johan Lundh: I am intrigued by the way you situate your work art historically, explicitly referencing conceptual art and minimalism, and then undermine it by adding or subtracting something from what you started with. For example, *Make Me See* (2009), a white neon sign over which you have sprayed black paint: Conceptual art meets Abstract Expressionism.

Stefan Brüggemann: I don't think of my work as nostalgic over any period or movement in art. I'm not interested in criticizing it either but in putting in a position where you can question it. There are lots of artists that quote and reference historical works and positions, but more than that I like to question it. Many conceptual artists, as we all know by now, had quite radical ambitions

from outset, but soon it became a style. Ironically, the “dematerialized art object” ultimately became just another form. The conditions and ideals of that generation of artists and mine are completely different, many of them were Marxist’s and anti-capitalist, and I don’t feel so close to that anymore. I think I have just accepted that capitalism rules the world and that there is no way out.

JL: Yes, but this is criticism almost as old as conceptual art itself: Lucy R. Lippard writes in the 1973 postscript to *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, that she feels like the radicalism of conceptual art is over. Institutional critique suffered a similar fate, as Andrea Fraser noted in her 2005 *Artforum* article *From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique*. However, if you perceive yourself as a critically minded person, which I think a lot of people in contemporary art do, it is a difficult balancing act between embracing and criticizing the system that feeds you.

SB: I see my work as dealing with existential questions. That, above and beyond it all, is what connects all the disparate parts. It is about humankind and our societies. Who are we? How do we live in our Western societies today? And what are the possibilities and problems we create for ourselves and for others? I’m not offering solutions or suggesting new ways of living together, but making myself and others think about these questions.

JL: Asking questions but not offering solutions is a common approach for contemporary artists. Nothing wrong with that, or? I find that some artists' are keen to criticize others but not themselves. In order to be truly critical in a field such as art, I believe you need to question and sometimes even undermine your own position.

SB: I think my practice is critical. However, it always starts with the work itself and then it can expand from there. It's not trying to point fingers at other artists or works. Like an earthquake it has an epicenter but its impact can be far reaching. In recent years I have been obsessed with mirrors. The mirror confronts you with your own image. However, the images have no depth, no reality. For example, I replaced all the glasses in Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion with mirrors, turning this modernist, supposedly rational and transparent building into a self-reflecting entity.

JL: Let's talk about your new show at Parra & Romero, Text Pieces, Obliterated Mirrors & Tautological Paintings.

SB: Yes, I will present three types of works, like the title of the show: text pieces, mirrors, and paintings. There will be three text pieces made with black vinyl lettering. The first one spells out "*Ideology is Over*", the second is "*An advertisement for Coca-Cola*", and the third one, "*No More Tears*". Connecting

back to what we just spoke about, I will show a series of objects I call obliterated mirrors. They are mirrors which I, in an expressionist style, have partly covered with aluminum paint. You can only see part of yourself and part of the surroundings at any given time. For me, these mirrors are playing with the conscious, unconscious, and self-conscious. That's how I think society functions today, a state of partial consciousness and partial unconsciousness. The mirror paintings will go on top of the vinyl text, obfuscating parts of their messages.

Finally, there will be a series of paintings, which I have called tautological paintings. This is a new body of work that I have never shown before. Imagine a painting by On Kawara, with a small black text on a gray background: The text is very small, 10 points or so, spelling out the price of the work. In total, there will be six paintings, exactly the same except for the price. One of them will be priced at \$10,000 and another at \$10,500. In some instances, the price of a painting will just be a few cents higher than another one. Since the stock market has turned out to be a risky investment, people with money invest it in art. The thing that interests me is the notion that people buy prices rather than works. I priced them in US Dollars, speculating that it won't be the dominant currency in the future. Similar to some buyers of art, I'm here speculating on their value by connecting them to a certain currency.

JL: You're playing with the idea of what the safe investment is. There is a conceptual correlation between piece and value.

SB: Yes, in the primary market, the price is what is written on the painting. However, on the secondary market that connection will most likely be lost. I suspect that the differently priced but identical painting will eventually have quite different prices.

JL: There is an openness to the works you've just described which makes them interesting to me. Unlike the dates on On Kawara's paintings, value is something that is in constant flux.

SB: I'm very fond of contradictions, and I sometimes think of my work as "conceptual pop", juxtaposing intellectual inquiry with consumerist desire. By doing that, I think my work becomes harder to comprehend or categorize. One of the main reasons why I wanted to be an artist was the possibility of choosing what you want to do. This is a romantic idea of course – you're always your own prisoner– but trying to escape from yourself, if ever so briefly, is something I strive to do. For someone who doesn't know my practice, my solo shows might look like they feature works by many different artists.

JL: In a way, you are creating a group situation where you have something to react too. Some artists who often show in group contexts seem to have a hard time reacting to their own work rendering their solo presentations dull at best. In your case, you are doing it in order to generate creative contradictions, which can be productive to your practice.

SB: I have never thought of it that way but it is true what you say: I constantly react and even defy my own work. This sometimes makes curators and dealers terrified since they don't want to work with or represent an artist that has an unclear direction or incoherent style. I don't understand this urge to have everything so digested. I think the interesting to be open to things for as long as possible without becoming a brat who wants one thing one day and another the next. Things get digested and definite when you die. Either by you or someone else.

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