

Schöne Ordnung
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exhibition text by Guillaume Oranger & David Riemer

Leisure has never been neutral. The Nordpark was laid out in 1937 for the Reichsausstellung Schaffendes Volk, a large-scale exhibition and landscape complex conceived as a spatial staging of the National Socialist Volksgemeinschaft. The Ballhaus was erected on the site in 1938. What made this site ideologically effective was not its monuments or explicit symbols, but its organisation of shared pleasure. Strolling, dancing, sport, festival, play – seemingly innocent forms of public life – were primary instruments of collective formation. Ideology did not announce itself here only through banners and speeches: it arrived through the choreography of enjoyment, through the shared experience of belonging to something larger than oneself. The park's spatial structures have largely survived. What has changed is their declared function, not their form. *Schöne Ordnung*, a title that, as one of us has experienced, resists full translation into English or French, all the more so in the particular historical context in which it is used here, its irony carrying as much weight as its apparent beauty, situates itself in this overlap. Not as a memorial to what was, but as an investigation into what persists: the aesthetic mechanisms through which community is produced, and through which, always simultaneously, exclusion is made. Such dialectics may seem abstract if not activated.

The funfair has a long history in modernism. Georges Rouault (1871–1958) painted *Jeu de massacre* in 1905. André Derain (1880–1954) painted *Fête foraine à Rouen* in 1908. Robert Delaunay (1885–1941) painted *Manège de cochons* in 1922. Parallel to the funfair, the circus, its gleeful amusement, its costumes and roles, is among Pablo Picasso's (1881–1973) most recurring themes, one central to his formal development and self-identification, as early as 1917 with *Arlequin et femme au collier*, and his numerous acrobats stand in this wake. Through these two themes, the intertwining of meaning and game in art is at play.

In the *Salle de Jeux* of the 1972 *Julio Le Parc* exhibition at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, participatory installations turned the funfair aesthetic into an instrument of explicit political critique. His *Jeux-enquêtes – Choisissez vos ennemis, Frappez les gradés, Faites tomber les mythes* – invited visitors to shoot and strike at named figures: Hitler, Napoleon, Uncle Sam, the cop, the idol. The enemy was designated: the act of play became an act of refusal. The four works in *Schöne Ordnung* proceed differently. They do not name enemies. They ask a different question: what if the structure of form and play itself, independent of its explicit content and stated ideology, is already the mechanism? What if belonging is produced not only by what we believe, but by the simple, willing act of participation?

Camilla Angolini begins with photographic images of broken Roman columns. Working with images, she isolates and reconfigures these fragments into new visual constellations, refusing to restore what has already been displaced. Her work exposes what fascist classicism always had to suppress: that the tradition it claimed to continue was already fractured, already available for appropriation precisely because it never carried a singular, stable meaning. The broken column unsettles not only the ideals of antiquity but also their later political instrumentalisation, revealing the fragility behind every claim to cultural continuity. That the past remains open to reinterpretation from the present is not a consolation here: it is a structural condition, and a warning.

Paula Rinderle's modular sculpture works with a different but related logic of material memory. Formations of cans rise to the height of poplar trees, species planted systematically across postwar landscapes for their speed, utility, and capacity to grow tall and straight while hollowing out from within. The can itself carries its own history: developed for wartime supply, a cheap and storable vessel still in use today, a material that outlasts the conflict it was made for. Rinderle's formations do not illustrate this: they enact it. The sculpture intervenes physically in the spatial order of the Ballhaus, breaking with the remaining architecture and redefining the path through the space. The landscape here is designed. The order is not natural. And the question the work poses – whether history can be preserved at all, or whether, like the poplar, it only appears intact from the outside – has no reassuring answer.

Felix Giesen constructs the exhibition's most direct encounter with its own argument. His shooting gallery, built and painted entirely by hand alongside the use of 3D printing, drawing on the visual language of folk festivals and shooting clubs, is not a representation of leisure culture but a functioning instance of it: a formal structure insidiously inviting to oriented behaviours. Visitors aim, shoot, and those who hit their mark are rewarded with a 3D printed fridge magnet depicting a figure in traditional dress, a souvenir that travels from the exhibition space into the domestic sphere. *Tracht* is not a neutral image. The system measures performance, distributes recognition, and produces, through the simple mechanism of willing participation, temporary but real experiences of rank and belonging. No critical distance is available in advance. The reflection, if it arrives, arrives in the act itself.

Fabian Raphael Sokolowski's contribution operates at the level of the surface across both the gradient work and a series of canvas paintings included in the exhibition. A horizontal gradient moves from light to deep grey: white and black, the poles of a visual culture built on delineation, classification and the sharp assignment of meaning, are deliberately excluded. The binding agents are buttermilk and soy yoghurt: organic, perishable, resistant to any claim to permanence or monumentality. In his opening address at the Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung at the Haus der Deutschen Kunst in Munich on 18 July 1937, Hitler cited as Germany's essential law a phrase he attributed to a "great" German: *Deutsch sein heißt klar sein*. Sokolowski's surface refuses this clarity. Each tonal transition is continuous, without threshold or border, the binary logic of belonging and exclusion dissolving into gradation – not as a utopian proposal, but as a formal insistence on what authoritarian systems must always suppress: the space between. In this work, Sokolowski forgoes the pure values of black and white and works instead in the infinitesimal gradations of the greyscale, with all that this entails for colour theory, for political freedom, and for the social order on which that freedom rests.

What makes a community, if not a set of shared beliefs? Two people can occupy the same space, share the same past, even the same memory, without being able to connect. These elements convert into a bond only when perceived in the same register. Community is, in this sense, about shared imagination more than fact or habit. But this account, however accurate, is incomplete without its constitutive shadow. Community does not only produce belonging: it produces, as its necessary condition, the boundary that makes the inside possible.

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David Riemer is a curator and founder based in Düsseldorf. His current practice develops exhibitions that locate questions of social order, collective belonging, and political form in the present tense – among them a group show at a former slaughterhouse with Julia Frey and Nicholas Grafia in collaboration with Maximilian Biagosch, and a project at Odyssey Cologne with Viktoria Feierabend and Fabian Raphael Sokolowski. His engagement with contemporary art extends to his own collection, built in close proximity to the artists and institutions he works with. He also serves as supervisory board member and holds training from the Art and Business Programme at Christie's and Maastricht University.