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ROMAN SIGNER

Hauser & Wirth

Zurich

Ranked among Switzerland's premier contemporary artists for three decades, Roman Signer continues to produce a deadpan conceptualism that amuses and amazes. Generally, he performs an activity or stages an event, such as an explosion, then exhibits its documentation—videos, films, photos, or sometimes the objects he used for the piece. Past examples include sinking a canoe with small explosives and riding a bike down a narrow hallway with flaming signal flares on the handlebars.

As part of this show of recent work, *Kameramann* featured a video snippet—a shaky vertical tracking shot from the sky to a church to the woods surrounding the church, then back up to the sky—on eight monitors lined up on the floor. The image, hypnotizing and gorgeous, could have stood alone as eye candy. But the signature Signer stroke was the ninth monitor. It showed the artist bouncing ridiculously atop a giant rubber ball, videocam aimed out a window of the room he was in as he filmed the mesmerizing sequence.

Schlauch mit Kamera (Tube with Camera) similarly involved a camera tracking along a vertical axis, but this time it was the gallerygoers who controlled its movement. Visitors could walk on top of a large hose with a camera attached at one end that pointed directly at them. The weight of one stepping on the hose pushed the trapped air toward the tube's end, thereby elevating the lens. A live-feed recorded the camera's movements and projected them on the wall.

Less obvious in its workings, *Beobachtungskiste* (Observation Box) at first seemed merely an odd rectangular assembly of plywood, electrical wires, and a welder's helmet. But closer inspection revealed it to be a contraption that Signer had sat in while detonating an explosion two feet away. Only the burnt line from the fuse and circular scorch marks on the box serve as clues, demonstrating Signer's pitch-perfect sense of the balance between mystery and transparency in recording and displaying the surreal.

Marc Spiegler