

Balice Hertling

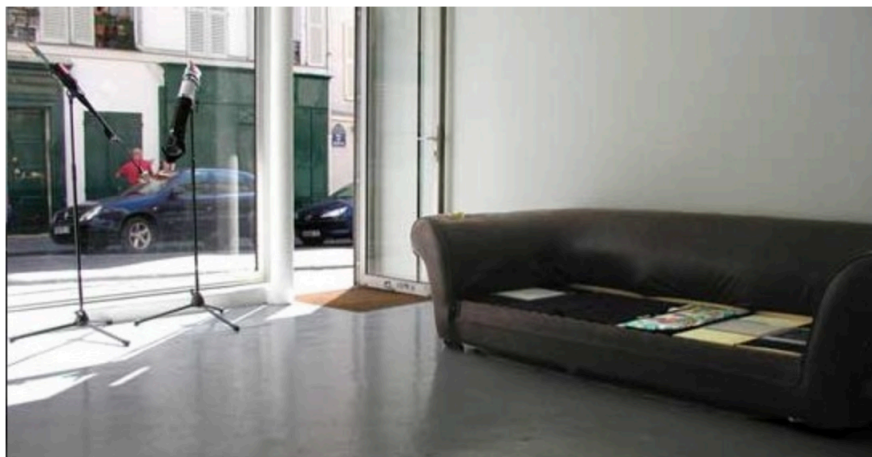
Artists [Exhibitions](#) Contact

Paris



Reto Pulfer

20 Jun - 19 Jul 2008



© Exhibition View

RETO PULFER
DIE GUNST DER SUNDE
DIE KUNST DER WUNDE

Michele Robecchi: I've noticed that a lot of your performances are music-related.

Reto Pulfer: I like music because I can use it to create an atmosphere. And another thing is that it's something very easy to interact with.

MR: Are you a musician?

RP: I played in different bands. I used to play some sort of metal, that was when I was 18-19. I did a few concerts. It was always very political. I played bass, guitar and did some singing too, but I'm not really part of the music scene anymore. Sometimes I do computer music. Computer music was part of an installation I did a while ago and now in a show at the SMBA Stedelijk in Amsterdam. I use it for my videos. In my performances I just play guitar but I think that's more for the atmosphere.

MR: I was trying to figure out by looking at your performances if they are influenced by early Dadaism.

RP: Yes, totally. At the beginning I really liked Guillaume Apollinaire and Stéphane Mallarmé and how things came out of that, how they started and the influence they had.

MR: Even in your drawings, the way you play around with language seems to be inspired by the early-hour Dadaism.

RP: Yes. When I was in Paris (I was there for a grant) I read a lot of these papers that were published then, like Francis Picabia's 391, and all these magazines they made, with their puns and jokes, like Tristan Tzara's Dada magazine.

MR: You're not trained as an artist right?

RP: No. I didn't go to art school.

MR: How did you get to contemporary art?

HOLLYBUSH GARDENS

RP: I was always dreaming and drawing. One of my aunts used to make drawings for scientific forms and another one was doing ceramics, but maybe that's not so important. I was just doing my art, at the same time I was going to school and playing music, but I was doing much more music in the beginning, writing lyrics and texts, poetry, stuff like that. I wanted to go to art school in Basel but in Basel art school is more like applied arts. There was a test to do in order to get in and it felt like applying to a commercial school, so I didn't do it; I kept doing my things and somehow got into contemporary art and got to know a lot of people. So I didn't want to study it anymore.

MR: Do you think not having a conventional art education gave you an advantage?

RP: Yes, maybe. I was also interested in bringing together music and writing in my practice and I realised that in art school they wouldn't teach me about music or writing. The way I like music is also because it works with many medias and I wanted to bring them all together in exhibitions.

MR: You also organize exhibitions and events.

RP: Yes.

MR: It seems like you're interested in embracing art as a whole and breaking boundaries.

RP: Yes. And music is part of it. It's part of the music, the performance, the events, and the language. It affects everything together.

MR: What do you think is the relationship between your performances and your drawings?

RP: Well, my drawings are more about making them during the same moment and being very conscious. Making drawings is like a sort of meditation. Or I would do a drawing without being conscious of what I'm doing. The performance is always very much about being there in the present and with the people. It's a lot about relating to people. There are some performances that can only work with an audience.

MR: Right. Like Audience.

RP: Yes. Also with the guitar thing, if you notice in the video where I just play a solo and shout, I was trying to think what sort of thing people would expect from an artist. Maybe it was a bit like wearing a suite. I'm an animal in the suite, they can get close but they're protected from me. Maybe they want something very extreme. I was conscious of this and so I thought, OK, I want to do something that interacts very much with people. The performance is always a lot about establishing a one-to-one relationship.

MR: How do you think the relationship between you as a musician with your audience differs from the one of you as an artist with your audience?

RP: Well, I'm not a very good musician for a start. (Laughs). Nobody wanted to produce the music or bring me within a music context, like the people who organise things in music venues. But at the same time I'm also not that bad. It's not like an art band where someone plays an instrument he can't play. Actually a small music label from Zurich wants to release one of my recordings. I'm very happy about this.

MR: But do you think the audience responds to you differently as a performer than as a musician?

RP: I guess they know that music is part of art and of the things I'm interested in. They see it as an expression vehicle. When someone plays the piano like this they see it more like performance.

MR: How about the way you document your performance? I have only seen videos so far. Do you take any pictures?

RP: I sometimes let people take them but they're always very personal and specific. It would be like someone taking a snapshot. The camera is part of it in the same way it's a document. It's the same difference that goes between language when it's in the drawings and spoken words. The drawings kind of mixes this but you can always refer to written things, it has a certain foundation and you can read it all over again. The performance can only happen once and so all the documents related to it are just that. It's just like having one side of the story, they can only offer you things observed from one angle. There are also some drawings that relate to music that have a colour code. I was making them for an exhibition and there was a drawing that had blue for clean sound, green for feedback, and brown for very noisy sound. So when I was drawing I was using these colours as a track to see when things start and what would happen. And I use this also for computer music. And also for computer music I have a sheet. It's just like drawing paper, it's A4 and has these colours and letters from the computer like F, G, A and I can press these buttons and then the sound changes. The drawing has the colours that make the sound change and it has the letters and at the same time the letters are very poetic and remind me of the sound. G is like "Gestaltung", and S is like "Stone", N like "Noise", and it's written in brown.

MR: What about the sculptures?

RP: The sculptures I can use in performances, they can change them or they move and so they are kind of used as presence, they function as a presence. I also like it when sculptures make a sound, like when they fall, and there is something written on it. Or I would place them on a drawing and trace the sculpture and then write the name of the sculpture inside.

Reto Pulfer was born in Bern in 1981. He lives and works in Berlin and Arlesheim (Basel)

(Michele Robecchi is a curator and critic based in London, where he is an editor at Phaidon Press.)

See article on http://www.frieze.com/shows/review/reto_pulfer

www.balicehertling.com

HOLLYBUSH GARDENS

Tags: Francis Picabia, Reto Pulfer

[Edit Balice Hertling](#)