

VIVRE EN POF with Fabrice Hybert

Fabrice Hybert is one of those artists who, in the 1990s, began to employ forms of economic practice as the material of their art in various ways. The first and outstanding collaboration of the "artist-entrepreneur" Hybert with Kunstraum Lüneburg took place in 1996. It consisted of the temporary transformation of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (Palais Tokyo) into a supermarket, stocked with thousands of commodities intended for sale, which, thanks to a student initiative, were made available by medium-range German companies.

The idea of the artist as an "economic actor" also extends to the objects Hybert terms POF: "Prototype d'Objet en Fonctionnement". These "prototypes in function" have the appearance of innovative everyday objects, and their stylization - as through Hybert's trademark green - seems to place them in competition with ubiquitous consumer goods. Yet thanks to their contextualization in the art field, they prove to be insidious objects that elude facile classification. Despite presentation in a museum context, the POFs obviously do not take on the character of contemplative, auratic works of art, yet at the same time they resist appropriation by the utilitarian demands of consumer capitalism - they are not "marketable" despite the fact that their outward appearance reflects the logic of modern market innovation.

Hybert's outdoor sculpture "Pof 83 [pylône]", installed at the University of Lüneburg in the year 2000, has since become a visual landmark on campus. It represents the prototype of a lighting pylon that functions independently of the electrical system, by utilizing every source of energy available in the environment: wind, sun and rain. Yet this seemingly ideal technical apparatus, a model for the utopian idea of a new, decentralized technology, is in reality a "poetic machine" (Robert Fleck). All it takes is a mild night with no rain or wind for the viewer to realize that the sculpture does not live up to its promise, and that its maker was no art-minded environmentalist. The non-utilitarian, non-functioning character of this art object disguised as a lighting pylon becomes obvious, an experience we have with all of Hybert's POFs at some phase in the reception process.

This seems to bring a classical theme of the autonomous art field into play, according to which - to speak with Adorno - art, if it is to have a function at all, this can only be that of functionlessness. Yet the POFs tend to take an ironic stance with respect to this postulate, since the artist-entrepreneur offers it as a possible "mark of quality" of his commodities. If there is indeed any background for the aesthetic paradigms Hybert operates with, it may lie in the circumstance that he invariably chooses the medium of drawing as the point of departure for his POFs. Hybert employs art as a three-dimensional realization of the spaces of potentiality worked out in the free play of the drawing activity.

In addition to this idiosyncrasy of their production process, the POFs might be described as sculptural objects with a performance character, which sets them off fundamentally from a contemplative aesthetic. The playful, active testing of their useability in an exhibition setting, their potential development or reincorporation in the cycles (ecological, economic, etc.) from which they originally stem, are predicated on active recipients whose participation in the artistic process contributes to the completion of the POFs. If you will, Hybert constructs an experiment-based laboratory situation.

In the context of the Kunstraum's cooperation with Fabrice Hybert, award winner at the 1996 Venice Biennale, and his Paris firm Unlimited Responsibility (UR), a total of forty-two POFs were installed at various sites around the Lüneburg campus in January 2003. Short videos on monitors show Eliane Pine Carrington in the process of testing and using the POFs. The inception of the project dates back to a rally held in Paris in October 2002. With the aid of a Kunstraum project group, POFs were installed at about sixty sites in the public space in Paris, and the rally participants were assigned the task of finding them. The rally ended in a "nuit blanche", with a performance by Eliane Pine Carrington and the POF Cabaret, held on October 5, 2002 at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.

For the Kunstraum der Universität Lüneburg - an art space founded in 1993 - cooperation with Fabrice Hybert has been significant in many respects. Our aim of presenting contemporary art on a high level to local and national audiences by means of projects, exhibitions, lectures, symposia and publications, has been immensely furthered by collaboration with one of the major French artists of our day. At the same time, the specific character of the project has led to increased focus on the practice-related aspects of university instruction, especially in the context of the art and imaging sciences which are part of the Applied Cultural Sciences major. Another central component of the project is the employment of empirical survey and observation methods for an analysis of the social utilization of the POFs installed on campus, which has enabled an extension of the discussion to cover issues in the sociology of art.