

made oblique or explicit reference to the work of Judd, Oldenburg, or Sol LeWitt, one could still make out an amused look at the legacies of Bernar Venet, Bertrand Lavier, or Jean-Pierre Raynaud. Reexamining the old model of the cabinet of curiosities turned out to be a way of questioning the connections between art and economy, art and possession. For an exhibition in a commercial gallery, this made its own sense, too.

—Yoann Van Parys

Translated from French by Jeanine Herman.

## BERLIN

### Sven Johne

#### KLEMM'S

A man stands on the seashore. He swings his arm and tosses a message in a bottle into the waves. This procedure is captured seven times in a series of black-and-white photographs, the places and times recorded in logbooklike annotations: “Sent in: Rockaway Beach, NYC, USA Date: 15 Sept. 2008,” “Sent in: Fire Island, NY, USA Date: 16 Sept. 2008,” or “Sent in: Block Island, RI, USA Date: 18 Sept. 2008.” If the Gulf Stream is reliable, the bottles should eventually arrive in Europe. And with a little luck, the commentaries sealed inside, with their quotidian observations on the topic of “speed, efficiency and solidarity in daily New York,” will find their way back into the work, ideally being incorporated, with notes specifying the time and place of their discovery, in these diptychs whose right-hand panels await notation of the results. The man in these photographs, Sven Johne, born on the Baltic Island of Rügen and trained as a photographer at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig, has previously attracted notice with his pointed docu-fictional conceptual projects, which combine researched or found histories and individual life stories with atmospheric photographs. The contemplative tone typical of Johne’s work is visible everywhere in this show, “52 glückliche Orte” (52 Happy Places). The way his work plays with location and dislocation, however, is taken further here: Johne’s explorations of the search for happiness, dream locales, and romantic longing and disappearance find their culmination in the no-man’s-land of the high seas, abandoned subway tunnels beneath New York City, and an archipelago in the South Atlantic.

Besides in the message-in-a-bottle diptychs, which have already integrated a speculative horizon of expectation into their very form, Johne’s yearning sensibility can be seen above all in his suite of ten fictional nautical charts, *Seafaring Discoveries of Our Time* (all works 2008). The viewer is presented with coordinates and arrows indicating depth, boundaries, and “restricted areas,” but in the absence of

any markings of land or coastlines. Instead of facilitating orientation, these charts evoke dislocation; instead of describing concrete locations, they serve as diffuse metaphors of disorientation. These maps also function as an allegory for the alienation of labor, thanks to the reports that form their basis—notes by young seamen who often go months at a time without leaving their ships—and find their analogue in the “52 Happy Places” of the show’s title: Fifty-two small images found on the Internet depict islands belonging to the Vanuatu Archipelago in the South Pacific, on which, according to the “Happy Planet Index,” live the happiest people in the world. Johne’s collected photos, however, don’t show us this mythically happy life, but instead function as a commentary on our projection of unattainable happiness onto distant parts of the world.

For the most part, the results are compelling on a formal level, highlighting the interplay between concept and affect, between the strict imposition of form or structure and the emotional depth of subject and tone. But what really makes these pieces stand out is the subtlety of their sociopolitical component. Far from trumpeting any political content in overt declamations or in terms of site-specificity and institutional critique, Johne’s works gauge certain individual—if socially structured—emotional universes and trace them with sensitivity. Neither losing himself in feeling nor denying his essential emotional investment, Johne maintains an effortless balance.

—Dominikus Müller

Translated from German by Oliver E. Dryfuss.

## AACHEN, GERMANY

### Nairy Baghramian

#### NEUER AACHENER KUNSTVEREIN

The building that houses the Neuer Aachener Kunstverein is simple: two levels, each a single long room, connected by a plain staircase. This manageable structure was the perfect setting for Nairy Baghramian’s exhibition “Affairen. Ein semiotisches Haus, das nie gebaut wurde. Zu Gast: Janette Laverrière und Henrik Olesen” (Affairs. A Semiotic House That Was Never Built. Guests: Janette Laverrière and Henrik Olesen). In it, the artist staged doublings, reflections, recollections, and meetings. Downstairs, the sculpture *Entrechambre verticale*, 2008, greeted exhibition-goers. An architectural structure made out of numerous intersecting walls standing well above head height, it was dominated by a long, freestanding, pointed post, which towered over the room like a giant fishing rod. Thick fabric films flowed down its sides and rolled out on the concrete floor. Upstairs in the same spot lay a second sculpture, *Entrechambre horizontale*, 2008. While its materials mimic the first, they lay flat on the ground, as if not yet assembled. And here the long pole and the white sheets were nowhere to be found.

This gesture of doubling and difference was repeated in a pair of mirrors hung parallel to each other in the stairwells of each level: *J'accuse* and *La Bastille*, both 2008, by the French artist and designer Janette Laverrière, whom Baghramian chose as her guest collaborator for this exhibition (having already created a display for Laverrière’s designs in the Fifth Berlin Biennale last year) along with the Danish artist Henrik Olesen. While the connection between the two mirrors and Baghramian’s own works became immediately apparent—because both doublings work like slightly displaced material versions of a theme, as if one had broken the same work along the coordinates of an axis—the connection to Olesen’s work was more complicated. In his installation *Invadí tortore turche* (*Interior Invasion*) (Interfering Turkish Turtledoves [Interior Invasion]), 1999, newspaper pages



Sven Johne, *Message In a Bottle—Observation of Helplessness No. 7*, 2008, black-and-white photograph, silk screen, and silver-gelatin print, each 21 5/8 x 10 3/8".