

IT WAS ONE THING,
THEN IT WAS ANOTHER

I am glad you agreed to this format, Constantin, even though you normally don't put yourself forward in your work. I am aware of the problem that our words follow us around. Your images and objects strike me as extremely pared-down and distilled. They manifest like displaced riddles, and seem intentionally vague about origins and intentions. Have you always worked from home, rather than in a studio?

At the moment, I work at home. I often have lunch in the evening or forget to get dressed. I tried having a studio several times, but I don't like the idea of going to work, at least as far as art is concerned. There's also the comfort of having all my books around. I like to be close to them and objects I bring home. I even carry around images I made of my bookshelves on my phone.

Didn't many of your works formulate themselves while you contemplated the apartments you've lived in, whether it is through images taken by moonlight, or imagining sculptural dimensions and responses?

Yes. Berlin art writer Kirsty Bell's first book, *The Artist's House: From Workplace to Artwork* (Sternberg Press, 2013), was really important to me. As was artist Danh Võ's first tiny Berlin-

Kreuzberg apartment, where he had his bathroom titled as a work for the 6th Berlin Biennale (2010), and where he let me stay when I was finding my feet in Berlin.

When we first met, it was like you appeared out of nowhere. It was in Basel at the project space Elaine (2011–2013), which was founded by curators Tenzing Barshee, Scott C. Weaver, Nicola Dietrich and Hannah Weinberger, and supported by the Museum für Gegenwartskunst Basel. Later, you told me you grew up on a mountain, implying that actually you are just a simple, down-to-earth, nature-loving chap. How did you end up circulating amongst the in-crowd of the Swiss contemporary art scene of the time? Where did you go to school?

I suppose I graduated from the mountains. As a child I went to a boarding school, although I was a day kid, not a boarder. It was very British. Strict. Traditional. I was in a class with kids from the valley. So, my friends are still the son of my mother's gynecologist or the daughter of local hoteliers. Now she runs the family hotel. Then there was someone whose parents owned a bar, and so on. And I felt at home in theater classes. At summer school I did method acting, which taught me a lot.

Isn't doing this, your first interview, as a post-conceptual artist who until now has only left the faintest of biographical traces in their work, a bit like doing some method acting in the role of one version of yourself? I suppose you could make things up, which wouldn't trouble me in the slightest. All texts involve subjective fiction, editing, reformulation. But doesn't a *not dead* but *absent* author

leave behind an author-shaped hole? I am thinking of some of René Magritte's bowler hat figurative paintings... I am asking because your formal language is very allusive.

I'm glad you are thinking along these performative lines. Although I think of performance as *Performanz* in German, which relates more to effectiveness. I worry that, at the moment, my work can seem dry, sanitized. That it looks very strict and 'conceptual'. But I have always felt there's life in it, even if I am concerned sometimes about it coming across as having a certain lack of vitality. I think I come from a 'school of life' in the sense of Paul Thek's queer palimpsest sketchbook and journal, *School of Life. Egypt—1969/70*.

I think your work evidences a strong, consistent sensibility even if you're averse to being pinned down.

I want to tell you where I am at right now. I want to behave like the things I exhibit. I want to behave like an object that can decide for itself what it is. If I take away the names or what defines the object, then I think I should also try to treat myself in the same way. If that means I disappear somewhat as an author, it is just to allow the objects to be what they want to be. And it allows me to navigate the world or an art context in a much freer manner, and remain fluid between things.

Personal information or narratives don't just limit, they can also give access, empower others—don't you think so?

It doesn't interfere with the conceptual framework I am planning for my Sweetwater exhibition to say it is a solo exhibition by Constantin Thun. He is someone with thoughts. As you know, this text will become a physical part of the exhibition in some form. So, it is a self-conscious, constructed thing—an object, too. Alongside it, I just want to give the other objects in the exhibition agency. I didn't go to art school. Before my Basel time, after school I ended up in Zurich, because I took a job as a commercial photographer, taking pictures of a renovation of a shopping mall that was being refurbished. The property developer who hired me wanted to make a brochure about the employees. Some of them had been there since it opened 30 years earlier. While doing this job, I learned to see and I learned to be with people who didn't want to be photographed. There were a lot of details involved; there were harsh realities that were very unpleasant. I was paid well. That was in September 2010. I was staying temporarily at a friend's place and she invited me to go to a party at an artist's studio.

Maybe there are traces of this photographic experience in the forthcoming solo exhibition, which signals that a gallery like Sweetwater, while being many things, is also 'just a shop'? Do you now think of those mall images as a piece of conceptual art? There is also an interesting echo regarding Sweetwater's current location in a former GDR shopping strip—built for ideological show but not much action.

I dislike supermarkets. They give me anxiety. I can't go into them. I limit my time in supermarkets as much as possible. I go in and

out, and only if I have to, once a week, which is already too much. But I want to go back to the story about Zurich. A friend of mine said, “You should meet an artist I know. He’s looking for an assistant.” I didn’t know what I was getting myself into. And I thought to myself, “Yeah, let me just be an assistant of an artist and live in Zurich.” In the end, I only worked for him for one year, because then I was like, “I have to do my own thing”. That year and the next couple, I feel like I didn’t speak a single word. I was only absorbing, absorbing, absorbing. And there were also two years of depression, feeling really bleak. I felt like I was an artist, but couldn’t say that I was. I couldn’t give a name to it. So, for a long time, I didn’t want to call myself an artist. But then I had a long discussion with Hannah Weinberger about it, and she was like, “No, because you live and you do things, of course you’re an artist even if you’re not producing anything at the moment”.

Unlike artists who work out ideas in the making, your part Duchampian, part post-studio production seems, in the first place, ideas driven, and executed according to well-laid plans—plans that you insist shouldn’t be too planned! I understand, for instance, that on either side of the entrance to Sweetwater you will install empty mock window displays; rudimentary structures made from MDF and painted white. Except for these displays, everything else in the exhibition, in terms of objects and images, will be found, salvaged or thrifted. I imagine your window displays will reveal themselves as sculptures or spatial interventions once someone moves into the space and turns around and sees one side of them is not painted. What do you want to tell me about the specific collection of objects you plan to include in this exhibition?

The window displays indicate a specific framing. Obviously, this will be a gallery exhibition, so there are conditions at play. One of them is the question of the market. I think I want to wink at the viewer, saying I know we are in a shop, so you have to have window displays. Everything already exists, everything is for sale. I really want to treat these displays purely as window displays, in terms of their character as objects. When you look into the gallery from the outside, you'll see yourself reflected in the window pane on the object inside. A melange will occur. Artist Dan Graham, architecture historian Beatriz Colomina, Marcel Duchamp, and many others have written about window displays. They become works of art if someone buys them. But, really, I'm interested in how someone grasps them as objects beforehand. Whatever you will see in the exhibition is interchangeable. We shouldn't now fall into the trap of explaining what will be in the exhibition. By trap, I mean, explaining to other people what the objects in front of them are or might mean. That's exactly what I do not want to do. I think people should approach things in their way, and if they have the same feeling about them as me, then that's great. At best, it will give us a shared sense of being 'at home', as Hannah Arendt notoriously suggested.

Many of your objects relate strongly to architecture and display. For instance, your small collections of salvaged old oak beams, augmented with flotsam and jetsam tucked into the gaps, look like they came from a barn or outbuilding. They also have a considerable poetic material resonance that comes from their patina, from their prior use. They are not really substantively unique until you set them free of their original context and make space for them.

Can you tell me something about your process of selecting objects for your attention?

I don't have a systematic way of approaching things. I find pieces of wood in the street. I find objects at other people's houses. For instance, I met someone who told me about a house being demolished and how much they were in love with these old roof beams. The owners just wanted to pass them on to someone to build a new house or whatever. I brought them home. I lived with them. A 'first contact' occurred. There is a Canadian philosopher Dalie Giroux who talks about 'contiguity', the moment you have contact with and proximity to something, and then things develop. Objects come into my apartment, then we just live together. We see what happens.

Do you attribute a consciousness or agency to inanimate objects? Found objects have a past, but what is their future?

I am not projecting anything into things. It's more about listening rather than producing or expressing. It's more about listening and trying to understand what is happening around me. I'm absolutely open to giving these objects back to where they came from.

Do you want to talk about one of the wall-mounted images that will appear in this exhibition? It's an image of a painting, right?

Technically, for me, it's also an object. The image on it shows a photographic reproduction of a painting by Emil Jakob Schindler (1842–1892) that I saw at the Leopold Museum in Vienna.

His painting is not really my cup of tea, but this composition *Holzgerümpel im Wald* (1882–1885) is striking because it depicts stuff in the woods, and it is so undefined. It is very abstract. It's beautiful. It reminds me of my photographs of street trash I made last year in New York.

Doesn't meaning just bubble out of things, whether or not we want it to? Isn't it this image of Schindler's painting that actually gives us the biggest clue as to how you're thinking about objects for the exhibition at Sweetwater? I mean the idea of placing the viewer in an indeterminate, undetermined place in the metaphorical woods, surrounded by things? I think all art opens up some kind of space of being. Probably too little space exists for things that are indeterminate, left radically open. That's what I like about your work.

Meaning is everywhere. But I'm interested in how you grasp it. It's difficult to talk about this because we might close something down instead of opening things. I want to leave the viewer with their own thoughts about things. One could say it's an imposed generosity, but there's definitely a sense of giving. The fear of not knowing is just so huge that people feel like they need instructions for life. That's what pops up on the screens that we look at every day, selling us an idea about how to think, feel, behave. Oh... I sound like the Unabomber ranting against technology. (laughs)

Can you explain to me some more why you don't want to have a titled exhibition, full of objects that are not yet works of art and do not have titles yet either?

I really want to talk about this time when we met, and you were talking about your as yet unpublished novel, and I asked you: “Why was homosexuality increasingly criminalized in the 19th century?” And you said, “Because they gave it a name.” In that moment, a lot of things clicked for me because I realized that when you give things a name, you can grasp them. So, the exhibition does not have titles and it does not have a name. The objects are not works until they are bought and a certificate is issued to a collector. I think it’s a fundamental question of how we approach things. I want to show objects that are autonomous, even though I put them there, I chose them, I edited them, I put them on the floor and or leaned them against the wall. I had the same concerns when I showed found banners in Naples and made my largest work to date, *Cabin*, (2020–ongoing), which has different states of being. *It was one thing, then it was another.*

So the decision not to title the exhibition or the objects, which are *not yet art* works, is about the space of undefined betweenness?

This is where poetry lies, when you approach something without knowing it, and it surprises you. Many artists use conceptual templates to create and control meaning with objects. But that’s not poetry. In order to embody something, I have to give up control. I want to go out of an exhibition with many questions. These are the best moments, where I come out of the sea after swimming naked and I’m like, “What was that? That was such a good feeling to swim naked in the sea. Like, where, where was it touching me?”

If you're talking about feelings and poetry, when I see a bathroom sink, like the working one you plan to install in your exhibition, I think: Robert Gober's sinks. They have a kind of hyperrealism that evoked the uncanny, and were made during the AIDS pandemic, giving them a powerful resonance, a symbolical weight. Really loaded, loaded things. Can any object truly be autonomous from the weight of art history?

I'm not a philosopher. So if I speak of Michel Foucault, I'm not really entitled to speak. But what really struck me, in one of his texts about the author, is where he says, "the author is a person who holds everything together". Gober and many others are definitely a reference within me, because I'm built out of references like you are built out of references and a lot of recipes that make you who you are. Originally, I wanted to put a real, live puppy in the exhibition. I was inspired by *The Quadruple Object* (2011), a book by philosopher Graham Harman, when he writes about how singular everything is and that the only way to relate is through allure. He talks about puppies being this moment of access towards a relation with something else. And maybe that's the knowledge of the thing. For me, at least, this is what I know through Gober. Everyone can also relate to a sink. It's not a highbrow decision. Harman doesn't speak of objects, he refers to entities. He doesn't speak of objects because he says, for instance, the unicorn, which doesn't exist, or the United Nations, are still entities, right?

What does the gallery think about your questioning of the nature of art objects?

Ideally, I want to be able to put these objects in a laundromat or in other public spaces. I want them to be accessible anywhere, including in a gallery or an institution. In a commercial gallery context, of course, Lucas Casso from Sweetwater asked, “But what do we sell? Do we sell objects? Do we sell the object at the market price that we can identify, or not?” The market is something that wants you to grasp something, it wants you to define something. It is, in part, a language issue. My solution here is not to give things names until the moment of sale, when the collector’s name is inscribed on the certificate of authenticity, like an analog version of a blockchain. Their ownership creates the work—like in quantum physics, it is the moment something is measured that it is fixed, not before. Ultimately, one is owned by what one owns, and authorship is an ownership I reject. Before, you can just co-exist with the thing as an entity between other things.

So you’re not doing an artist contract that affects the value or who takes part in the value of an art object. It’s really more about marking a moment of transition, *the becoming* of an artwork?

Yes, in that sense I examine the biography of a thing, including meanings and values, which shift over time and in different contexts. There is a commodity phase, but there is also an authorship phase. The way we started out talking about my past has got me thinking back to Elaine in Basel again. The moment of my own becoming, I suppose. That space was crucial for me in the beginning. I was very shy. And I remember once, I traveled to Basel and stood in front of the space, but I was so scared of going inside that I just went back on the train to Zurich. But, eventually,

I became close with everyone there. There was a lot of partying. They really gave me a home.

Things have changed for you since. Maybe there will be some other young artist out the front of your forthcoming exhibition too afraid to enter?

There are still plenty of people who don't know what I do. Recently, a friend in New York told me what some other people think about me. He was at a dinner somewhere, and this other artist was like, "Oh, I always see this guy around, but I don't know what he does." Her friend was like, "I have noticed him, too, handsome, but I don't know either." And the guy I was speaking to was like, "Oh, that's Constantin." And their artist friend was just like, "I see him everywhere."

Do you consciously encourage this personal shadowiness or lack of definition? Is it modesty or a strategy?

I enjoy being in places where nobody knows anything about me. Recently, another artist friend of mine Dora Budor told me, "It seems like you cultivate your myth because people don't really know what you do." And I responded, "That's strange, because I feel like even though maybe I don't talk about myself much, I am definitely working on something." I also mounted an exhibition in 2016 titled *In One's Own Time*, which I think was funny to say because everyone has their own time of saying something at a certain point.

Some contemporary artists seem to be in a hurry, feel the pressure to get somewhere—anywhere—fast.

Really, do you think so? I feel like this pressure has always been there, even if people talk about this like it wasn't. Even in the Middle Ages, there was the same structure. There are always money questions involved and a structure that dictates. We like to romanticize that these things didn't exist and that they're a thing of our time, but they've always been there.

I once spoke to Marxist conceptual photographer Fred Lonidier about the Californian scene at UCSD (University of California San Diego) in the 1970s. He incidentally very much inspired Cameron Rowland, whose politicized 'found' objects and texts I know you admire. Lonidier told me that everyone in his circle (including Martha Rosler, for example) knew they would not make any money with their work, and that the only thing that would save them would be to get a teaching position.

A little while ago, I worried that I was not being honest with myself in my work. That I was 'doing art that looks like art' without actually asking myself what it is, you know, to only get it art historically or theoretically 'right', and to merely point at things. Now, I also want to feel it, let it through my body and live it through, to genuinely understand what I'm trying to get at.

Tapping deep intuition as a rudder to navigate the not-yet-known is also underrated, I think. Can you tell me about the first art work you made for an exhibition at Elaine, also titled *Elaine* (2011–2013)?

I am thinking of that first work that features footage of you just playing with the end of your nose. What on earth were you thinking?

Elaine is Julie Ault's mother's first name. You know, Julie Ault, from the collective Group Material. Elaine was a clairvoyant. I think the curators called the space Elaine because they wanted her blessing. Anyway, I remember I was at a dinner party back then talking to someone, and this person was like, "Why do you always touch your nose?" I am very self-conscious of my nose because it has a downward slope. So, I always somehow unconsciously push the tip up with my finger. Later, when I first exhibited the finished film in an off-space called 1857 in Oslo, someone told me that touching your nose is a military move to put yourself back in your body in moments of panic. When I made the piece, I had been reading Pirandello's last novel, *One, None and One Hundred Thousand* (1926). It opens with the protagonist looking in the mirror. He is in his mid-twenties, married, looking in a mirror and touching his nose. His wife, behind him, is like, "What are you doing?" Still touching his nose, he says, "I have this little pain." Then she is like, "Oh, I thought you were looking to see which direction it's pointing." To which he replies, "Pointing? In any direction?" She's like, "Yes, it's pointing to the right." After this first page, his *entire existence collapses* because he realizes the way his wife sees him, and the way he sees himself, are two completely different things. And the way the baker sees him, the way *Dominic* sees him, the way someone else sees him, is also completely different. And among them, they will never know who he is, so he kind of disappears, like he's no one. Hence, *One, None and One Hundred Thousand*. It's an existentialist novel. I think it's also based on the author's wife,

who suffered from paranoid schizophrenia. So, my film *Elaine* is about connecting to oneself. There was a moment in the film—and I say specifically film, because it's not a video, it was shot on 16mm film—there is a moment in which the nose freezes. The still provides a moment of deception, where not everything looks the way it seems. Freezing can't happen when you shoot on film. Obviously, there's also post-production involved.

16mm film is not the easiest medium to start with to make a first work. Most people just roughly sketch or collage something...

That's true. And I also don't know how to use a film camera. I remember my appointment to meet the person who would help me shoot the film. The night before, I had a wild night going out, and a friend who has a gallery in Zurich was like, "It's always like this. It is in moments of high pressure, when everything comes together, that you go the wildest."

Were you thinking about early performance videos and films? It's got a kind of Bruce Nauman thing about it, doesn't it?

I think I knew nothing at all about Bruce Nauman back then. Not even after I moved to Berlin and did my first skirting board works in my home 'studio'. Bruce Nauman's *Mapping the Studio* (2001), let alone his seminal work of the late 1960s and early 1970s, just wasn't yet in my head.

Why the move to Berlin?

The curators from Elaine also had ties and roots here that I could tap into. I was so tired of the cleanliness of Zurich. The lack of friction. But, truthfully speaking, I was also depressed. I didn't know what I was doing, so Berlin felt right. My peers were patient with me. I was also finding my sexuality.

Berlin is the European capital for runaways. Sometimes people who come to be artists completely disappear in the nightlife, substance abuse, glamorized poverty or self-righteous self-exploitation, and never emerge or move away again.

Maybe, but the city also gives you time and space for thought. And architecturally speaking, there are still open spaces, or weird between spaces to inhabit. When I moved into my apartment in Chausseestrasse, I wanted to have a clear frame, but I didn't know how to make this frame. I wanted to have people over. I wanted a space for thinking. I wanted to mount exhibitions here. So, first I had a skirting board installed. My skirting board work became like this thing that people know, like the nose film. Skirting boards are part of the architecture when you enter a space. You can judge a space by the skirting boards, like you know what space it is you're entering. They are like someone's shoes. I wanted to focus on an object that made you ask if it is an artwork or not. Or whether or not it is functional. I put a long sentence, the title, hidden on the back of my skirting board work with vinyl lettering stating: *You think it will never happen to you, that it cannot happen to you, that you are the only one in the world to whom none of these things will ever happen, and then, one by one, they all begin to happen to you, in the same way they happen to everyone else* (2014–2020).

That sounds like Berlin to me, or a concise history of the dark side of bohemia.

Today, I wouldn't use the vinyl letters anymore. I would just have the skirting board installed or use an existing one.

Apparently, height and quality of skirting boards is also a class thing. Can you tell me about the first major piece of yours that I really registered, *Cabin*, (2020–ongoing), a mysterious deconstructed room based on the scale of your apartment's living-room? As you mentioned, it exists and has been shown in various physical states, and sometimes with accompanying objects and the artwork of others?

For me, both the skirting board works and *Cabin*, are all about framing and betweenness. *Cabin*, is notionally a room within a room with no architectural function. It can't be erected physically in my apartment, as its wooden components require too much room to maneuver them into position. Its form of construction was inspired by traditional Japanese carpentry and joinery. It consists of about 30 panels that interlock and hundreds of wooden pegs, which secure them. I found a woodworker to make it in the mountains of northern Italy, at the end of a remote valley. He had worked with Japanese woodworking techniques before. But there was some translation of ideas and cultural traditions involved. I went to him with a book and I said, "I don't want any metal in there. I want it to be in as pure as possible." Then he said, "You can't have it pure as possible, because it would cost you a fortune because you can't have massive wood." Obviously, I was

totally naïve. I didn't know that. So, in the end, *Cabin*, is laminated. The dark stain is just something that I wanted. Maybe it's inspired by confessionals, the darkness of the confessional, the darkness inside. How he did it was really beautiful. He didn't ask me what it was for. He understood right away. He was like, "Yeah, that makes sense. We will build it together." Fully assembled, *Cabin*, has a footprint of about 3.5m by 4.5m.

That's room for many sins. But in different exhibitions, you showed parts of *Cabin*, or photographs of stacks of parts of the *Cabin*,. It has been shape shifting, not knowable as a stable whole?

Yes. I first showed *Cabin*, in January 2020. The exhibition was in three parts, really, which developed in conversation with Lucas from Sweetwater. First, I wanted to show *Cabin*, fully constructed, like a destination, a thing in itself, something that performs itself not as an artwork, but as architecture or like a skirting board. But it's not really. It can't be used. The second part of the exhibition was *Cabin*, deconstructed, all the pieces stacked, shown with other objects. For the third part of the exhibition, I invited artists to take part and exhibit within this framework. This involved long exchanges, especially with one artist, B. Ingrid Olson, who was like, "What is this? Is it architecture? Is it an exhibition space? Is this my work or yours?"

Questioning who is using or consuming whom? Who's staging who, who's framing who? Like us now in this text. But *Cabin*, is also about potentiality. Is it Utopian?

Its transportability is important, because that is like how an artwork functions: it transports an idea, mediates a notion. When I was realizing *Cabin*, I was more thinking of it as a frame coming, as it did after the skirting boards. But then in conversations, other people were like, “No, it’s also a destination and it’s also a place for potentiality, for what can happen.” And then there is this idea of the performative, you know, doing something, carrying something out. And I was really intrigued by what does the thing we see do? Is it performing as an artwork? Is it an artwork at all? Is it functioning or not? *Performanz* and all these questions seemed very important to me.

Photography, as well as slightly obsessive private note-taking, and giving those notes an odd form, are the two other important components of your work. Why do many of your photographs feature ocean or street trash?

Photography is note-taking, somehow. Just before the economic crisis in 2008, when everyone became a photographer, photography disappeared. I have an entire section devoted to photography in my notes. What I’m thinking about photography, is that it actually doesn’t exist anymore. Now, AI reproduces exactly the look of a photographic image. I want to take my work in the direction of AI, but without exploiting actual artificial intelligence. Artificial intelligence cannibalizes everything that is already there. It’s not creation. The reason I photographed trash or certain objects, especially in public spaces, is because I feel attracted to these things. I don’t know why. It’s like meeting someone and having an open dialogue with them. It is not one thing. It is not fully identifiable.

We cannot grasp it exhaustively. Trash is interesting because it shows that there is already too much of everything. The work of French postwar artist Jean Fautrier, whom artist Henrik Olesen also showed me, partly inspired me. He explored what to do at a historical postwar moment when it felt ethically impossible to express anything anymore. He made these heads of hostages, but they don't look like heads. They are just a mass. They are about the inability to say something, but they still present something. I often ask myself, "How can I express something when everything is already there?"

We're circling back to an existentialist moment. Or are you reacting to our late-capitalist noir?

Last year, I lived in Saint Mark's Place in New York, which is a super hyper-commercialized street, and where everything is utterly Instagrammable. Every morning, in my routine, where I would go for a walk, the street was filled with piss, vomit, open boxes, food, rats, cockroaches, everything was there.

You were examining the dirty skirting boards of billionaires' island?

In a way, yes, it's the trash filtering down from what is happening at the top. I approached photographing trash in the street the same way I photographed my apartment for a long time, for the artist publication *Fontanel*, (Saxpublishers, 2016–2021). I was thinking about this abundance of stuff that already exists, and what to do.

The fontanel is the soft spot on an infant's not fully formed skull. What does it mean for a grown human to evoke that? Does it point to yourself as a cultured subject, as an artist and the vulnerability involved when you allow stuff into your gray matter?

Probably, yes. Being at the beginning of something and being formed and getting ideas. The title is actually based on a song by Eartheater. She is a New York-based singer who talks about how, through the fontanel, the ideas come in, or whatever fantasies fall from heaven, and they ignite the shell. And basically my apartment was this, you know, shell in which all these ideas come up and ignite.

That's a very nice metaphor. And *Cabin*, is like that, too. It is like a shell within a shell?

I was obsessed with Eartheater and read everything about her. She was once asked what she thinks about a song, and she's like, "I don't know, ask the song." She talks about the cut umbilical chord. When something gets its own life. She creates something and then it's a process of letting go. She also says there should be more pressure on listening than expressing.

One way artists signal being critical of physical or overproduction is to use found objects, which makes me think of the canvas banner work you showed in Naples, *Untitled* (no date)? You stole the banners in Venice, didn't you?

Appropriation is stealing. Quoting is stealing. Photography is stealing. Note-taking is stealing. Etymologically, anything private

is a theft from the public. Just before the pandemic, my brother, who is a London gallerist, and I went for a walk in Venice. We saw these banners, and I said, “Look at these banners. They’re so beautiful. They speak to me.”

I can understand why. They have lovely wide rust and orange stripes, and immediately remind me of the work of artist Daniel Buren. But, actually, I think you were investigating for yourself what you feel is missing in other works of art, which involve just displacing something into a gallery. Perhaps it surprised you that the banners, with nothing added at all, would read as art?

There is just so much in them. There is maybe an art historical reference, but that was not the first thing that came to mind. They look like paintings, but ones painted by the Venetian lagoon. They have this deep Venetian red. And I had all these questions again. Are these banners a frame? Paintings? A covering? All these questions also came up and I thought to myself, “This is my work, like it’s right there.” Then my brother said, “Yeah, maybe you should get them.” I was like, “Yeah, but it’s in public.” Half a year later, one night I decided, “I have to get these.” I asked curator Liv Cuniberti to join me. It was during an *acqua alta*, and it was raining and freezing. We went out in our hoodies, knives in our pockets and stole three banners, and ate a pizza afterwards. Once I had these banners at home, I didn’t know what I wanted to do with them or what they should become. But then, one day, I showed them to Gianni Fonti, the owner of Fonti gallery in Naples. I went to his apartment in Zurich and he was lying on a daybed in a room full of his daughter’s toys. I spread the banners out in front

of him and he said, "Let's do an exhibition with that, like, show this." I wasn't even hankering for an exhibition. I was just saying something like, "Don't you think these are beautiful?" Then he said again, "Yeah, we should do it." And obviously he was reading some Mediterranean language in it. Later, when we created the exhibition, Laura Preston wrote a beautiful text. I put a ginkgo tree on the balcony of the gallery, which was a direct reference to gay writer, art historian and theorist Douglas Crimp, from a talk he gave here in Berlin. Goethe wrote a poem about ginkgos, which Laura printed on the back of the exhibition's press release. I also showed images I made of a Robert Gober catalogue. There's this interview with Gober, and I can't remember who else, in which they talk about the sinks. It was about his Dia exhibition in New York back in the day, how these works made everything become alive... Anyway, in my exhibition I showed three banners and a wooden object that I found at my grandparents' place in the mountains. Nobody knew what the object was actually for. That was why I liked it. It came from a mountain farmer. I went to the farmer and I asked him, "What is this?" And he said, he had no clue what it is. My grandparents used it in the kitchen to stack books on.

Duchamp's ready-mades were originally conceived as objects with no aesthetic surplus. Perhaps that's impossible today. Maybe your found objects are relics? I am thinking of your forthcoming exhibition again, too.

A ready-made suggests that the work of art cannot escape the status of commodity. I wouldn't say they're relics of something else, because then they would be representations of something else.

And I don't think they are. There are certain things that are already inscribed in every object, which goes back to the question: is this object authored?

Are you letting go of control of what the meaning might accrue for your viewers?

Absolutely. The opening of the Fonti exhibition was really beautiful. Everyone came to Naples. It was spring; we were all coming out of the pandemic. We launched my publication, *Fontanel*, on the streets. Everyone was dancing. And I think this part, of making everyone part of this shared moment, is also very important. People want to relate and I want people to carry skirting boards around.

That feels like an Arte Povera action or romantic conceptualism.

I don't definitively date my works so that they can all take place in a notional forever-present. And there's even a term for that, which is Eternalism; where everything happens at the same time and just moves on. Julie Ault once quoted Bruce Springsteen, I think, at the beginning of a concert when someone asked him, "What is the next song?" And he says, "It's all one song." Being close to the eternal means being close to nothing at all.

This conversation is a thing, isn't it, and potentially a piece of work?

Dominic Eichler
— Berlin, Spring 2024.