

STEFAN BRÜGGEMANN: SOAP BOX (A DECORATIVE FORM OF NIHILISM)

KERLIN GALLERY, DUBLIN
12 JANUARY - 9 FEBRUARY

'Haven't we been here before?' is not among the *Show Titles* featured in Stefan Brüggemann's ongoing book and web project offering ready-made ones free to anyone in search of an instantly attractive but perplexingly opaque title for their project. It is, however, just the sort of thing that could be mistaken for a text piece from the Mexico City-born artist: a loaded question, disguised as a self-criticism and somehow given the stature of agitprop.

Brüggemann's Kerlin show consists of some of the artist's *Obliteration* paintings – digital printed photos 'obliterated' by aluminium paint – along with works in neon and a wallpaper which covers the gallery in a grey mist, closer examination of which reveals the pattern to be made of the text 'conceptual decoration' repeated, if not endlessly, at least ad nauseum.

Brüggemann's conceptual work enlists a welter of echoes, offering subliminal glimpses of Lawrence Weiner, Barbara Kruger or even Liam Gillick as deftly and unreliably as a three-card-trickster shows you the queen of hearts. Hard as Brüggemann appears to try to hide them – to erase them – you'll keep noticing the fake edges, functions that appear to describe limits and trajectories but turn out to be nothing less than the work itself. But any project as dedicated as this to crushing the distinction between signal and noise, original and echo, must be ready to welcome failure on some level.

Brüggemann's neon *Obliteration* series makes a semantic fable of the idea of erasure. The artist's handmade erasure marks are scaled up and converted into neon, and that neon itself is 'erased' by covering its front surface with black pigment. The result is to create a burst of reflected light on the gallery wall, an effect that is disconcertingly spectacular in *R.M. (Obliteration Neon)* (2008), where multicoloured neon produces a surprising orgy of hot Pop colour.

Erasure, after all, is not the route to silence and nothing, but to an alteration. The idea that there is something which is not a text, some way of imposing silence and negation, holds no sway here. As there is no *hors-text*, all erasure is simply text in a different register. In the same way Brüggemann has talked about the slogan 'no future' forcing one to think of the future, no mark can create an absence of marks.

But while all these deconstructive approaches and payoffs can be explored, it is noticeable that almost all already have been. By employing this pre-enjoyed, outdated atmosphere, Brüggemann can almost undercut pointless historicism. Surely the Strokes (and all that followed) would have been even more unbearable if their skinny ties had not nihilistically pilloried the rhythmic circulations of culture. Likewise, some of the surprisingly melancholy force of this work comes from the macro-version of Brüggemann's obliterations, which sees the tides of fashion busy in the background, wielding the eraser. *Luke Clancy*



R.M. (Obliteration Neon),
2008, coloured neon, black
paint, 64 x 80 cm. Courtesy
Kerlin Gallery, Dublin