

## **Stillegung**

### **Reflection of one's own identity**

The exhibition *Stillegung*, at the Neuer Kunstverein Wuppertal, reveals a new quality in Ben Greber's work process: It chronicles the transformation of biographical memories into objects and installations. Sculpture can be understood fundamentally as a process of transformation, as a transmutation of a story into a condensed moment, an idea into a three-dimensional entity or of material into a specific object. This process can be observed and discussed more concretely with reference to Ben Greber's work. While transformation was inherent in the process of creation of his early, representational – as in: object-ive – works, he now subjects these works to a radical “de-object-ification,” and in this exhibition achieves a “Stillegung” (a suspension, shutdown) – that is, an object-ification; or, better yet, questioning – of his own individuality, nourished by the trauma and coping strategies of his more recent history.

For all their differences, Ben Greber's works up until around 2013 are representational, object-ive – at least in the sense that their forms allow us to recognize something familiar, such as a supermarket cash register or a speedboat. And yet it is clear that what interests him is not reproducing and contextualizing these objects, but rather the question of what, beyond their practical value, these things convey. Beginning in 2013, a distinctly different formal language emerges: These works, including, for example *Umspannwerk* [Substation] and *Sibirisches Licht* [Siberian Light], are more like minimalist-abstract sculptures, formally influenced by geometric and serial structures. What is crucial, however, is that they are transformations of his own already extant works, which he disassembles and rearranges.

In addition, the sculptures and installations in *Stillelegung* also present a new feature: Just as Gerber's transmutation of representative, object-ive, works into abstract works indicate a questioning of his own artistic language, the works shown here are a reflection of his own biography and identity.

The exhibition is composed of two parts: Installation (1) consists of a room featuring a sculpture that looks like a broken model railway. Installation (2) is made up of three vitrines that present an arrangement of recreated boxes whose sizes (and numbers, applied to their front sides) correspond to the packaging of the model-train maker Märklin. They have been treated with a bronze-colored patina that evokes a wide range of associations, including a forgotten warehouse or old container boxes, for example.

After the Second World War, Ben Greber's grandfather lived in a one-room apartment in Wuppertal, on Buchenstraße, which runs parallel to the Rhenish railway line, near the former Wuppertal-Loh train station. He set up a model railway in his kitchen, which could be folded up to save room, and stored the corresponding collector's items in cabinets.

For this exhibition, Ben Greber reconstructed parts of these spaces and the railway from photographs. In this way he presents his idea of the postwar era while deconstructing its model-like reality, as his presentation has nothing in common with typical model railways.

A whiff of kitsch notwithstanding, model trains can be seen as a "miniverse of social coexistence" (Harald Schmidt), as a social experimental set-up through which realities are simulated imitatively and truths are created. But in the postwar period it was doubtless less

imitative than a means to escape the devastated living environment and an ideal to strive for in the country's reconstruction and impending economic boom. The idyllic world soon reaches its limits, though; once completed, it is condemned to repeat the same movement again and again, and to come to a standstill. In an episode of the television crime series *Polizeiruf 110 - Kreise*, (2015) written and directed by Christian Petzold, the related *horror vacui* is addressed as a social and individual problem when the character Peter Brauer says: "Most set-ups are circular, and inside the circle you have these boring, harmonious worlds ... the same train always circling around the same world ..." Fear of emptiness leads to a completion that allows for no further development. Ben Greber sees this as the actual motivating force behind his sculptural practice: "The discomfort of living in a world in which everything is finished and completed."

In this sense, Ben Greber's work can also be understood as a counter-project, as the deconstruction of unequivocal worlds and the creation of open worlds that can be newly questioned – whether by imitatively altering objects, allowing uncontrollable processes to participate in their creation, or radically transforming his own works. In the case of the exhibition *Stilllegung* – whose title already articulates this paradox – Ben Greber questions not only his artistic imagery but also his own identity as a person and artist. By taking his family history as a starting point, he also presents the objects as artifacts of parameters, memories, and fantasies. The installation of these objects and their specific arrangement draws viewers into spaces rich with associations – spaces that suggest a course between dream and reality, rife with riddles and paradoxes.

Erik Schönenberg