

Oliver Scharfbier—The Provisional Arrangement as the Status Quo

Oliver Scharfbier's works may be ironic, impudent, mean, burdened with memory, subtle, brash, and melodramatic. But they always live from the daring, yet sensitive access to local material he has found and introduced into multi-layered spatial pictures and installations. His multi-stranded formal language is worked into ever new arrangements, and because of how the compilation is put into a specific local context, a confusing narrative emerges from out of discontinuous moments of action. In the ongoing mutual permeation of levels, texts, and textures the new gets mixed in with the old, becomes assembled, though this is not permanent—everything looks as if there were only a short pause in the decay of materials. It is the fading of impressions and desires that may crumble to pieces at any moment.

For staging his art Oliver Scharfbier works with reconfigurations, which mix together disparate chains of significant, and in so doing, connect various discourses and technologies with one another in the process of assemblage, collage, sampling, and picture clusters. In this undertaking he employs extremely varying techniques and materials, such as sculpture, drawing, found pieces, painting, and video, which then reflect in their interaction the modalities of their staging and origins. But at the same time the individual elements of the spatial pictures center around the person of the artist. He is perhaps their—absent—protagonist, and yet he is always the sounding board as well, the trampoline for what is foreign, different. The materials Oliver Scharfbier uses always drag with them their own statement as a trace, a memory, an injury, but then they are re-charged in their new combination, assuming and taking up fresh, sometimes also completely contradictory, fields of meaning. In such presentation, from the simplest of elements a dissonant story arises that also says something about art and its possibilities. The gesture of precise improvisation, a feature of Oliver Scharfbier's stagings, creates a turbulent density that answers to the changed and changeable order of things, to the network of overlapping time structures of the fleeting modern and its urban landscapes interspersed with indeterminable, sudden condensations of communication: the provisional arrangement as the status quo. The energy of the arrangements arises then from the potential of the respective, resolutely defined departure situation, from the active interventions, from the material used—and just as a ship uses the waves for its own movement, Oliver Scharfbier also uses the flow of the pictures, the oscillating impressions and impulses, for his ensembles—perhaps it is no coincidence that rafts and ships continue to emerge (and disappear) in his meandering inventions of form, whereby these shapes always contain or hide biographic reminiscences as well.

A new series of works now makes use of graffiti on glass panes the artist has found, then destroyed and forged into sculptural objects together with other trash to make new constellations. The energy, the symbolic charging of anonymous graffiti remains as a trace in the sculptural assemblages, though their meaning, their readability, has been undermined, transferred into a new code, thus returning to one of the structural features of graffiti, in which each element only takes on meaning as a variable structural term. Here the codes as such do not bear any actual message or content, unless it is a kind of self-assertion—beyond romantic designs of identity. Oliver Scharfbier breaks with the combinations of signs he has

found, reinterprets the intrusion of graffiti into the linguistic/pictorial monotony of the cities by transforming their fragments into poetic spatial pictures and staging them as a bold montage of fragments of various cultural and media provenance. His scene arrangements reflect and interpret the wild interventions in the urban environment by cunningly reversing the process of their production and breaking the paintings—illegally and clandestinely created in a coup de main—out of their location and transplanting them into a different public sphere, that of art. At the same time such transfers trigger a fresh and subversive questioning of the ambivalent evaluation of graffiti between scribblings and art. Sculptural figures, also built from the objets trouvés found locally, such as the *Survivor with the Silver Wheel Rim*, a swift windsurfer, or *The 13th Warrior*, as well as its modification, the raft of light called *The Return of the 13th Warrior*, two sculptures, whose title is a flashback to the direct, naïve, and quickly-narrated action film, itself a mix of various myths, and then, using dark images and diabolical sound effects, wraps the “Clash of Civilisations” cleverly into adventure action—with a clear message: We must listen to one another (alright already) in order to overcome cultural differences. Such assemblages may then be given further facets and be broken up more through text images: With Scharfbier all things in space are bound into a confusing yet lucid play and counter-play—it seems as if everything together forms a field between the search for meaning and the denial of meaning, whereby the artist no longer stands alone as the sole constructor of meaning, but has been replaced by a multi-part, anonymous choir, in which extremely varying attitudes, opinions, and vocabularies intersect—a dynamic place of events.

Added to this plural concert, newly performed each time, it is also fitting that several of the groups of works or individual works have been dedicated to friends. There is, for example, the book “Mega Amerika”, which was published for the premiere of Oliver Scharfbier’s documentary film *Pampoopam, an homage* to three friends, who were important companions at discussions on art. There is also the concert for Almas Corovic, and now, for the Galerie Zone B in Berlin, there is the *Large Drum as a Score for Björn Achilles*, which will be displayed during the exhibition *In the Shadow of my Battery—Light/Virus/Spectacle*. Already the title of the staging provokes and balances various interpretations or attempts at the way the piece may be read. It lives from extremely personal, but also social implications, which then catch the individual elements of the spatial arrangement (and the viewer) as if in a net, take them captive, or even misdirect them. The battery is, of course, where the energy is stored, but it also alludes to the French word for drum. We all live with Debord in the society of the spectacle as an illusionary world of clichés, propaganda, surrogates with their vulgar forms of pseudo-fests, with the parodies of the dialogue and the offering. We are infected and infiltrated with expectations, influences, and a fear of being influenced: since Flavin, the use of neon is indeed nothing new anymore, despite its original meaning. In Oliver Scharfbier’s space the art of light made from artificial light is carried further rather incidentally, and Flavin’s spiritual exaggeration of minimal art becomes surprisingly enriched yet again. Of course, the title also centers around the battery of German history, which burdens us with meaning and weight, or else it identifies our history as a battery for the artists, a legacy and source for creatively making things better and different. Perhaps, however, it refers to art as the transformer of energy; is the battery meant here as a surrogate for a motor in weak times, a storage battery for the residual?

Very nonchalantly and without shying away from great themes Oliver Scharfbier allows for such interpretations, but at the same time the overall staging eludes being pinned down in any one way, remaining in the shadow of responsibility. The large drum, a formation we associate at first glance with a solarium or a starkly lit operating table, in turn built of neon tubes and concisely based, oscillates between adapting and running counter to its free-floating title, developing new connections and questions in its shimmering relationship. The fragments of the exhibition are ambiguous and yet live from their unique presence and the movement within them: In accordance with the 'images', the poetic text *I, however, fly away* on a pink ground and the grid of tape on a reflecting surface, which pulls the viewer into the picture, the installation for the Galerie Zone B results in a rebus sequence (rebus=through the things) of images and signs, disturbing, lucid, subversive, and bold.

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Translated by Elizabeth Volk