

# Joachim Bandau

GALERIE MARK MÜLLER

Theodor Adorno, your illustrator is here.

Walking into this recent show of Joachim Bandau's work, one could not help but recall how Adorno's thinking, and that of some of his Frankfurt School colleagues, was characterized by axioms of exuberant pessimism: Humanity is deformed by a military-industrial cage; sexuality has been harnessed by the culture industries; our senses have been dulled by the media machine; our consumer society is nothing other than a cultural mausoleum, richly decked out with grave goods. Adorno dispensed his inexhaustible despair in aphorisms; he defined modern music—one of the few arts he loved—as “the surviving message of despair from the shipwrecked.”

If the philosophical weight and media savvy of the Frankfurt School have a counterpart in the arts, they might be found in the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf of the 1960s, a school that produced not only Bandau but Joseph Beuys, Anselm Kiefer, Gerhard Richter, Hilla Becher, and a generation of German artists who took up a kind of intellectual residence in what György Lukács unforgettably described as the Grand Hotel Abyss. Like that of many of his peers, Bandau's work is uncompromising, politicized, antigustatory, and academic—he was a professor of sculpture at both Aachen and Münster. Well known at home but rarely shown abroad, Bandau embodies the enlightened nihilism of postwar German art.

Although Bandau's iconography is familiar in Germany, it did not develop all of a piece. Like many in Cologne in the mid-1960s, Bandau was influenced by Rudolf Zwirner's and Konrad Fischer's exhibitions

the Israeli artist Micha Ullman, who had independently arrived at a similar formal language. In the recent exhibition “*Dieses und Jenes*” (This and That), Bandau's “Bunker” series was represented by two wall objects. These minimal prisms of lead could be architectural models—if architecture was a windowless, symmetrical, and subterranean enterprise—or rattraps, if rats were radioactive.

By 1983, Bandau found he had become allergic to his own themes. His hands had become swollen and cramped from the agitation of drawing the bunkers. He began making watercolors—in black, of course. Their overlaid rectangles are not so much translucent as transumbraunt. At the same time, like some of Bandau's sculptural works, the watercolors enact a quiet truce with the viewer, something of a reconciliation between the negativity of the content and the positivity implied by the effort of translating content into form. Their painstaking composition betrays the persistence, if not of hope, of an ineradicable need to create.

—Adam Jasper

## “Dadaglobe Reconstructed”

KUNSTHAUS ZÜRICH

This small exhibition at the Kunsthaus Zürich, where curator Adrian Sudhalter presented a meticulous reconstruction of Tristan Tzara's book project *Dadaglobe*, uncovered two urgent desires on Tzara's part: He aimed at an artistic production that could circulate, not only with mercurial ease, incorporating diverse forms and materials, but also—as the title suggests—on a truly planetary scale. Tzara planned to publish the anthology in 1921, conceiving it in close collaboration with Francis Picabia, but it was never realized. Both Tzara and Picabia were prolific editors of magazines, a privileged forum for Dada's ephemeral and situational works. It seems that in order to transcend the usually national character of magazines, Tzara had to turn to the more stable and canonical form of the book. Richard Huelsenbeck had attempted a similar project in Germany under the name *Dadaco*. John Heartfield had already started to elaborate a graphic layout and had conceptualized iconic photographic portraits of George Grosz and Raoul Hausmann, among others. When Huelsenbeck abandoned the project in 1920, Tzara saw his chance to take it up. Several of Heartfield's portraits reappear in Tzara's project. More than fifty artists (only six of them women) from twelve countries answered his and Picabia's invitation to send photographs of works, portraits of themselves, and texts.

While Sudhalter's *Dadaglobe* publication aspires to completeness, the accompanying exhibition, unsurprisingly, focused on the more or less pictorial contents. But exhibiting the original images has meant framing them as cryptic, fragile-looking figures on aged paper, thereby completely reversing Tzara's original attempts to devalue the original in the name of distribution. As Sudhalter points

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View of “Joachim Bandau,” 2016. Photo: Conradin Frei.

of Pop, but he responded with a Frankfurt School edge. His torsos and busts are made of polished fiberglass, the reassembled pieces of dismembered mannequins. Their irritatingly glossy surfaces suggest all the allure capitalism can display, but also disfigurement and perpetual frustration.

Bandau's drawings from the early '70s mixed references to Leonardo da Vinci's codex of military inventions with World War II armaments as well as consumer commodities. Drawn in pencil on antique paper, with careful smudging, they recall the bleak fantasies of Lebbeus Woods, artifacts from some terrible future where the catastrophic capacity of the present has been brought to completion. They also display a sculptor's interest in the volumes of machines and the conventions of technical drawing. In *Flieger* (Pilot), 1976, an axonometric depiction of a bomber is merged with that of a man with arms outstretched, a military-industrial equivalent of Leonardo's Vitruvian Man. Should there be any doubt about the mood of the piece, the plane is angled downward, like St. Peter being readied for his inverted crucifixion.

In 1976, Bandau encountered Paul Virilio's year-old study of the fortifications of the Atlantic Wall, *Bunker Archaeology*. The encounter crystallized tendencies already developing, and would define Bandau's mature work. Virilio's typology, which connected the coastal bunker to the domestic air-raid shelter, became the basis for sculptural explorations that Bandau developed over the next three decades. As Bandau observes, his “Bunker” series, 1976–83, can be compared to works by

