

WELCOME TO THE COLLECTION, SAM PULITZER!

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Whim or Sentiment or Chance. The title of this exhibition refers to *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936) by British economist John Maynard Keynes, according to which decisions are often made on the basis of “whim or sentiment or chance” and animal instincts (“animal spirits”) rather than rational calculations.

The same can be said of many museum collections, whose genesis over years, decades or centuries has been shaped by the work of directors, custodians and curators with different collecting strategies, and again and again by chance. Depending on the whims of the market, donations, or allocations. An element of chance is therefore also part of the fact that Sam Pulitzer’s work found its way into the collection of the Nationalgalerie.

How better to welcome Sam Pulitzer to the collection than with the collection itself? Together with the artist, a selection was made — a selection of artists who play a significant role for Pulitzer, and a selection of works that serve to complement, comment on, or question his installation on a thematic or material level.

The exhibition centers on a narrow corridor made of aluminum and transparent acrylic glass titled *Acrylic Display Corridor, Animal Spirits*, for which Sam Pulitzer was awarded the annual Baloise Art Prize at Art Basel in 2017. The drawings inside the corridor reveal the artist’s affinity for linguistic games, hidden references, logos, and pop culture. Although rather unusual materials in Daniel Buren’s oeuvre, acrylic glass and aluminum also make up *Die Farbe gesetzt/versetzt. A (1) Aluminium* (The color set/offset. A (1) Aluminum). Both Pulitzer and Buren are open critics of the art market.

Pulitzer offered the “full package” with *Acrylic Display Corridor*, *Animal Spirits* at Art Basel in 2017: a series of works on paper and even something to house them in — as he vividly describes in his catalogue text. The relationship between art and the structures that frame it, both physical and immaterial, is fore fronted by both Buren and Pulitzer. In *Die Farbe gesetzt/versetzt* Buren’s trademark stripes are monotone and industrially produced from acrylic glass. His art often broaches the issue of a museum’s role in defining what art is. Similarly, Pulitzer creates his own framing device from the very material deemed nonsingular by Buren, acrylic glass, which is often used in fair architecture.

Just as Pulitzer contrasts his delicate works on paper with mass produced acrylic glass, Mona Hatoum too has a similar practice of toying with the tension between handmade and industrial production that pervades current discourse on the value of handcraft in contemporary art. *Puzzled* establishes a physical relationship with viewers through visual methods as the mirrored glass presents their reflection as they move through the space (ill. p. 23). Pulitzer corporeally dictates this relationship with physical movement through the corridor, yet both function in the vein of minimalism in that the participatory act of viewing becomes a spectacle. Minimal Art made the spectator’s movement in the space part of the concept. In *Puzzled* mirroring, and subsequently being observed whilst observing yourself is akin to the zoo-like situation Pulitzer orchestrates; viewers are observed by those outside the corridor as they observe his works on paper within.

Another work that physically involves both the museum space as well as the visitor is *Ventilatoren* (Fans) by Roman Signer (ill. p. 34). The artist employs everyday objects in his practice, activating them in surprising constellations. He plays with the forces of nature and almost casually stages the elements in his works. That which applies to the laws of physics and chemistry also applies to Signer’s practice: something entirely new can emerge from the combination of basic elements, and every action is followed by a reaction. In the juxtaposition of two fans, the fan connected to the power supply activates the other one with its air flow. The work deals with standstill and motion. Though unchanging on an optical or aesthetic level, the “chemical-physical” situation in the exhibition space is in constant change. The artist himself speaks of “occurrences” to describe his works as they have a temporal component and are changeable and changing.

Pulitzer’s corridor is narrow. It draws the viewers in as the works on paper are only vaguely visible from the outside, or

from the back. Yet it also constrains the viewers: a spatial element keeping them at a distance from each other and from the seven drawings inside. An artist who has been experimenting with spaces and corridors since the late 1960s, and who was the most important point of reference for Pulitzer's corridor, is Bruce Nauman. He is concerned with compulsion, self-control and external control. Part of the exhibition is his *Double Cage Piece*, which has been on the premises of the Hamburger Bahnhof since 2005 (ill. p. 25). The work consists of two steel cages, one positioned inside the other. The short sides have narrow doors. In this performative experiential architecture, the visitor can barely move along the steel cages. It is only this physical interaction between recipient and space that completes the artwork. Associations of imprisonment and violence create a feeling of isolation. The distance to the sheltered interior of the museum may intensify the insecurity and anxiety. Nauman's works cannot be understood through observation from a distance, they must be experienced.

The situation is similar with Gregor Schneider's work, which is again accessible as a permanently installed space within the framework of this exhibition (ill. p. 26). Schneider builds rooms. As walk-in sculptures, they make rooms in museums and galleries disappear and create an oppressive atmosphere as private rooms on display. Pulitzer's clear corridor functions as a similarly confining constructed room within the museum, however this manipulation is literally rendered transparent. Both offer a critique of the orchestrated space in which art is shown, to the point this staging becomes the work of art itself.

In the same room where Schneider's bedroom from the *Urhouse* is exhibited, a wall piece by Sam Pulitzer is on display, which was first shown in Brussels in 2016. It combines different media — photographs, drawings, and plotted wall text — evincing this work was created for a different context than that of the corridor. A selection of 24 documentary style photographs depict what appears as the banality of suburban American life. Taken in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy in 2012, Pulitzer evokes a sense of desolation, but this comes not solely from the images of storm damaged property. In fact, the buildings and public spaces appear in far from a sordid state of disrepair. Despite this, the eerie feeling of an uninhabited proposed demolition site prevails. What happens in the wake of a natural disaster, from whom is a response expected, and by whom? In a game of pass the blame the dreariness of the lives of the perceived lower and middle classes, forced to the outskirts of the city, is

Read the fine(?) print... you may have just mortgaged your life. Yikes. So, please, for all of our sakes, don't go in the house. Take a pass this time, for once. Normally, the writing would be on the wall but it seems that some silhouettes have managed to get away with all the proverbs. Nothing dead comes back living, life is absorbed into death, and, with each turn of the axle, the only bargain is in the grandeur of the living winning—or so the departments claim. Yowzers... Perhaps a fast'n'loose centennial might clear the palate?

Are you almost split asunder?
Loaded like a long-eared jack?
Boob—why don't you buck like thunder,
And dump the bosses off your back?
All the agonies you suffer
You can end with one good whack;
Stiffen up, you orn'ry duffer

shown up through not showing. The American dream is exposed. Pulitzer's view is that of a male white American artist, one, who lays his own innate privilege bare in a coalescence of societal and self-critique. Pulitzer, as he describes in his text, has found a temporary reconciliation of art as a calling and as a profession. In recent years he has focused on the medium of drawing. Striving now for a single individual artistic voice as a way of getting over his own self, Pulitzer takes to the paper page to work, for its closeness to the written word. In a play of Pulitzer's superlative use of language, the texts on the wall cryptically refer to the subject matter of the photos whilst consciously denouncing the artist's own compromising privileged bystander status in the affairs of the socially and economically marginalized. He ironically addresses viewers, lumping them together with the invisible population of the sprawling city fringe: "Read the fine(?) print... you may have just mortgaged your life," he warns in one of the vinyl wall texts (ill. p. 39).

Two series of red drawings and xerographies by Sam Pulitzer complement the exhibition next to the above mentioned wall work. *Restaurant, "B" Letter Grade* (ill. p. 28) is reminiscent of Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlett Letter* (1850), which is standard reading material in high school. The protagonist and adulteress Hester has to wear a scarlet "A" on her chest — and the "B" is emblazoned here with equal severity next to the door of a restaurant: an obligatory A to D grading system rates hygienic conditions in New York restaurants. Pulitzer demonstrates the power of words and letters.

Since this 2015 series, the artist has primarily worked in the medium of drawing. However, Pulitzer first creates his works digitally before he executes them. Strictly speaking he understands "drawing" only as these digital models or cartoons, rather than his actual works on paper as he writes in an e-mail: "I don't quite think of them as drawings as they are not necessarily the sort of preparative, artistic thinking out loud that I tend to historically associate with drawings, in this sense the digital cartoons would fulfill the role of drawing and the works on paper are one potential product of their design. I find by staying on the page the work is able to be closer to writing than other artistic media in that Lawrence Weiner 'the work need not be realized' kind of manner." As an artist and as a person, one question that concerns Pulitzer is: How is an identity created? How is this identity articulated and how does communication with others influence one's own voice? In *the livelong June* (ill. p. 29), also part of the series of red works on paper, Pulitzer broaches the problem: there is a frog

embedded in a figure's throat, a common expression for losing one's voice. The title refers to Emily Dickinson's poem of the same name: "I'm Nobody! Who are you? / Are you — Nobody — too? / Then there's a pair of us! / Don't tell! they'd advertise — you know? / How dreary — to be — Somebody! / How public — like a Frog — / To tell one's name — the livelong June — / To an admiring Bog!"

It is no coincidence that the corridor is called *Animal Spirits* as animals appear time and again in Pulitzer's work. The motif is entrusted with a consideration, power and rationality that questions societal hierarchies. As with Turkish artist Gülsün Karamustafa, the animal motif functions as a suggestion for an alternative human society where hierarchies are dissipated by the very creatures at the bottom of them. In *Tiger Woman* Karamustafa imbues the representational tiger hide with a carnality and strength that works to empower the anonymous woman rather than simply accentuate her sexuality or demean her ethnicity (ill. p. 30). Similarly Pulitzer's all-knowing owl is critical in its rhetorical observation regarding working conditions.

Pulitzer likes to work in series and uses Pop Art strategies to question the role of authorship and the meaning of the original. So does Hans-Peter Feldmann, who compiles found pictorial material in the form of family photos from flea markets, trading cards, postcards and press images with his own photography in series. In *Knaben mit Hunden* (Boys with Dogs) Feldmann





JENNY HOLZER Survival: Men don't protect you anymore., 1983–85

appropriates five children's photos by hand-coloring photocopies of the images, which are presented in small metal frames. Feldmann's primary interest lies not in the images themselves, but in the associative potential through their manipulation and sequential combination. The grey of the children's faces and arms uncannily shines through in the photocopies, strangely coalescing with their undeniable connotation of kitsch. An early German concept artist, Feldmann is concerned with the topic of authorship, questions regarding originality and reproduction, and the relationship between anonymity and media presence. In the 1980s he withdrew from the art market for a decade. As an artist, he scrutinizes the art market from its outer echelons. He does so by playing with the found, the fictional, and the concept of reproduction that is innate to a series.

One of Sam Pulitzer's most important artistic references is Raymond Pettibon, who began his career creating posters and record covers with little view to the gallery as a place for his work. The sheer volume of comic-style drawings he has produced speaks to a stream of consciousness style practice. His individual drawings form a whole that consolidates recurring sociopolitical content. Pettibon disseminates commentary on matters of war to religion to the environment with an innate, raw irony. His specific combination of drawing and hand written text either functions as an animated philosophical consideration or a hard-hitting punch line. Drawing on pop culture he holds up the proverbial mirror not only to society, but to the art market itself though a nonchalant, improvised and highly personal approach. With airy-light irony *Untitled (It got so cold...)* intensifies the horror of a nuclear explosion's fireball temperature that evaporates all existence within its radius (ill. p. 32).

Language is Jenny Holzer's key medium of artistic expression. The American concept artist brings slogans and aphorisms into the world via T-shirts, stickers, posters, postcards, and benches, as neon signs and on LED displays. Her simple yet subtle messages are not only produced for the art market. The works from the 1980s *Survival* series deal with topics such as politics, war, class and family hierarchies, sex, feminism, violence against women, power structures, AIDS, and the environment. A statement like *Men don't protect you anymore* becomes more provocative when Holzer prints it — in the best-known version of this language work — on condoms. Women are responsible for their own personal lives and for their bodies. The exhibited version is an aluminum sign that addresses each viewer of the exhibition (who is familiar with the English language) on a personal level, inviting reflection on their own role in a relationship for instance, or more generally in society. At a time when fake news and decorative items covered with worldly wisdoms proliferate, the work yet again demonstrates the power of language.

Jonathan Horowitz' *Coke and/or Pepsi* transcends a simple critique of consumer culture (ill. p. 44). The soft drinks are recurring motifs in Horowitz' work for their strong sociopolitical undercurrents. Early American advertising ploys from the 1940s saw skin color determine marketing target groups as Coke was coined the drink of white America and Pepsi that of African Americans. *Coke and/or Pepsi* was made in 2009 after Barack Obama had defeated John McCain for office in the American presidential election the previous year. The colors of Coke and Pepsi reflect the predominantly red logo of the Republican Party and the Democrats' blue logo, and by association their respective candidates' skin color. Horowitz' work physically unites the two cans with plastic six-pack rings and sets them upon the same stand saying "And/Or;" a gesture of warning that also exudes a level of cautious optimism.