

DIE STILLE REVOLTE DER DINGE SCHENKUNG SCHRÖDER

DIRK BELL
GUILLAUME BIJL
JULIETTE BLIGHTMAN
MERLIN CARPENTER
STEPHAN DILLEMUTH
FELIX DROESE
CERITH WYN EVANS
CHRISTIAN FLAMM
ULRIKE HEISE
YNGVE HOLEN
KARL HOLMQVIST
KITTY KRAUS
LUCY MCKENZIE
GEORGIE NETTELL
NILS NORMAN
MANFRED PERNICE
DANIEL PFLUMM
KIRSTEN PIEROTH
JOSEPHINE PRYDE
ANDREAS SLOMINSKI
FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER
STEPHEN WILLATS

DURATION

23.3.2025 — 29.3.2026

VENUE

Kunstmuseum Bremerhaven

OPENING

March 22, 2025, 5 pm

A COMPANION GUIDE TO THE EXHIBITION **THE QUIET REBELLION OF THINGS** SCHRÖDER DONATION

by Dominic Eichler

IN THE FOYER, ON THE GROUND-FLOOR, AND IN THE BASEMENT

a map and a stitch

Before us lies a selection of contemporary works of art whose assembly and arrangement has been orchestrated by now invisible hands. Transactions, correspondence, and business have been concluded; ownership and locations changed. The Schröder donation is a thought-provoking group of charged and particular things, whose transition from private to public ownership comes as an unexpected elevation. This map-like pamphlet is designed to be held in one hand, to act as a reassuring navigational aid through the exhibition presenting the donation as many of the works use an encoded or reserved mode of address. This is art that is fully conscious of being reticent, even difficult by design, and pioneering in some way. Visitors are bound to draw all kinds of conclusions. Meanwhile, the collector in the background can be thought of as the unreliable narrator of his own subjective corner of art history, one who wishes to leave space for us each to make up our own minds. A stitch is being added to the social fabric.

1992

The donation comprises 57 works by 22 artists produced between 1992 and 2020, although art from around the 2000s makes up most of the offering and not all the works have been included in the exhibition. The selection also mainly features German and British artists, along with a few Scandinavian exceptions. Seen as a greater whole, some overarching topics emerge. The main one being the strong emphasis on media discourse, or the tracking of a vein of post-Duchampian art where both objects and their makers are put up for critique. Another is the role of context. There is also a near but not complete absence of traditional painting—implying the medium receives enough attention elsewhere.

A number of the artists have previously exhibited in Bremerhaven's Kabinett für aktuelle Kunst, a project founded in 1967 by Jürgen Wesseler (1938–2023). Its legendary and ongoing series of exhibitions inspired the selection of the particular works in the donation.

the fifth act

This donation is also the fifth in a series of major bequests by the Schröder collection to major institutions including: the Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg; and Mumok—Museum modern-er Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna. Schröder has noted, "A museum is a place where you want to pack more in." In classic narrative plot structure, the fifth act comes after the climax. It is the space for the denouement, the time for emotional responses, and for the acceptance of consequences. A private art collection can be as much a work of fiction (about projected importance, relevance, prosperity, self-discovery, coming-of-age, revenge) as a novel or film or an individual piece of art. The fifth act, then, to quote the title of an exhibition at Schröder's own not-for-profit Berlin art space

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- 1 Cerith Wyn Evans, *Untitled (perfect lovers +1)*, 2008 © The artist, Photo: Fred Dott
- 2 Yngve Holen, *41cU77U*, 2013 © The artist, Photo: Fred Dott
- 3 Stephen Willats, *People and Diagrams, Bergmannstrasse, Berlin*, 2014, film still, Part of the work *Berlin Local*, 2014.
- 4 Daniel Pflumm, *Ohne Titel (Raiffeisen)*, 1999 © The artist, Photo: Fred Dott

MD72 (2007–2018)—a side project amongst many—is where the “past, present and future” might commingle.

time is running out

The exhibition’s title *The Quiet Rebellion of Things* refers, amongst other things, to a refusal for art to concede to becoming just another elitist commodity. But it could equally imply an unwillingness to perform a public service in order to justify its existence. In this exhibition there is no pandering and fawning, no overt attempts at pleasantry, or patronizing justifications or explanations. And a guide such as this would do a disservice if it over–explained and, in doing so, subverted the intention of the artists to be standoffish. That does not mean that the visitor is intruding or an unwanted guest provided they can approach the unknown, the mysterious or hostile with a sense of curiosity, not a set of preconceptions.

Time is always running out, and our internal clocks often feel synchronized with runaway reality. At the entrance to the first room of the exhibition is Welsh conceptual artist, sculptor, and filmmaker **Cerith Wyn Evans’** (born 1958 in Llanelli), readymade clock piece *Untitled (perfect lovers +1)* (2008) **(1)**. The work is a brazen quotation of a work by Felix Gonzalez–Torres (1957–1996). Gonzalez–Torres’ much more famous elegiac work, created during the height of the AIDS crisis in New York, pairs just two clocks in memorial to his deceased lover. Wyn Evan’s remake adds a “plus 1”—an unnamed guest. This polyamorous suggestion is at once an homage and a conspiratorial wink. It is easy in these reactionary days to provoke the extremist patriarchal forces of socio–sexual conservatism within.

let’s get physical

The slightly ominous title of the exhibition suggests that art objects have an agency. An effectiveness that might entail a kind of resistance in lieu of an actual revolution (anyway an art gallery would be a strange place to start one). Digital algorithms are changing knowledge, work, the public sphere, and contemporary art. **Yngve Holen’s** (born 1982 in Braunschweig) series of four sculptural figures for instance, have passwords for titles engraved into them (see for example, *41cU77Uv*, 2013) **(2)**. Holen emerged in the so–called ‘post–internet’ era. In these works, a transactional body has been reduced to a nameless translucent fleshless perspex rod adorned with sneakers or other consumerist accessories. Alongside his wall piece, *Rose Painting* (2018) is not a painting but a scaled–up scan of the wheel spokes of a SUV vehicle. But mounted on the wall, its decorative esthetic surplus comes to the fore, especially through the use of laminated wood, and therefore sets associations free evoking, for example, the rose windows of Gothic architecture or the machinations of the world we have constructed.

local, control

The donation also evidences many such approaches and choices, positioning, and statements inspired by social–political discursiveness. A prime example is the work *Berlin Local* (2014) **(3)** by political artist and publisher of Control magazine, **Stephen Willats** (born 1943 in London). Willats’ lifelong artistic research into class systems and urban structures is on display. His programmatic and schematic method goes beyond mere information, creating a unique, unforgiving esthetic. In this installation, the displacement of his work emphasizes its artistic specificity. This is art that insists on an activistic relation to the wider chaotic and fascinating body social, regardless of whether that relation is just symbolic or a matter of wishful–thinking.

contemporaneity, the crash

We usually take for granted the things surrounding us, so it falls to art to wake us up again to the cultivated language of the built, made, or constructed. At the time of its creation or acquisition, most of the donated art was part of the vanguard, leading the wave. Every wave, however, eventually reaches a shoreline. And unkindly, it can sometimes seem like nothing is old as yesterday’s ‘contemporary’ art. While contemporariness can momentarily bolster an artwork’s claim to fame, it may also blind us to its genuine quality. Luckily, the benefit of hindsight can reveal the true colors of works in a deeper sense for posterity. And as it does, produce fresh sprouts of meaning. The past’s task is not to be right or better, but to be a foil for the emerging future. Nothing is static even though an art object might look so and as the safety warning says: “objects in mirror are closer than they appear”.

market trends

When it was made much of the selected work consciously bucked dominant market trends and hypes or was ahead of the game. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, the international contemporary art market and the gallery business changed and expanded in tandem with globalization, following new markets and new money. In order to exist, most contemporary art adapted to this greedy and self–congratulatory system, but not all. Amongst all this fervent activity, isn’t having a dissonant taste the mark of superior discernment? (“Why would anyone want what everyone else has, anyway?” Schröder has once remarked.) The rise of the curator characterized the 1990s, while the 2000s saw collectors claiming greater prominence, going from being patrons to players. More players should think of teams.

companion piece

Embarking on a journey is best done in good company. In the basement is a fictional companion, a bright–eyed young man figured in a work by Belgian conceptualist **Guillaume Bijl** (born 1946 in Antwerp). His composition of found material and objects *Composition Trouvée* (2002) centers on an effigy of an angler (a greatly oversized young man—all head and no discernable body) who appears happy and oblivious to his dimensions and positioning. The work exudes a charming if naïve confidence. Only the cynical might read the angle of his cocky angler’s hat as pointing sarcastically at the world. Bijl refers to his quizzical found object assemblages as “contemporary archeological still lives”. Schröder acquired the work from a Belgian gallery at a Greek art fair. The artist urges consideration of art’s nature and the artist’s purpose. Our unlikely mascot’s positioning in the cellar suggests something sub–conscious or hidden from view—optimism or relief, perhaps?

BY THE STAIRS AND ON THE FIRST FLOOR

confounded expectations

In the stairwell are two signature light boxes by artist and former club owner **Daniel Pflumm** (born 1968 in Geneva) **(4)**. Their appropriated, recycled graphic quality is evocative of the streets of 1990s Berlin. The titles of these works refer to a banking and an insurance firm, but in an art context, one might think of Mark Rothko’s abstraction or minimalist light sculptures. After the surprisingly peaceful end of the Cold–war,

Germany’s troublesome capital experienced an extraordinary cultural and economic twilight zone, a state of exception before its gradual, arduous and still incomplete absorption back into capitalist normalcy. Pflumm’s work might have easily gone unnoticed amongst the real and ideological ruins in both East and West Berlin, as many pop–up art and music scenes appropriated the city’s defunct signs and squatted its disused and dilapidated spaces. This, of course, is the home turf of the Schröder collection as well. We should not underestimate how this context influenced some of the donated works, if only subtly in attitude or feeling. It matters if just outside the gallery is Mayfair, the newly gentrified meat–packing district, or a former GDR *Plattenbau*.

traps for young players

Light rooms and abstract, in–between spaces abound on the exhibition’s first floor. But first, it begins with a threshold, a trap in the form of **Andreas Slominski’s** (born 1959 in Meppen) sculptural *Durchlauffalle* (1998) **(5)** and two accompanying drawings both entitled *Fallensteller* (Trapper, both 1992). Despite their violent designs, Slominski’s sculptural traps seduce and delight through their ingenuity and folkish construction. The artist asks viewers to consider the metaphorical implication that art is not benign, that it might even be capable of grievous bodily harm.

Throughout the donation, art does not necessarily reflect the Apollonian impulse but gives expression to darker, ambivalent and malevolent forces. Take, for example, the jagged, violent scene depicted in the silhouetted paper cut–out *Die Stummheit der Gebannten* (The muteness of the banished, 1992) by **Felix Droese** (born 1950 in Singen). Droese took part in documenta 7 and represented Germany at the 1988 Venice Biennale with his “Haus der Waffenlosigkeit”. In 2003, Droese staged a collaboration with the discount supermarket chain Aldi offering more than a hundred and forty thousand prints at over one thousand five hundred stores to the public for €12.99 each. Noting the success of the project, the artist dryly observed that it demonstrated the unfulfilled demand for cultural produce in the Federal Republic.

traces, shadows

A mix of humor, philosophical musings, and cultural politics also enliven the works of three British artists of the same generation. **Juliette Blightman** (born 1980 in Farnham) stages works like spatial interventions pointing to a heighten awareness of the passing of time. The manuscript produced as part of the performative work *Grasses grow and they make a shadow, so just as grasses grow* (2009), for instance, records in typewritten prose the comings and goings in another exhibition space at another time for a different audience. Nearby, a mirror and chair piece *mirrors would do well to reflect more before sending back images* (2009) **(6)** drolly invites more reflection and a more careful choice of words. What we say about others is, of course, a reflection of ourselves.

Georgie Nettel’s (born 1984 in Bedford) dirty dishes in plastic tub sculptures, *Malewhitecorporateoppression3* and *Malewhitecorporate–oppression4* (both 2013), seem like they were left in the wake of an unspecified event. Refusing to pick up afterwards, the abandoning the mess resonates as a pointed feminist and class conscious action that might be read as a joke or a mild irritation, but which, in fact, contains the seeds of revolt.

Lucy McKenzie’s (born 1977 in Glasgow) *Mackdoor* (2000) **(7)**, consists of a found door roughly painted over with one of Arts and Craft movement architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh’s designs. Mackintosh (1868–1928), designed, among other things, the impressive building for

the Glasgow School of Art. The artist’s work challenges division of art and craft and the loss of utopian high quality egalitarian ideals in modern architecture and design. Wherever installed, McKenzie asks us to think critically about what the built environment presupposes about us, and about what it could be, and might still become.

light, love, and lead

Two of their German born generational counterparts have a similar urge to postulate in the imaginary, albeit expressed through abstraction. **Dirk Bell** (born 1969 in Munich) work made from wood, steel, and bird–droppings *Ohne Titel* (2008) features Bell’s “LOVE” symbol—an integration of the four letters as a kind of monogram that has become a recurring emblem in the artist’s work. Although, it is not clear here if love has been abandoned or rescued. The artist’s small drawing of a man wearing sunglasses *Untitled* (2000) **(8)** provides yet another fictional protagonist—the mirror glass could be on the inside of the frames.

Alongside is a part of an ensemble of works by post–minimalist installation, light, and sculptural artist **Kitty Kraus** (born 1974 in Heidelberg). The grouping of five exemplary works in the donation distributed over two floors now makes Bremerhaven a destination for those interested in the artist’s subtle, ephemeral oeuvre. Kraus often uses DIY techniques in intriguing ways that are not at all apparent on the first encounter in order to produce startling effects. Her art is rooted in research and experimentation, in nuance and surprise. Take, for instance, *Ohne Title (Light Box)* (2012) **(9)**, which is diffidently unspectacular as a physical structure but produces a mesmerizing horizon line in light around the space. To space she adds the dimension time with *Ohne Titel* (2006) that consists of an old–school incandescent light–bulb encased in an ice cube that when exhibited melts—although that work is on the next floor up and on the invitation card. In Kraus’ hands, the everyday can become a thing of wonder. In the room with the Droese cutout are, for example, *Untitled* (2011) a reconfiguration of a halogen lamp and an antenna on the wall. This might be a device for mysterious communications with the ether. In Kraus’ work, there is a playoff between secrets and figuring things out or making them work for a new purpose. It is no surprise then that the witty piece *Ohne Titel (Bleikappe)* (2009) suggests we all need a thick skull and may have been inspired by the medieval idea that such a head–covering might cure depression. Here the work is paired with a series of text posters that speak of the brutality and effectiveness of the guillotine in graphic terms.

THE SECOND FLOOR

a commotion upstairs

If one started the tour of the second floor by the back door—at the emergency exit—then the first work one would encounter would be a group of early ink on paper drawings (all *Ohne Titel*, 1994) by the influential artist’s artist **Stefan Dillemoth** (born 1954 in Büdingen) **(10)** exploring the lot of the artist. In them, cartoon–like scenes depict emotional highs and lows in the fabled classic painter’s studio. About the always troubled genius stands easels, mirrors, and other accouterments and artistic paraphernalia. The drawings’ use of an outmoded esthetic vernacular recalls 19th century illustrated magazine engravings or even William Hogarth’s series *A Rake’s Progress* (1734) now in the John Soane Museum,



5 Andreas Slominski, *Durchlauffalle*, 1998 © The artist, Photo: Fred Dott

6 Juliette Blightman, *mirrors would do well to reflect more before sending back images*, 2009 © The artist, Photo: Fred Dott

7 Lucy McKenzie, *Mackdoor*, 2000 © The artist, Photo: Fred Dott

8 Dirk Bell, *Ohne Titel*, 2000 © The artist, Photo: Fred Dott



9 Kitty Kraus, *Ohne Titel (Light Box)*, 2012 © The artist, Photo: Fred Dott

10 Stefan Dillemoth, *Ohne Titel*, 1994 © The artist, Photo: Fred Dott

11 Nils Norman, Stephan Dillemoth, *wif–hobo*, 2004 © The artists, Photo: Fred Dott

12 Christian Flamm, *Ohne Titel (Ich bereue keine Stunde)* © Christian Flamm, Photo: Fred Dott

London. It truly is far from clear if things have really changed as much as one would think.

A related collaborative work by **Dillemuth** and his artist peer **Nils Norman** (born 1966 in Kent), is uncannily prescient about conditions for creative workers today. Incidentally, the sculpture *wifi-hobo* (2004) (11), was made after Dillemuth's only half-serious announcement a decade on his fortieth birthday that he would no longer make art at all. The sculpture consists of a repurposed shop manikin sitting below a spray-painted Wi-Fi sign that looks like all-purpose obscene graffiti on a flat-tened cardboard box with a chunky laptop. The work was included in an exhibition at Berlin's Kunstwerke and can be seen as a contemporary retake of Paul Thek's generation defining *The Tomb-Death of a Hippie* (1967).

The 1990s taught us that questions concerning fashion and lifestyle are not only superficial. **Christian Flamm** (born 1974 in Stuttgart) emerged in the decade, blending cross-disciplinary influences with a distinctive graphic design style that subtly reflects the creative industries of the period. His minimalist, paper cut-out collages, for example, captures the late 1990s pop style, characterized by the blending and re-appropriation of visual signs. *Ohne Titel (ich bereue keine Stunde)* (I don't regret a single hour, 2001) (12), could easily be mistaken for an album cover or serve as a generational motto.

who is paying for this?

Taking a sarcastic swipe at the system underpins also the work of British artist **Merlin Carpenter** (born 1967 in Pembury). His work, consisting only of a wooden pallet with a car decal attached declaring "sport", presents a biting irony, double-downed upon by the work's tau-tological monocle *Sporty Title* (2020) (13). Carpenter's nihilism follows the logic that, if art is a debased commodity, it should convey this unpalatable truth. Paired with his *Untitled* (2007), an old-school portfolio case for larger works on paper, the work implies that the artist is part of a system of transactional exchange. The artist may start out as a gifted idealist but must become a savvy marketer. The rudimentary painting *Blondie* (2013) rendered in acrylic on canvas, appropriately then, is redolent of the early work of Andy Warhol who harnessed and mirrored the market like no other.

A related line of commodity critique applies to **Josephine Pryde** (born 1967 in Alnwick), whose photographic work *Credit cards (2 hands: citi and a golden morgan)* (2004) (14) depicts hands holding the artist's own credit cards appropriating the vernacular of ubiquitous advertising images. The work emphasizes the economic exchange as dictating the core condition of art making. And that this is the case whether the work expresses precariousness of the artist's situation, or the exact opposite. But as with so much of Pryde's work, a certain unquantifiable surplus esthetic value arises paradoxically, regardless. This may have to do with the spark of smart consciousness her works emanate. Take, for example, *Josephine Pryde Night & Day* (2001) a framed lambda print of seductive ambient dusty pink striped hues that wraps awareness and perception into a question about content. The work featured in the artist's solo exhibition *6 A.M. Summer 201* (2001) at Galerie Neu, Berlin.

Macro structures

Zooming in and out from personal to macro economics and structures is part and parcel of **Manfred Pernice** (born 1963 in Hildesheim) work. Back in 1997, on a visit to Bremerhaven Pernice became fascinated with the shipping containers, which then reproduced in recycled chipboard and hung art on them. The collapse of the GDR and ideas of obsolescence

and loss haunted other chipboard works as well. His work is also a celebration of making-do, ingenuity, a recuperation, and recovery. The major installation *Bad Bauteil 106* (1998) (15) was first shown in Anton Kern Gallery, New York. As Pernice has noted: 'A chipboard panel does not always remain a chipboard panel. Sometimes it is transformed into functional furniture, sometimes the simple building material becomes an admired installation.'

Franz Erhard Walther (born 1939 in Fulda) is known for his fabric objects that imagine viewers as actors or activators of his work. Winner of the Golden Lion at the 2017 Venice Biennale, Walther is a key figure in the departure from the image in the postwar period. Walther's work was collected by Schröder's own collector father and to mark this his democratic performative series of minimalist steel floor pieces *Boden-gruppe* (1974) from the host institution's existing collection is being displayed as part of the exhibition. How do we measure the value of art—by foot traffic alone? Walther imagines each viewer's body becoming integral to his sculpture. Some relationships, social or geometrical, run deep, some connections are not immediately apparent. The new is always an amalgam.

worm, thief, poet

Ulrike Heise (born 1974 in Lübeck) not only studied art, but also landscape ecology. Her *Untitled* (2012) presents miniature sculptural land art creations made by earth worms in the bush of Burkina Faso. The artist felt a communion with the creative creatures. We are all part of a system that produces things. Hence also the corollary popularity of deconstruction in art. Take, for example, the work of **Kirsten Pieroth** (born 1970 in Offenbach). Her *27 Minutes* (2004) documents her action of stealing a copper clad minute hand from a Copenhagen public clock tower in collaboration with the boss of a Danish furniture maker.

And nearby **Karl Holmquist's** (born 1964 in Västerås) video projection *I'll Make the World Explode*, 2009 (video loop, 30 min.) makes no apologies for its stated intention. The title is quoted from singer and icon Grace Jones' song *Corporate Cannibal* (2008) and consists of a video and poem that explores human interrelations, including dancehall recording artists inciting homophobia. His composition, *Jean-Paul Painting* (2006) (16), consists only of a black background and the white capital letters declaring "This is Jean-Paul". The work, of course, begs the question: who is "Jean-Paul"—existentialist Sartre, or queer designer Gaultier, or another entirely different private person, friend, or lover? And by the way, is this a poem or a painting? And consider too the structural difference in the economic viability of those forms.

the column

At the end of this guide, we return to **Cerith Wyn Evans**, and his beacon-like column of light *Untitled* (2008). White columns evoke the architectural and humanist ideals of the West, even if we now know that polychromy was the rule, not the exception in the ancient world.

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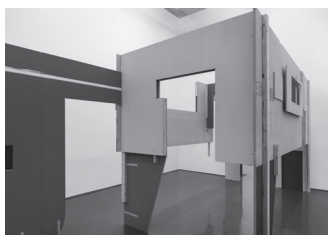
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13 Merlin Carpenter, *Sporty Title*, 2020 © Merlin Carpenter, Photo: Stefan Korte

14 Josephine Pryde, *Credit Cards (2 hands: citi and a golden morgan)*, 2004 © The artist and Galerie Neu, Berlin, Photo: Gunter Lepkowski

15 Manfred Pernice, *Bad Bauteil 106*, 1998 © The artist, Photo: Fred Dott

16 Karl Holmquist, *Jean-Paul Painting*, 2006 © The artist, Photo: Fred Dott