

Karl Salzmann | *Monopulism*

JUNE 29 – SEPTEMBER 4, 2017
Austrian Cultural Forum New York
11 East 52nd Street, New York
open daily, 10 AM – 6 PM

The term “Monopulism” is etymologically not clearly identifiable. This very fact describes the underlying concept of the exhibition perfectly. Both, the title and the exhibition itself unite the attributes of mono, populism, monopole and manipulation in an artistic space, composed of pre-existent works and new pieces, specifically tailored to the venue. The installation at the Austrian Cultural Forum New York comprises various correlation elements: a destroyed wooden bar, an acoustic monument, broken microphones, paintings and two automated vacuum cleaners autonomously roaming the area. The single elements, if observed isolated, might seem aesthetically pleasing and not menacing at all, but their activity and interplay remains somehow irritating.

The show *Monopulism* reflects upon social and political influences and transforms them into semiotical metaphors and signs through their visual and acoustic realization/manifestation. Their neutral, sober presentation leaves it completely up to the viewer to interpret relations between different arguments, without proposing predefined opinions or solutions.

One of the works on display, an acoustic monument called *Lautsprechermonument*, emits a near-inaudible low frequency signal resonating with the room which causes physical unease and the feeling of an invisible threat among the visitors. As soon as the monument comes alive, it blanks out everything else. The sound takes over the space, percolates the visitor's body without asking for permission, and could be determined as a metaphor of the ongoing dictatorial and populist political systems occurring worldwide as well as of the exorbitance of (non)-information which society faces every day through mass-media. Conversations are no longer possible and staying in the exhibition space becomes almost unbearable.

As counterpart to this dictatorial monument, the works *Kontrapunkt 1 + 2* display broken microphones. The titles refer to the term “counterpoint” – used in a musical context – which remains as the counter voice to the main melody. While observing these sculptures it gets clear that they have been destroyed by an act of violence. Someone may not have wanted to hear what certain voices had to say. To exemplify this, the artist created one of the sculptures during a performance at the opening night. While he was reading the international declaration of human rights, he was breaking the microphone with a bench vice.

Another sculpture which was finished during the opening reception is the work *Sorry, the bar is closed*. The artist created a sculpture which was designed as a bar which then had only one problem – there was no way to get in or behind it. It was designed as a closed system. During the opening, the visitors were invited to tear down “the wall”. Can this be seen as another metaphor to the worldwide occurring phenomena of building walls and closing borders? Maybe the song which is audible in the area of the bar gives the visitors a hint at the meaning – a sample of the song “I've been looking for freedom” – performed live in 1989 at the fall of the Berlin wall. The mess of the violent act of destroying the bar is left to be cleaned by two automated vacuum cleaners, a cynical reference of the act of following simple algorithmical patterns without questioning the orders, seen for example in the behaviour of the infantry which usually acts as the general branch of an army that engages in military combat on foot.

Finally the works *Detonation 1 + 2* perfectly depict how to decontextualize a violent act into a pleasing picture suggesting that everything is fine. While looking at the works, the viewer would not recognize that what they see is the outcome of a massive dry ice bomb made to explode within a closed system constructed as a wooden box. This highlights the core of the installation and the artist's intention, which is deeply rooted in punk and counter culture: never trust what you see, be critical against loud and overwhelming media infiltration, and always question the use of fences, borders, and barriers.

— Karl Salzmann, 2017