





BEN GREBER GREEN MACHINE

Die Dinge der Anderen

Curator: Charles Wennig.

Umspannwerk - Das Große Danach, 2023 © Ben Greber

1. BEN GREBER

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Exhibition: 28.10.2023 > 25.02.2024

Curator: Charles Wennig

The digital age is characterised by what the German artist Ben Greber (b. 1979) calls the 'progressive de-objectification and invisibility of all socially relevant processes'. Today, instead of operating heavy machinery in huge plants with smoking chimneys, we work in front of screens, our allimportant mobile phones always within reach. The time when large-scale coal and iron ore were processed in our direct vicinity is over, production has been relocated. Today, many products are manufactured outside of Europe, in anonymous and architecturally redundant halls in suburban industrial zones.

Today, we are surrounded by silent witnesses of a vanishing past. Things/objects, machines, even entire infrastructures/industrial facilities have lost their purpose. Few people still know what function they once served, and yet they shaped the everyday life of countless people. They were essential, economically and socially relevant, shaping people's identities through the products/work processes in which they were involved.

These objects are now akin to archaeological relics. While, essentially, they are still charged with meaning, laypeople can or will no longer ascribe any meaning to them. As a consequence, they drift off into the realm of meaninglessness/worthlessness.

Greber documents this disappearance, this ungraspability. He does so by foregrounding often tiny relics of past human activity (architectural remains, foundations, rail tracks...) and elevating them into the realm of the sculptural or sacred, similar to the small bone fragments of ancient and early medieval saints, which were enshrined in elaborate reliquaries and complex altar structures.

While still referring to the objects' original form and function, his sculptural works gain autonomy through the reduction of their formal vocabulary and appear as independent works in the context of the exhibition. A first series of works (until 2013) titled *Prozessuale Skulpturen* consists of sculptures made of cardboard, paper and other materials evidencing the functions of basic human needs in a technological world. They are figurative and tangible, their shapes suggesting more or less functional objects, such as a cash register (*Untitled*, 2008) or a radiator (*Untitled*, 2012). However: '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.' (Erik Schönnenberg, 2020)

Another series of works (from 2013 onwards) bears testimony to a new, minimalist-abstract formal vocabulary. As a sculptor with a keen interest in forms, volumes and haptics, Greber explores the concept of 'de-object-ification', the disappearance of things.

The series titled *Almagia* anonymises sculptural objects packed in cardboard boxes. The homogeneous, formally simplified boxes become objects in themselves, the 'actual content' disappearing in favour of pure work drawings.

In his following series, Greber radically dismantled and reworked much of his existing work. *Alles steuert der Blitz* (2013), for example, was made by casting the cavities inside the sculpture *Windmühle aus dem südlichen Teil des Jenseits* (2007). In *Umspannwerk* (2014), *Mast* (2015) and *Sibirisches Licht* (2016), the original works were completely reworked. The dislocated elements were rearranged and organised in strictly geometric, serially layered structures displayed in wall boxes and archiving modules.

Evacuations (from 2018 onwards) marks the beginning of another series of works in which complex metal constructions (or 'presentation architectures') isolate and meticulously frame a series of casts of fragments. The precision and detail of the textures of the moulded volumes generate a poignant sense of realism, counterbalanced by the artist's characteristic monochrome colour scheme. The frames create new sculptural volumes while simultaneously enhancing spectators' sense of distance and commanding their attention.

Figuration here returns in reduced, fragmentary quantity – and with a new narrative quality, as spectators sense that the artist's exploration revolves a 2 round biographical elements.

In other words, Greber created figurative works, which he then disassembled and abstracted. In a long pendular movement between the opposing poles of figuration and abstraction, he now repeats this process (structuring/destructuring) as he delves into his own biography and addresses both generational and intergenerational conflicts and traumas.

2. GREEN MACHINE – DIE DINGE DER ANDEREN

BG: Why *Green Machine*? The colour green has been a steady presence in my work from the very beginning. It was quite intuitive at first, and for a long time I didn't have an explanation for it.

CW: I vaguely remember the ubiquitous presence of green machines, lathes, etc. Historically, it's not entirely clear whether this colour scheme was designed to provide cheap and effective protection against rust or whether there was some psychological thinking behind it, as green was deemed to have an appeasing effect and therefore increase concentration and productivity.

BG: At the same time, green also has an organic, plant-like character, and when it comes in light, faded hues, it can have a spectral quality associated with decay and decomposition.

CW: This resonates with the use of *terre verte*, or 'green earth', in Renaissance (fresco) painting. It was used to produce a light greygreenish background that allowed for a more subtle and realistic treatment of the skin tones, as it made the incarnates, the warm skin colours, stand out. The equivalent in Flemish oil painting is called *doodverf*, literally 'dead paint'. It turns out that the realistic reproduction of the living requires the non-living as a background, as a foundation.

BG: So the colour green stands for the process of dissolution and 'renaissance'. For me, the colour green is never a colour, but an attribute of a given (possibly transcendental) state. It positions things between their past and their future. Perhaps green is a key to the exhibition in the sense that it is the lowest common denominator of all the works in it. The term 'machine' is not to be understood in the sense of a technical object, but as the motor or drive of a process to which all objects are subjected – time, their coming into being and passing away.

CW: Your work perpetuates the tradition of artists' machines – a description that does not exactly refer to kinetic apparatuses, such as Tinguely's, but rather serves an umbrella term for work that aims to lay bare complex, convoluted thought processes and set the mind in motion. Think of Duchamp's *Bachelor Machine* or Joseph Beuys's *Honey Pump in the Workplace* from 1977.

BG: Why *Die Dinge der Anderen*, 'other people's things'? I don't personally collect objects, I'm almost exclusively interested in other people's things – objects that have been created by people. Technical objects, in particular, seem to be imbued with a special kind of honesty. They reveal a certain feeling, a poetry about how they were created, how they were used, needed, cherished, how they were forgotten and finally replaced. The fact that I am a stranger helps to intensify my perception of my surroundings (and the objects in them). When I leave home, I detach myself from all the objects that surround me. It's a good feeling.

3.



Umspannwerk (DAS GROSSE DANACH), 2023
Coproduction Kunschthal Esch and Konrad-Krieger-Stiftung
Photo © Christof Weber

DAS GROSSE DANACH, 2023

As a Gen Xer, Greber reflects on his own perceived ahistoricity, on what it means to stand beside history in the making. On being born into a world that has always functioned, but whose functioning cannot be fully grasped because its socio-economic processes, which are constructed and managed by a multitude of decision-makers and specialists, are too complex. For the end consumer, these infrastructures and processes must indeed remain immaterial and hidden.

In this conflict-free Western European idyll, the COVID-19 pandemic was the first major personal disruption in many people's lives. There was a before and there is an after. *'Et in Arcadia ego'*: even in our wonderful, thoroughly designed world, fear, suffering and death still exist.

Greber playfully takes aim at the *'crise de la quarantaine'*¹ and invents a gigantic memento mori machine. He appropriates a profusion of classical vanitas symbols, which he combines with his own themes and working methods to create a daring collage. The empty pedestals bear witness to the disappearance and obsolescence of the things that surround us, while the burnt candles refer to the flowing of time, but also to the invisible parts of life's processes, that which remains hidden.

And so the conflict with the greatest historical caesura of all – the monstrous, incomprehensible industrial objectification and killing by the Nazi dictatorship – inevitably resurfaces. The result is both an aesthetically powerful, sprawling installation and a complex and stimulating commemorative machine in the venerable arthistorical tradition of still lifes.

¹ In French, the word *quarantaine* means both 'forties', as in 'midlife crisis', and 'quarantine', as in 'enforced isolation'.



Ben Greber & Bram Kuypers
Processions 1, 2021
Video loop, 6'51"
Cello: Patrick Reerink

PROCESSIONS - BEN GREBER & BRAM KUIYPERS

‘For the video series *Processions*, Ben Greber and Dutch artist Bram Kuypers (b. 1989 in Arnhem) embark on a journey to various test tracks for high-speed transportation systems. The starting point is the Transrapid test site in Emsland, in northern Germany. The second part explores the former track of the Aérotrain in France. The artists’ exploration of these test systems for high-speed trains is based on their overarching interest in technological utopias of the industrial age. In the films, Ben Greber and Bram Kuypers approach the respective transportation systems and associated ideas of the future in different ways. Combining performative elements with panoramic shots of the landscapes, they create an atmosphere that is at times surreal.’

Marijke Lukowicz, « Forgotten Future », 2022 (excerpt)



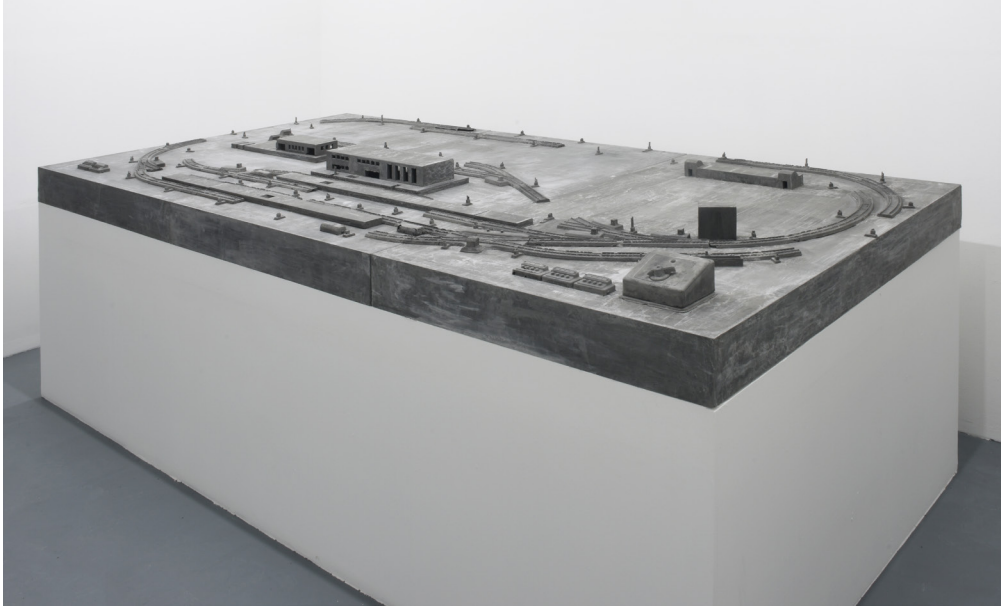
Grüß von Hollerith, 2009
Dimensions variable
Cardboard, MDF, plastic, pencil, silicon and wall paint on wallpaper, punch cards, plaster, zinc
LWL-Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster

GRÜß VON HOLLERITH, 2009

Through a peephole, spectators look into a 'dead room', a redundant staircase that has never been used, hidden behind plasterboard walls. Two objects hang on the wall. On closer inspection, one recognises two grey roll-fronted cabinets containing stacks of small cardboard squares reminiscent of index cards. The filing cabinets look bureaucratic and outdated.

The title, *Grüß von Hollerith* (Greetings from Hollerith), refers to the American entrepreneur, engineer and inventor Herman Hollerith (the son of German immigrants from Rhineland- Palatinate). In the 1880s, he developed and patented a punched card system for data storage. With the help of these punched cards, the data of millions of people could be recorded in censuses. His Tabulating Machines Corporation was later merged into the International Business Machines Corporation, or IBM, which still exists today. The Hollerith machines are therefore the electromechanical ancestors of modern data processing. They were made redundant by computers from the end of the 1940s, but punched cards were used as data carriers until well into the 1980s.

The peephole recalls a haunting scene from the film *Amen* (2002), in which a chemist (Kurt Gerstein, played by Ulrich Tukur) is asked to verify the efficiency of the killing machinery put in place by the Nazi regime. In Germany, Hollerith machines were used to record the data from the censuses for 1933 and 1939. During the war, they helped the SS manage the large number of prisoners who were interned and released from concentration camps. The machines were manufactured by DEHOMAG (Deutsche Hollerith- Maschinen Gesellschaft), a subsidiary of IBM since 1922.



Stillegung, Anlage 1, 2018

250 x 125 x 81 cm

Plastic, plasterboard, wood, LED lights, paint

Neuer Kunstverein Wupperta

STILLEGUNG, ANLAGE 1

'Stillegung, Anlage 1' consists of a room featuring a sculpture that looks like a broken model railway. After the Second World War, Ben Greber's grandfather lived in a one-room apartment in Wuppertal, near the former Wuppertal-Loh train station. He set up a model in his kitchen, which could be folded up to save room, and stored the corresponding collector's items in cabinets. 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', 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 this sense, Ben Greber's work can also be understood as a counterproject, 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 *Stillegung* – 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, « Stillegung », 2020 (excerpts)

4. BIOGRAPHY



Ben Greber (b. 1979 in Halle) lives and works in Berlin.

He studied at the Münster Academy of Art with Katharina Fritsch and Ayşe Erkmen and is a master student of Katharina Fritsch. In 2011, he was awarded the GWK encouragement prize for visual artists and a work scholarship from Stiftung Kunstfonds. Together with Bram Kuypers, he was supported by the 2020 VISIT programme of the E.ON Stiftung. He is currently a laureate of the forty+ prize of the Konrad-Krieger-Stiftung. His work has been presented in numerous solo exhibitions, among others at Marta Herford, Viafarini in Milan, Neuer Kunstverein Wuppertal, Cuxhavener Kunstverein, 515 in Los Angeles and LAGE EGAL in Berlin.

www.bengreber.com

PUBLICATIONS (SELECTION)

Ben Greber, Bram Kuypers: *Processions*, 2022 / Published by Pierre Granoux and LAGE EGAL / Text and interview by Marijke Lukowicz

Ben Greber: *Virtual Reality*, 2020 / Published by Kunstverein Gütersloh / 160 p. / Preface by Marcus Steinweg / Texts by Marcus Lütkemeyer, Anna Lena Seiser, Erik Schönenberg, Raimund Stecker / Favoritenpresse, Berlin / ISBN : 978-3968490113

Ben Greber: *Alles steuert der Blitz*, 2013 / Published by Jochen Heufelder / 6-page folder / Text by Arne Reimann / ISBN: 3-930636-71-9

Ben Greber: *Almagia*, 2012 / Published by GWK / 124 p. / Texts by Andreas Peeters and Ludwig Seyfarth / Kettler Verlag, Bönen/Westfalen / ISBN: 978-3-86206-169-3

5. General program

Full programm on konschthal.lu >agenda

Free guided tour of the exhibition every Sunday at 15:00 and every Thursday at 18:30, as well as on public holidays (FR-EN-DE).

Detailed dates on konschthal.lu

29.10.2023 | 16.00–17.00 | DE

Artist Talk | Ben Greber, Raimund Stecker, Charles Wennig

12.10.2023 | 15.30–16.30 | DE (At Luxembourg Art Week)

Artwork and narrative - In conversation with Ben Greber

19.11.2023 | 14.00–18.00

Family Workshop | Shaping memory | with Birgit Thalau

25.11.–25.02.2023 | 11.00–18.00

Walk-in Workshop | Shaping memory

07.12.2023 | 15.30–17.30

Train the Teachers | Teacher training around the exhibition

16.12.2023 | 15.00–16.30 | LU/FR

Drawing tour for families | Walking Talking Drawing

28.12.2023 | 14.00–17.00

Kids Workshop 9–12 | Mini Home Pieces | with Birgit Thalau

18.01.2024 | 18.00–19.30 | LU/FR

Drawing tour | Walking Talking Drawing

20.01.2024 | 14.00–17.00

Workshop Adults/Teens | Mini Home Pieces | with Birgit Thalau

25.01.2024 | 18.00–24.00

Takeover Thursday | The memory factory | In collaboration with Industriekultur-CNCI

01.02.2024 | 19.30–22.30

Screening Series – Ben Greber | *Short Cuts* (Robert Altman, 1993)

08.02.2024 | 19.30–21.30

Screening Series – Ben Greber | *Dear Wendy* (Thomas Vinterberg, 2005)

10.02.2024 | 11.00–17.00

Masterclass for adults/students | Hardness and elasticity, a dual approach to casting | avec Arthur Delhaye

15.02.2024 | 14.30–16.30

Kids Workshop 6–12 | Frottage printmaking workshop

24.02.2024 | 09.00–16.00

Train the Teachers | in collaboration with FerroForum et IFEN

24.02.2024 | 19.30–22.00

Screening Series – Ben Greber | *The Doors* (Oliver Stone, 1991)

23.02.–25.02.2024 | 11.00–18.00

Presentation of projects by CapFutur students (Lycée Guillaume Kroll, Esch) | in collaboration with FerroForum

25.02.2024 | 15.00–16.00 | LU

Thematic guided tour | Through the eyes of Vincent Artuso

6. Publication + Artist's edition

Publication on the work of Ben Gerber with texts by Raimund Stecker (art historian and curator)
Co-published by Korschthal Esch and Salon Verlag & Edition

128 pages DE-EN

ISBN 978-3-89770-580-7

Price: 28 €

Artist's edition: *Umspannwerk (DAS GROSSE DANACH)*, Ben Greber, 2023

Produced in 50 copies

22.1 x 15.2 x 6.3 cm - Spray paint on plastic, cardboard

The edition includes a copy of the book *Ben Greber* (Salon Verlag, 2023) published on the occasion of the exhibition *Green Machine - Die Dinge der Anderen* at Korschthal Esch, Luxembourg.

Price: 500 €

7. Press visuals & credits

Please note that photographs of the exhibition will be available from 31:11 on



Umspannwerk - DAS GROSSE DANACH, 2023 (Détail)
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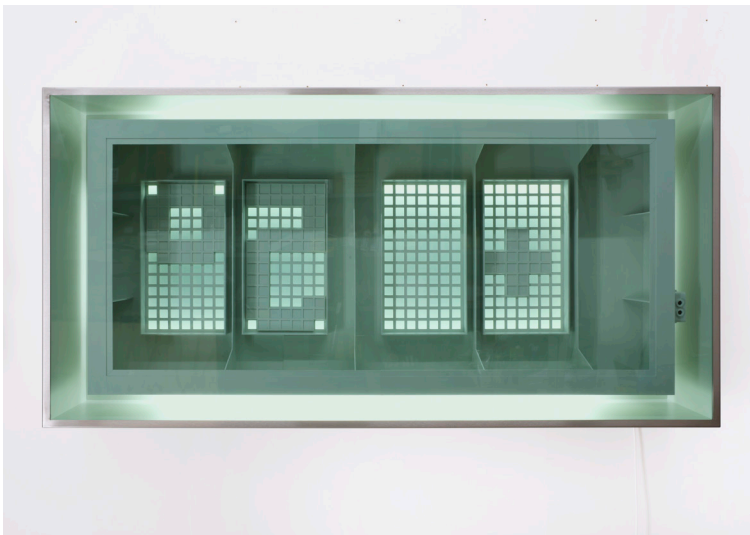
Umspannwerk - DAS GROSSE DANACH, 2023 (Détail)
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Umspannwerk - Marzona, 2017 (Détail)
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All press kits can be downloaded under:
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Free admission
WED 11AM - 6PM
THU 11AM - 8PM
FRI/SAT/SUN 11AM - 6PM
MON/TUE closed