

Sven Johne

Dear Vladimir Putin / I am the Power

28.4.–9.6.2018

We're delighted to present for this year's Gallery Weekend Berlin Sven Johne's 4th solo exhibition with the gallery: *Dear Vladimir Putin / I am the Power*. In an immersive, spatial interplay of film, sound, text, and images three new works are on view.

In his intermedial game, alternating between fiction, narration, and documentation, Johne approaches general and highly subjective topics of our time with humor and subversiveness: the question of self-optimization, specific fear of exclusion and failure, the search for individual fulfillment and the promise of a better, fairer world. Johne's interest lies in the individual stories beyond the historic: personal fate, local events or moments of stepping out of order are getting attention and – like a mosaic of details – enable a reflection of our times.

„Dear Vladimir Putin, please allow me to introduce myself: my name is Peter Bittel. I was born in Dresden on April 19, 1949, where I still live today. Please forgive my somewhat rusty Russian; I haven't spoken your beautiful language for quite some time now.“

In Sven Johne's newest film *Lieber Wladimir Putin / Dear Vladimir Putin* we see retired civil-engineer Peter Bittel (Gottfried Richter) prepare for his 'big gig': a speech to Vladimir Putin about things personal and political, a monologue in Russian around 18 minutes long. Although Bittel can give his speech from his home computer, it is supposed to be live and available to everyone online.

"Dear Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, I long for peace, justice, and order, I hope for mutual assistance and solidarity, as once was a given. I would like, in this, my very own country, to be more than a non-voter and a consumer."

Bittel practices reading his script, edits and rejects or hones individual passages, and sometimes despairs in the face of the pronunciation and grammar of the language. It is a text like a confession, which oscillates between political camps and challenges us to question our own favorite political standpoints, to discard them or to buttress them.

In reciprocity to the above Sven Johne sets *Heroes of Labor*, the portraits of individualized capitalism: The 'big 12' among the motivational and life coaches in this world, celebrated icons of self-optimization, look at us in a large grin from the wall. They seem to literally embody the postulate *I am the Power* – the central motive of the second film/sound-piece in the exhibition. A nocturnal stroll through a pedestrian area – scarcely lit and with the typical mix of useful architecture and the faceless, over-renovated facades of the old-buildings – opens another emotional realm. At first sight these harmless, almost funny pictures of the 'spokesmen of success' and their visions presented here in sound and image address us directly as acting individuals, triggering in us a process of reflection on our own sources for motivation and doctrines: How far is our own identity and life plan imprinted by the neoliberal age? And: how free are we in the decision-making for our existence?

Sven Johne's work has recently been shown at a.o.: „Field of Codes“, PiK, Köln, DE (2018), „Fotografierte Ferne“, Berlinische Galerie, Berlin, DE (2017), „Biennale für aktuelle Fotografie – Farewell Photography“, Mannheim, Ludwigshafen, Heidelberg, DE (2017), „Naturgeschichten / Natural Histories“, mumok, Vienna, AT (2017), „Sven Johne: Window of the World“, Hiroshima Museum of Contemporary Art, Hiroshima, JP (2016) (solo), „Reset. Outskirts / Randlagen“, Pinakothek der Moderne, München, DE (2016), „History is a Warm Gun“, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (NBK), Berlin, DE (2015), „Jeden Morgen ein Lächeln' – Anomalien des frühen 21. Jahrhunderts / Einige Fallbeispiele“, Arbeiterkammer, Wien, AT (2015) (solo), „Welcome to the Jungle“, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, DE (2015). Soon his work will be on view at the Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art, Riga, LVA (2018), Triennial of Photography Hamburg, Hamburg, DE (2018) and at the Hamburger Kunstverein (2018).