

Press Release

Kunstverein Hannover
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Exhibition Information

Koenraad Dedobbeleer (b. 1975 in Halle/BE, lives in Brussels) is an artist who engages intensively with the history of art and transforms the knowledge he draws from it into individual works and installation spaces. Dedobbeleer's works manifest cultural-historical insights of the Western world in various ways, often incorporating reproductions of other art objects and placing them in a new context. In other cases, he builds things that are inspired by design objects or otherwise operate with topoi of art history including the well-known "pedestal question," which he "resolves" in his own way. Boundaries between original, found and appropriated remain fluid. Dedobbeleer's exhibition stages a kind of "imaginary museum" in the spirit of André Malraux who, starting in 1947, attempted to create what he thought to be the ideal museum in book form using images of works and a compilation of reproductions. A key difference exists in the fact that although Dedobbeleer's artworks consist of art-historical references and he does employ readymades to some extent, his sculptures are always "made" by hand. He is interested in humorously combining high culture forms with everyday objects, bringing them together in a circuit-tour-like round of sculptures that invites us to stroll through his "Gallery of Material Culture."

Rooms 1 and 2

Readings, artist's books, libraries and archival materials play an important role in Koenraad Dedobbeleer's work, despite the digital possibilities. The entrance area of the Kunstverein's exhibition rooms features new sculptural works that Dedobbeleer created from tables the Kunstverein has been using since the 1970s, which have holes in them and are reminiscent of shelves, cupboards or even secretary furniture. The artist places all sorts of objects in his self-designed compartments, with items ranging from a sculpture of his to a book he has chosen for the spot. The books displayed here are from the artist's collection and contain only variants, which is to say they are books of which there are several versions for whatever reason. What we find here is the old, analogue kind of research and various materials with different haptic qualities that represent a very lived form of material analysis and aesthetic studies. This is particularly striking in our current age of smooth surfaces, as exemplified by the offices and kitchens of today.

Room 1a

In the smallest exhibition room, Koenraad Dedobbeleer makes use of the existing spatial intimacy, so to speak, by inviting visitors to take a seat on one of his benches. On the walls are Dedobbeleer's photographic works, which offer a glimpse into his unique way of looking at everyday forms. On view here is his diptych "**The Effect of Redistribution Is Often Invisible**" (2019), which connects two different areas and was created from his research: The photograph on the left shows an ornamental element of the "Teheran" pattern design (1943–1945) by Josef Frank

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(1885–1967), a Jewish architect and designer who emigrated to Sweden in 1933. Dedobbeleer associates Frank's work with the so-called Anti-Hitler coalition or Grand Alliance, which was first negotiated in 1942, and underscores the Persian connection with a second photograph on the right: This image shows a Cyrus brand audio amplifier, a top product for connoisseurs developed by British technology entrepreneur Farad Azima. Both Azima's son and the amplifier are named after King Cyrus the Great, who ruled Persia in the 6th century BC.

Room 3

Sculpturally dominated Room 3 brings together works that play with notions of "art in public space": Viewers here encounter, among other things, an advertising pillar "**Für Max und Fritze, denkmal**" (For Max and Fritzes, monument, 2003) and "**Binary**" (2018), a human-sized hand mirror made of a stainless steel plate that has been polished until it reflected.

In the same room stands the large sculpture "**Faux Blonde**" (2016), a work that recalls gymnastics equipment. It too operates with the transfer effect and, like many of the artist's and the exhibition's objects, was produced in a complex and elegant manner. An extravagant abundance of handles gives the impression of closeness and manageability, which represents a break with the exhibition space and its function. On the one hand this is a made "thing," and yet closer inspection reveals several interwoven levels here as well. The metal object's marbled lacquer finish recalls postmodern sculpture or Memphis design; the marble look either "refines" the simple metal sculpture or takes it to the point of absurdity. And once again, the question of fake versus original: Do appearances really deceive or do objects subtly reveal their own presence?

Dedobbeleer employs minimal shifts in shape, size or materiality to make the familiar seem alien. His works and interventions turn the everyday upside down with a wink, offer the inconspicuous a surprising platform and are situated in a dense web of references to protagonists, works and art-historical anecdotes.

Room 4

Visitors are denied a direct transition from Room 3 to the adjoining skylight hall by a sculpture that resembles an oversized folding screen. The opposite end of the room is occupied by a similar sculpture, enabling a person to walk around the individual works as one would in an antique sculpture gallery and explore a unique subject area with each work. Doubles and duplicates are a recurring theme in the artist's exhibition practice, as already noted with the selected books near the exhibition entrance. The motif continues here with the screens, and also manifests in photographic works such as the diptych in this room, titled "**The Contemporary Will Be Untimely**" (2019): It shows the front and back of a museum shop bag depicting a still life by the Flemish painter Pieter Claesz (1596/1597–1661), and again humorously comments on the profanation of artworks.

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Koenraad Dedobbeleer traces both the genesis of the museum as an institution and its forms of exhibition practice to Hanover, both in terms of content (historically) and form (spatially). It is no coincidence that a museum bench designed by Alexander Dorner was taken from an exhibition display at the Landesmuseum Hannover and placed in this room. Art historian Alexander Dorner (1893–1957), who was also a member of the Kunstverein Hannover advisory board, became director of the Provinzialmuseum Hannover (the forerunner of today's Landesmuseum) in 1923 and contributed decisively to the modernization of exhibition display.

Art mediators and educators continue to refer to Dorner's concept of the "museum as a powerhouse" to this day, a notion that envisioned more far-reaching forms of art experience than just passive contemplation – which is to say this bench both suits Dedobbeleer's way of thinking in terms of content and offers a surprisingly good formal fit for his exhibition.

In thinking through everything from pedestals to the reproduction of art on bags, the exhibition existentially presents us with the question of seeing without providing didactic answers. Even the titles are not explanations, but poetic extensions of the works. A closer look reveals a number of elemental forms and formal languages, including the sculptor's classical tools in the long skylight hall and a still life staged three-dimensionally using real fruits. A visitor encounters miscellaneous pipes – one from a stove, for instance – citing Joseph Beuys's famous example or another that references Constantin Brâncuși. We even discover something like an antique hairstyle: The silkscreen "**Tête**" (Head, 2016) shows a fragment of hair carved in marble; it is both abstract and recognizable as belonging to a figure. The image stems from a publication on collecting classical sculptures, compiled by collector Henry Blundell (1724–1810) on a trip to Italy. Blundell deliberately created an entire series of "Frankenstein" sculptures by depicting miscellaneous fragments or damaged sculptures together, as if in an idiosyncratic collage.

Room 5

The "**Things are Stubbornly Thinglike I-V**" (2018) series consists of trapezoidal "pedestals" reminiscent of cash machines, upon which selected everyday objects are displayed. As in the first two rooms of the exhibition, the work creates an "exhibition within the exhibition" on a green background, establishing its own relationships between the respective objects, form and use. On view are obscure, perplexing and enigmatic objects that have been detached from their original functional context in an effort to probe their potential, visual peculiarities and cultural references: an LP record cover; a green candle; a piggy-bank in the shape of a gold bar; a brush for cleaning car tires; a copy of a Romanian banknote with a portrait of Brâncuși; a paperweight from Waterloo; a compressed air horn; a Mickey Mouse comic book; a postcard reproduction of Albrecht Dürer's engraving "Melencolia"; a portrait of Niccolò Machiavelli; two chocolate coins found in Russia, wrapped in gold foil with the embossed name of Peter the Great; a cocktail decoration and a Eurocheque / voucher in the amount of one euro. The play with things as such, but also the construction of forms that display objects situated between the reproduction of an object and the

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objects themselves, comes to bear here in a number of ways and encourages far-flung associations as regards to both the things and their relationship to one another.

Room 6

The exhibition's final room opens with "**Nominal Representation**" (2018), a plaster model of the goddess Diana – a recent point of focus for Dedobbeleer with an immovable "instance" in art history, i.e. ancient sculpture. But what is presented as "ancient sculpture" today was brought into museums with the invasive working methods of classicism, which were prone to completely removing the original colored paint, for example, or replacing disappeared parts of a sculpture with others that might not match the original deity. This was first broached in the case of the "Blonde Youth," when analysis revealed that he was originally painted in color. The last sculpture in the exhibition, entitled "**Separability and Ignorance Are Sin in a General Way**" (2014), is a reference to this: The restoration measures were more in line with the zeitgeist than the art historical facts and the sculpture's function. Koenraad Dedobbeleer also subtly takes up this quality of fluidity in his replica of the ancient sculpture of goddess Diana by adding a new nose to it.

At the same time, he contextualizes this replica figure with the old question of sculpture and its aliveness with the multi-part work "**The non-Ideological Space Is Not a Space that Is Free of Meaning and Order**" (2019). The photographs show the seminal *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766), a publication of Enlightenment-era artistic understanding by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. The title of this art-theoretical examination of art and literature refers to the famous ancient sculpture of the Laocoön Group, or "Laocoön and His Sons," which depicts the Trojan priest Laocoön and his sons under mortal attack by sea serpents. Lessing notes that poetry in particular is the more comprehensive artform, since it demands more imagination from the recipient and shows beauty through moving narrative. Painting and sculpture, by contrast, "only" convey beauty in the arrangement of bodies in space. This devaluation of the visual arts on Lessing's part was published as a Russian version in the Soviet Union in 1954. Dedobbeleer discovered a copy of the book while a trip to Moscow. Published in the context of the then dominant "Socialist Realism," the artist was fascinated by it.

Koenraad Dedobbeleer's extensive retrospective was created as part of a trilogy, the three parts of which all gathered a core collection of the artist's works from recent years. All had the subtitle "**Gallery of Material Culture**." Since the artist always works site-specifically and used different works in each instance, the exhibitions are ultimately very different from one another. Nine completely new works are now on view in Hanover, along with the special bench that Alexander Dorner had once had designed as director of the Landesmuseum was borrowed from the Sprengel Museum's current holdings. Having titled his exhibition at Wiels in Brussels "Kunststoff" (Plastic), the exhibition at Kunstmuseum Winterthur was titled "Plastik" (Sculpture) and referenced to the museum's collection. A jointly published book has been produced on the artist's work to date. Books play an important role in Dedobbeleer's practice, and since 2006 he and Kris Kimpe

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have published “**UP**,” a magazine that appears at irregular intervals, is distributed free of charge as long as supplies last, and shows photographs of utopian and overlooked architecture.

Koenraad Dedobbeleer was recently appointed Professor of Sculpture at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. In addition to his own exhibition activities, he has curated exhibitions and challenged the discourse on art beyond his individual exhibition practice. He is represented by the galleries CLEARING (Brussels, New York), Mai 36 (Zurich) and ProjecteSD (Barcelona).