

ARTFORUM

MAY 2017

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

SUMMER PREVIEW

ART UNDER NATIONALISM:
DISPATCH FROM WARSAW

WARHOL AND FASSBINDER

WHITNEY BIENNIAL

ALLORA & CALZADILLA:
PUERTO RICAN LIGHT

\$15.00



occupy in a given space before it ceases to be spatial? To what extent can sculpture be pure surface, and can surface itself give rise to space? Where does surface end and space begin?

At Künstlerhaus Bethanien, where he was on a residency, Ank started by constructing an elongated casting mold that extended all the way to the ceiling. Placed at an oblique angle between two pillars so that it just barely touched them, the form interpreted these existing structural elements as a kind of frame. At the same time, the mold opened up to the surrounding space by extending beyond the pillars on the left and right. The cast itself was produced on-site over the course of six consecutive days, as was evident in the linear stratification and embedded bands of color. The technique didn't allow for detailed compositional choices, or even for the artist to lay eyes on the result until shortly before the opening. "Seeing it now," he said, "I have the feeling that the work really lives here, like a subject. It's not so much 'put' here as an object. It kind of grew here." The decidedly slender piece he realized at the Künstlerhaus formed a freestanding wall, and the beholder sensed, while walking around it, the presence of a distinct solid volume.

The objects at Galerie Michael Janssen, most measuring roughly twenty-four by sixteen inches, and about an inch and a quarter deep, were mounted on the wall like paintings but were again composed of layers of poured plaster stained by pigment mixed into the mass. These works explored a literal architecture of the pictorial space: The artist is interested in the lacuna behind the canvas, the shallow depth that painting usually obscures in establishing the illusive space of the picture. In these works, an essentially sculptural process has yielded color gradients with a sometimes powerful painterly appeal. Again, the technique makes the visual outcome difficult to predict. Ank built an upright casting mold into which he inserted a standard-format canvas before filling the void behind it with layers of plaster and liquid pigment. His focus is less on compositional aspects than on what he describes as an "inner space" that resonates with the beholder's interaction with the work; the works' painterly qualities lend this perceptual space concrete contours. Here, as with the massive site-specific installation at Künstlerhaus Bethanien, the works' true dimensions became actual only in a viewer's lived experience of the cast in its setting.

—Jens Asthoff

Translated from German by Gerrit Jackson.

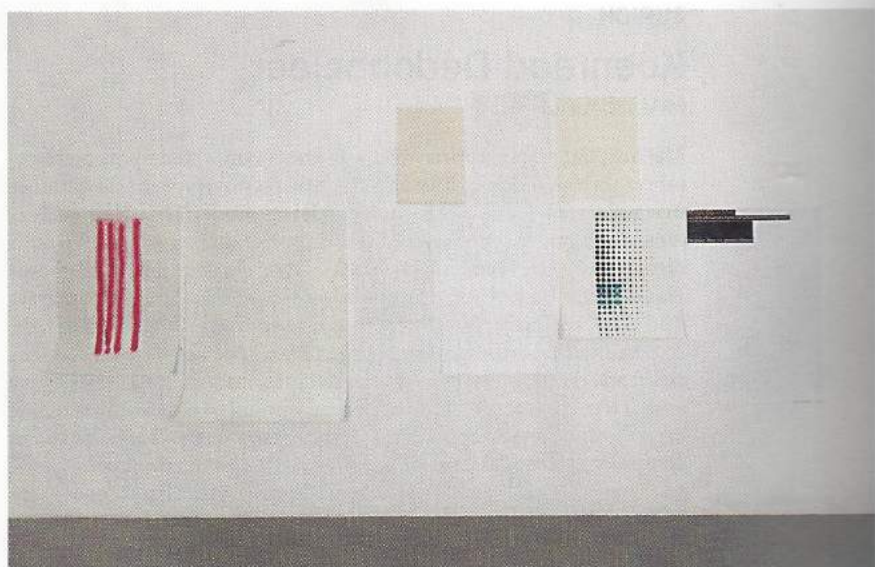
DÜSSELDORF

Wolfgang Plöger

KONRAD FISCHER GALERIE

"To use a search engine is potentially a political act," writes Paul Soulellis, founder of the Library of the Printed Web, in the brochure accompanying Wolfgang Plöger's exhibition "Inherited Lies." By using a search engine, Soulellis explains, we become involved, whether we like it or not, in an ensemble of hierarchies, preferences, parallels, and comparisons predetermined by algorithms. The moment we hit the "search" button, we subscribe to the order it imposes. But what does that order actually look like? Which hierarchies does it entail, which priorities does it implement, what does it withhold and conceal, how do these priorities shift over time, and how do political events affect the order of the search engines?

Such are the questions that may have absorbed Plöger when, in 2003, he began making printouts of his search results from the then-still-novel Google. He collected the pages and bound them in books, eventually compiling an entire library. "Plöger is the first 'printed web' artist," says Soulellis, who ten years later launched his "archive of web-to-print artists' publications," which gathers works created with data



from Google, Wikipedia, Twitter, Facebook, and other sites; artists including Jon Rafman, Clement Valla, and Penelope Umbrico have contributed to the enterprise. But Plöger got an enormous head start, and his *Google Image Search – Library* now consists of seventy-eight volumes, some of them running to several hundred pages. The complete set was on display here, neatly lined up on shelves as in a real library, labeled by the names of dictators, activists, and politicians such as Mubarak, Pinochet, Putin, Nasser, Obama, and Malcolm X; keywords including weapons and refugees, the latter of which Plöger first entered in 2004; and specific dates.

The first volume, *Death Row*, for example, is a compilation of images Plöger found by searching for that phrase between May 19 and May 22, 2003. Two volumes on Iraq illustrate the way the search results change depending on how a country's name is spelled: The English form yielded almost exclusively pictures from the Iraq war, while the Arabic also produced family pictures, landscapes, and fashion shots. The books of searches by dates represent some of the days on which the conceptual artist On Kawara produced one of his date paintings. Plöger's library is a heterotopia, a place where ephemeral digital data are relocated into the real world before they vanish forever. The volumes are frozen snapshots documenting the evolving universe of online visual material—the artist collects images exclusively—over the past fourteen years. They bear aesthetic witness to their time and various regions of the world as well as to social and political upheavals.

In addition to the library, Plöger presented works that represent a similar analytical approach to an exploration of the various tools of digital image editing. The series "Selection," 2013–14, for example, focuses on Photoshop's "selection tools" designed to single out details in actual photographs. The different sizes of the selections are recorded on the printouts. For "Print Stop," 2016–, Plöger output monochrome color fields, interrupting the printing process and resuming it at different points to produce a series of computer-generated abstract images. *Weißabgleich* (White Balance) and *Schwarzabgleich* (Black Balance), both 2016 and based on Wikipedia searches, are fraught with political implications. When corporations including Kodak developed the color scale for their films, the chemistry was fine-tuned with a bias toward light skin. For years, darker skin tones looked unnatural in Kodak photographs. Running an internet search, then, is not the only act that can be political: So is using a camera.

—Noemi Smolik

Translated from German by Gerrit Jackson.

Wolfgang Plöger, *Weißabgleich* (White Balance), 2016, paper in nine different shades of white; ink-jet print, silk screen, spray paint on paper, 6' 10 1/2" x 15' 8".