



Istituto Svizzero di Roma
Sede di Venezia

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Press release

Stefan Burger

Irene: The Sinkable Show

Opening:
Thursday, April 8, 2010, 6.30 p.m.

Exhibition venue:
ISR – Venice branch
Campo S. Agnese – Dorsoduro 810
Venice, Italy
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The exhibition runs through June 23, 2010

Open Monday - Friday 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. / 3 - 6 p.m.
Saturdays 2 - 6 p.m.
Closed Sundays and bank holidays
Free entrance

The Venice branch of the Istituto Svizzero di Roma presents the solo show of Stefan Burger (born 1977, lives and works in Zurich), with a series of new works commissioned by Salvatore Lacagnina and produced by the Istituto Svizzero di Roma.

The spacious exhibition hall of Palazzo Trevisan degli Ulivi hosts an installation of photographs, a wallpaper and a sculpture, dedicated to particular current aspects of the lagoon city and focused on the theme of temporariness and instability.

The title of the exhibition, “Irene: The Sinkable Show”, is inspired by the ships and *motorboats* made from ferrocement, designed by the great Italian engineer and architect Pier Luigi Nervi (1891-1979) the first of which, christened with the name of his wife, was launched in 1945 (motorboat, it weighed 165 tons). For Burger, “Irene” represents “the unstable center of the exhibition”, a “monument to failed ventures”.

The wallpaper on the wall that faces Campo Sant’Agnese, *Prova di carico improvvisata* (Improvised Load Test) (2010), is a 1:1 scale reproduction of a photograph taken in the exhibition space and which is inspired by a photograph from the Nervi archive that shows a group of workers attempting to test the strength of a cement slab, using their own weight. The document testifies a simple adjustment test, a superstitious ritual to exorcize the presence of a possible breakage point.

For the photograph printed on the wallpaper, Burger has used a base made of plasterboard obtained by cutting out the exhibition wall built in the Venetian salon, that obstructs the view from the three-mullioned windows onto the Campo.

Enti Finanziatori

Fondazione svizzera per la cultura Pro Helvetia
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The set up of the scene of the “improvised test” (that is what the caption reads on the back of the photograph from the archive) by using horizontally the vertical element of the wall, becomes a test not only of the stability and resistance but also of the importance of the wall, as the element that sanctions the power and authority of the image. Only after having built the wall, the latter regains its exhibition function that gives visibility to the piece of art. Also the photograph *Corno di nebbia* (Foghorn) (2008), that portrays a foghorn used on the ships, is linked to the theme of visibility. This work introduces a second level of interpretation of the exhibition, that includes an element of disappearance and is linked to a condition of imperceptibility. The packaging of the hair lotion that appears in *Inform* (2010) is a homage of the artist to the myth of “Confusion Control”, a very popular shampoo at the beginning of the year 2000. *Inform* describes the relationship that exists between the simple perception of an image and the considerations on the exterior appearance: the type of lotion used for hair influences our perception.

In *Spazzolino da denti* (Toothbrush) (2010), the artist presents a motif already used in the past, that represents a monument to transitoriness. The toothbrush is an object for personal hygiene that beats the rhythm of each day. Thus, the restorer in Burger’s photograph gently touches and cleans the façade of a historical building as if he wanted to stop the unstoppable disappearance of Venice. The same sense of precariousness reappears in *Tintura per capelli* (Colored Hair) (2010), in which the advertising image of a model, with her hair obviously colored and posing for a catalogue of specialized products, sinks into the lagoon.

Colonna dell’infamia (2010) immortalizes another passing situation. The cement and metal artificial limbs of this sculpture recall the main theme of the exhibition, in its idea and in the materials. The title of the work derives from an image found by the artist on the page of a book of Venetian anecdotes. Here, the condition of loss suggested by the elements in the photograph taken from the book, explains the use of the chain in the sculpture, that does not allow the work to disappear nor to be moved. And in the choice of materials, iron and cement, Burger offers a last homage to the venture of “Irene”.

Stefan Burger was born in Müllheim, Baden, Germany, in 1977. He studied at the Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst in Zurich, where he lives and works.

Selected solo shows: 2010: Fotomuseum Winterthur. 2009: Freymond-Guth & Co. Fine Arts, Zurich; BINZ 39, Zurich; Kunstbunker Nürnberg, Nuremberg; Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, Stockholm; DOLL Espace d’Art Contemporain, Lausanne. 2008: Laura Bartlett, London; Coalmine - Space for Contemporary Photography, Winterthur; Kunsthau Baselland, Basel; F.A.I.T. Gallery, Kracow; Marion Scharmann, Cologne. 2007: Kunstmuseum Thun. 2006: Galleria Studio 44, Genoa.

Selected group shows: 2009: “Event Horizon”, Ausstellungsraum Killingental, Basel; “ConceptIOUS”, Galerie Jette Rudolph, Berlin; “Fragile Monuments”, Suzie Q Projects, Zurich; “What you really need”, Stadtgalerie Wels, Austria. 2008: “Shifting Identities”, Kunsthau Zürich, Zurich; “Eröffnungsfestival”, Kunstraum München, Munich; “Art Cannot Be Untaught”, La Rada, Luzern. 2007: “Aggression”, Kunsthalle Winterthur; “Ernte”, Kunsthau Baselland, Basel; “The Art of Failure”, Kunsthau Baselland, Basel.

With special thanks to: Freymond-Guth & Co. Fine Arts, Zurich, Laura Bartlett, London, and Marion Scharmann, Cologne.

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