

Stephan Lugbauer's work deals with the current climate of cynical pessimism within the political spectrum. His artistic approach is aimed at analyzing the political aspects of communicational strategies, which he analyses directly in an intervention on the streets of Mexico City. In a wide-ranging research effort he investigated the living conditions and survival strategies of social fringe groups by seeking direct contact with them and involving them in his project. Lugbauer photographed street acrobats who for a few seconds form human pyramids at busy intersections and fakir children who roll themselves over t-shirts filled with broken glass and then ask for spare change. He asked them to sell him the objects, such as rubber masks and articles of clothing, that they had used during their shows. In the exhibition space the life-size photographs, produced as Diasecs, are put into a direct relationship with the objects used by the acrobats, which are presented on pedestals under glass bell jars. Lugbauer's practice, however, goes beyond the Duchampian strategy of taking objects out of their original context of meaning and transferring them into the institutional art context, thereby inherently transforming everyday objects into sellable artistic merchandise. In addition to engaging in institution and system critique, the artist's installation opens a wider associational space for sociopolitical and economic queries. The rubber mask on a head model undergoes more than the mere fetishization of an object on a pedestal. It is accorded the role of a trophy, whereby it also commemorates the long history of the functionalization of foreign cultural goods as identity-forming objects and strategies for underpinning national strength. Furthermore, the fact that the rubber mask used by the Latino street acrobats carries the cartoon-like visage of a black person suggests that strategies of social exclusion are practiced all the more vehemently by groups who themselves are in a precarious economic situation. The gleaming surface of the life-size Diasec demonstrates the artificial character of the medium photography, which is never suited for capturing actual reality. Photography itself already signifies a transformation of the pictured object through the individual experiential background of both its producer and its observer. It is determined by subjective criteria of selection and signifies the co-optation of a moment, its abstraction and emptying of meaning, and in the end also the separation of the pictured object from the problematic issues inscribed within it.