



Berlin Gallery Weekend 2012 / Jenny Holzer, Robert Elfgén,
Anthony McCall at Sprüth Magers Berlin

May 5~2012

/ Robert Elfgén. Development





Robert Elfgén focuses on the relationship between nature, human beings, and society. Biographical experiences and everyday observations serve the artist as the point of departure for his works. When the viewer enters one of his space-related installations, the sculptures, assemblages, collages, and films are linked associatively and transformed into spatial allegories which make it possible to experience a private mythology. Transitional situations, social threshold-rituals, the cycle of nature, and the shifts of aggregate states: material and immaterial transfers provide the motifs for his symbolic, often whimsical visual worlds.

The works themselves combine artisanally perfect execution with improvisation. Age-old artistic techniques such as glass engraving, marquetry, metal etchings, and relief printing are juxtaposed with used materials, found objects, chance occurrences, and mechanical bricolages.

Elfgén frequently works for an extended period with formal leitmotifs which he derives from nature. Belonging to these series are animals which are made of wooden inlays and mounted upon a monochrome background, abstract-geometrical paintings which imitate the architecture of beehives, or milky, semi-transparent surfaces and backgrounds which are reminiscent of the moods of light in nature. These works move within a dynamic field between the poles of abstraction and concreteness. In spite of their physical presence, they accordingly acquire an ephemeral character.

A recurrent theme is also the play with real and illusionistic spatiality in both the collages and the installations. Elfgén includes the architecture of the exhibition site in the overall concept, so that the installations acquire a palpable, unique existence. In similarity to sacred art and architecture, Elfgén creates a symbolic totality that is conveyed by physical movement and empathy.

Robert Elfgén's new exhibition entitled *development* confronts us with "stable disequilibriums." With humorous and ironical playfulness, he revolves around the relationship between production and utilization in art, society, and nature. In this field he negotiates questions on artistic production as a transformative concept and artistic authorship as a dynamic process.

seeblick (2012), an assemblage made out of pieces of a confessional booth and a skateboard ramp on the back side, slows down the viewer's entrance into the space, determines the direction of his movement, and guides his gaze towards what lies behind. The symbolic and the functional, the double-sided, seriousness and playfulness, found and constructed elements are combined with each other in a bricolage which Elfgén utilizes here as both an artisanal and a contentual method.

In the adjoining room, *development* unfolds an open nexus of references with further assemblages, objets trouvés, and collages. The collages are presented on the walls from floor to ceiling in a free salon hang. Here as well, Elfgén has recourse to found material: Copies of motifs from the Internet are combined with textiles and inlays upon a wooden background, so as to give rise to short, surreal stories. The randomly generated titles complement these narratives in an ambiguous manner.

Brandenburg (2012), a tree trunk found in a forest, shows clear traces of lightning stroke and insect attack. As a purely natural product, it complements the industrially manufactured objets trouvés of the other sculptures. Through the positioning of the tree in front of the windows with a view onto the garden, the exhibition is ushered into an expanded relationship to nature.







Robert Elfgén, *auf der suche nach dem sinn*, 2012



Robert Elfgén, *ein spaziergang an den teich*, 2012



Robert Elfgren, *great tit*, 2012