

## Roman Signer *Sculptures*

*Art: Concept, Paris 30 October – 23 December*

Among the ten sculptures in Roman Signer's fifth exhibition at Art: Concept is *Stiefel Rot-Blau* (2015), a pair of rubber boots displayed in a poorly lit, glass-fronted wooden box. In his studio, the seventy-seven-year old Swiss artist had ignited blue and red smoke-bombs inside the right and left shoes respectively, soiling the case internally with soot and dyes. With its burnt blue and red hues – colours that, since the terrorist attacks in Paris, have never felt so patriotic – the dim ensemble on a table in a back corner now conjures, however involuntarily, the horror and desolation that overtook the city at nightfall on 13 November. Yet to be fair, the first time I saw Signer's grimy boots, prior to the deadly attacks, I was absolutely thrilled at the prospect of ironising explosive art. My digression about the sorrow they convey to me in the aftermath is only to demonstrate the evocative and cathartic power of the artist's unconventional aesthetics, which are concerned with completely nonsensical yet meticulously orchestrated engineering experiments that propel trifling forms into high art.

On the opening night, for example, Signer set off *Pommery* (2015), cautiously inserting a half-opened bottle of champagne – whose cork he'd just painted blue – into a curved metallic tube fixed on a metre-high post at the entrance. Pressure popped the cork out of the other end

like a bullet: it hit the opposite wall, leaving a dribbly stain. Signer then proceeded *not* to serve the champagne and left the full bottle on the floor as part of his sculpture, thus keeping all subsequent visitors thirsty upon entering. While creating suspense out of ordinary objects, diverting their purpose absurdly, he certainly enjoys teasing us as much as he likes to play with fire. *Kabine* (2015), the remains of an explosive charge in a cratered piece of clay, which was detonated outside, is no exception: Signer blew it up from a wooden booth by sneezing into a microphone connected to the payload through an amplifier (a wall text informs us), then moved the entire apparatus into the gallery, leaving the microphone on for the curious to cough into, should they so wish.

Any sympathetic sneezing would be drowned out by the cacophony produced by three other sculptures. While *Stuhl* (2014), in which the front legs of a motorised chair rocking up and down on its back legs plunge in and out of a basin filled with water, damply beats time throughout the gallery, the remainder truly makes a terrific racket. *Kamin* (2012) resembles a chimney pierced at eye-level by a hole: visitors are invited to throw in red crumpled sheets of paper, metaphorical flames that are quickly expelled by a hidden fan, sparkling around until they fall and somebody else picks them up to repeat

the gesture. *Ventilator mit Brett* (2015) simply consists of a sheet of hardboard, its base aligned with a wall, blown continually back and forth by the gusts of another fan, which faces it. Contrary to the other artworks, these three don't crystallise any past explosion or action, but are meant to be in perpetual motion during opening hours (if, that is, they don't drive the staff insane).

A tension between the finite and the infinite thus informs the exhibition as a whole, further symbolised by *Uhr* (2008), a shallow wooden box that supports a stopped clock next to a cut-out hole of the same shape, which confronts an instant – the frozen hands – against eternity – the void. Between these two poles, some of Signer's actions are purposely constrained. For *Drei Regenschirme gleichzeitig geöffnet* (2014), he had electrically triggered in his studio the simultaneous opening of three umbrellas within a vitrine too narrow to contain their full extension, therefore ending up displaying them neither completely put up nor down. Finally *Kajak* (2014) offers another paradox: here, the artist cut a kayak – his signature form – into three sections, confined the middle one with the cockpit in a trunk, which he left opened for view, and threw out the others. Forever amputated, yet ready to ship.

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*Stiefel Rot-Blau*, 2015, mixed media, dimensions variable.  
Photo: Dorine Potel. Courtesy the artist and Art: Concept, Paris