

## ArtSeen

# RETO PULFER

## *Zustandseffekte*

By **Matthew Shen Goodman**

Swiss-born and based now out of Berlin, Reto Pulfer embraces equal parts sculpture, installation, and performance for his multidisciplinary output. Having shown mostly in Europe, *Zustandseffekte*, recently at the Swiss Institute, is Pulfer's first solo exhibition in the U.S., following *Unless otherwise noted*, a Bard Center for Curatorial Studies group exhibition concerning the curatorial process. Pulfer has a particularly curatorial mindset, his work possessing its own odd taxonomy. In an interview with *Mousse*, Pulfer outlined his logic: if a title contains the letters "ZR," the work has a zipper; an "O" means it can be rotated; the word "Ofaz" lets the viewer know that there's a sofa involved. Numbers signify the ways in which the work can be installed ("Ofaz 1442," [2007 – 2008]), demonstrating the rather large sum of possibilities as to how to install a couch). More interestingly, Pulfer's process includes the use of a mnemonic, usually a short story, used as a node of mental focus while working on a piece or performing. The physical work tends towards environmental installation, such as light fabrics hung around a room (with zippers running through them when accorded by title). Smaller works resemble individual articles of clothing cut at the seams and laid flat, unfolding into expanses of cloth on the wall. The performances, usually involving a mic-and-electric-guitar setup, are weird and beguiling amalgamations of technical competence and noise; prolonged pauses are interrupted by power chords, as Pulfer yelps and writhes about the microphone. The shifts in tempo feel technologically mediated, as if someone's messing with speed by remote. Resulting clips of performances often resemble temporally jumbled footage of someone very excited about playing guitar.

ON VIEW

**Swiss Institute**

May 8 – June 23, 2013  
New York



Reto Pulfer, *Zustandseffekte*, 2013. Courtesy the artist; Balice Hertling, Paris; and HollyBush Gardens, London.

## HOLLYBUSH GARDENS

“Mnemonic for a tropical and precisely built cave (Milchstrassengrotte mit Zustandeffekten),” the text provided for *Zustandseffekte*, sets the scene for the installed environment that comprises the exhibit. Written in the first person, the surreal paragraph describes walking into a cave in a tropical forest, the inside illuminated by a constellation of stars. As the cave grows warmer, the protagonist sloughs off his skin and jumps, somehow, into “the fresh and clear Milky Way.” Work-wise, this translated to Pulfer hanging unbleached cotton cloth from the Swiss Institute’s cavernous ceiling, as if a tent had been erected inside the building. The cloth was thin enough that illumination from the skylight suffused the space, making the room glow. Elements from previous works were also incorporated, such as Pulfer’s sewn-in patches of cloth and his now signature zippers.

A wash of paint cuts diagonally across the tent of cotton. A fat band of greenish blue freckled with brown and yellow, it stands in ably for a constellation (though it also has the look of a satellite map of the weather). In one corner sits the crate in which the work was shipped, stained a solid blue on the sides and painted orange on its floor. Littered about its base are bits and pieces of packaging material and hardware. Dingy and workman-like, it poses a mildly interesting contrast with the sublimated airiness of the cotton.

It’s that contrast between solidity and airiness that Pulfer seems interested in, *Zustandseffekte* translating to something akin to the effect of a state of matter. He’s successful insofar as the architecture of the space is inherently airy, but the difference seems almost perfunctory. One wants to see more of a transformation, more of a juxtaposition of extremes. That Pulfer has incorporated his smaller works into the fabric is more interesting—as if unhappy with the concrete and plaster of fixed walls, he’s created a gallery space that droops and hangs. It’s certainly not an unexplored effect—the Claes Oldenberg retrospective is currently on view at the Museum of Modern Art, after all—but its application to the enclosure itself, monumental but breathing, is affecting. At least it is momentarily, the problem being that after a period of considered looking, the room reveals itself to simply be a massive tent where someone’s managed to smear paint on the ceiling.

## HOLLYBUSH GARDENS

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### Contributor

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