

MATHIS ALTMANN

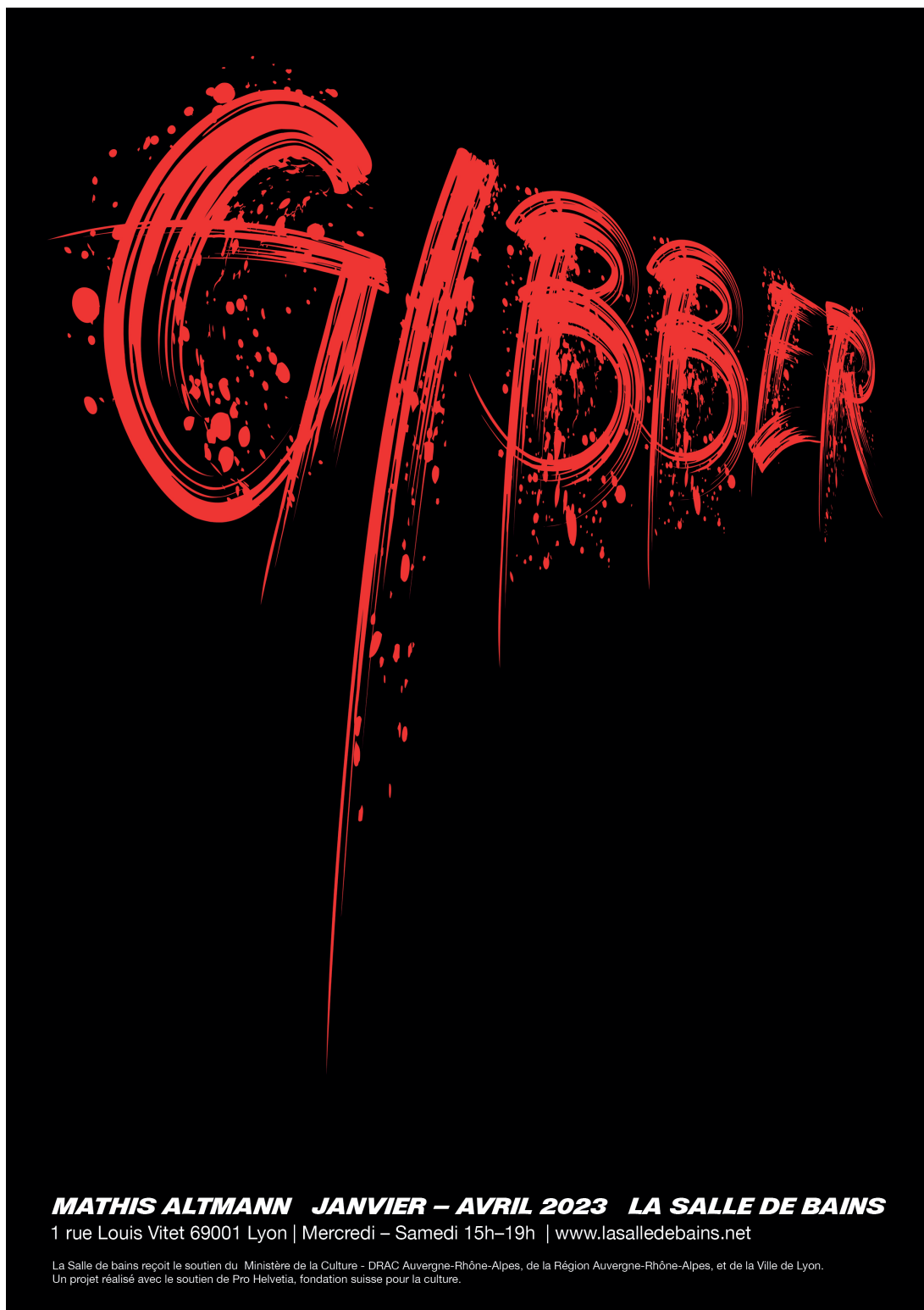
*GIBBER*

PRESS KIT

La Salle de bains

1 rue Louis Vitet

69001 Lyon



**MATHIS ALTMANN JANVIER – AVRIL 2023 LA SALLE DE BAINS**

1 rue Louis Vitet 69001 Lyon | Mercredi – Samedi 15h–19h | [www.lasalledebains.net](http://www.lasalledebains.net)

La Salle de bains reçoit le soutien du Ministère de la Culture - DRAC Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, de la Région Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, et de la Ville de Lyon.  
Un projet réalisé avec le soutien de Pro Helvetia, fondation suisse pour la culture.

JANUARY - MAY 2023

**Mathis Altmann**

*Gibber*

Press release

**Exhibition from January 26th to May 6th 2023**

Continuing its programme of invitations to produce an exhibition in three successive rooms, La Salle de bains invites Mathis Altmann from January to April 2023.

For his exhibition at La Salle de bains, the artist has devised a scenario that successively presents a new sound installation for the space, then a new light installation and finally the presentation of sculptures from an older series accompanied by a new series of wall bas-reliefs.

## Biography

Mathis Altmann (1987) lives and works between Berlin and Zurich. His work has been the subject of monographic exhibitions in Germany, at Efremidis in Berlin in 2021; in Italy, at the Swiss Institute in Milan in 2018 and in Switzerland, at the Kunstmuseum in Wintherthur in 2021 and at Truth & Consequences in Geneva in 2016.

He has also participated in numerous group exhibitions in 2021 such as Bijoux! at Fitzpatrick Gallery in Paris; Nimmersatt? Imagining Society without Growth at the Westfälischer Kunstverein in Münster; Macht! Licht! at the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Germany and in 2020 as Grand Miniature in Zurich or ANNEMARIE VON MATT. JE NE M'ENNUIE JAMAIS, ON M'ENNUIE at the Centre Culturel Suisse in Paris.

He is represented by Fitzpatrick Gallery.

<https://fitzpatrick.gallery/artists/mathis-altmann>

# Room 1

From January 27th to February 25th 2023

LA SALLE DE BAINS

## MATHIS ALTMANN *GIBBER*

### Room 1

It's the kind of recipe that has been exhausted by generations of designers of posters for horror films and the covers of crime novels – equally valid, by the way, for the reprints and remakes – although we must admit it still has what it takes to hold out the promise of a pleasurable *frisson*. As if mass communications hadn't only reworked the landscape but also imprinted in us a range of Pavlovian reflexes piqued by certain fonts that are among the most common and freely accessible. Written out like a piece of graffiti running with blood, the title of Mathis Altmann's new show at La Salle de bains, *Gibber*, lets visitors imagine this first gallery as the initial scene of some fictional story that is sure to descend into chaos and possible carnage.

It is under this sign then that visitors, stumbling face to face on this row of assemblages all connected by electric cables, might well imagine they had pushed open the door to the lab of a renegade megalomaniac scientist, one of those that devise devious plans at the start of B movies. Indeed, the technological gadgetry grafted onto the glass covers, which lend the sculptures their look of bionic incubators, and the hubbub mixed with robotic voices convey a host of retrofuturist images.

But let's remember above all that something is up, something is being prepared – something like an exhibition in three parts – a process is underway, that of a work of art that has been growing and branching out for a dozen years in counterpoint to the more or less predictable storyline described by the development of globalized capitalism. Mathis Altmann observes its effects on our physical environment, our day-to-day practices, the organizing of our desires according to our personal or collective aspirations, with a rare insight that is tinged with admirable humor, when recognition of the disaster is so generally admitted that it partakes of farce. His use of collage and assemblage is often compared to the inheritance of European avant-gardes for its critical effects. But it could also reference a West Coast tradition in the United States, where in the 1960s the use of scrap materials formed a reaction to the poverty that was proliferating on the margins of the free-market model, while exacerbating a climate of ideological confusion.

Moreover, after leaving Los Angeles a few years ago, Altmann settled in Berlin, whose urban changes now form the central theme of his work. The city quite literally

furnishes part of the materials that go into his work by putting out on the street a stream of rubbish in keeping with the systematic gentrification of its outlying zones. These materials are reused in sculptures that may in turn be recycled in new works of art like those featured at La Salle de bains, fitted out with accessories from cutting-edge technologies which remaster them, so to speak, into sound-and-light objects. And so the work advances in a movement that is organic and cyclical (good for remixing). That movement runs counter to the expansion of the "generic city," in which Rem Koolhaas sees the amnesiac principle at work, erasing and replacing everything that no longer corresponds to contemporary needs and tastes.

The present text is not about offering a narrative interpretation of the installation, whose hypnotic character, by this point in your reading, you have surely felt. And those snatches of speech, the abstruse patter put out by the sculpture situated opposite the mirror and accompanied by that muffled beat at the entrance, a beat that is striking a sensitive chord conjuring up a techno club located in an abandoned warehouse? We should make clear that those bits of discourse have been gleaned from the advertising Newspeak surrounding the major urban renewal projects in Berlin. These clichéd phrases lend the show its title, a diminutive of "gibberish." Thus, what is presented as both a set of scale models and some machine that is being broken in could deliver another version of the same dream (or nightmare). In other words, the rough ardent repressed side of renewal projects that collectively foresee the construction of glass-paneled buildings dedicated to coworking on the fringes of industrial wastelands converted into leisure and exhibition spaces.

list of works :

*untitled 1*, 2023

plastic, wood, glass, cardboard, LED, CCFL, exciter speaker, audio loop 1h34min  
62x70x91cm

*untitled 2*, 2023

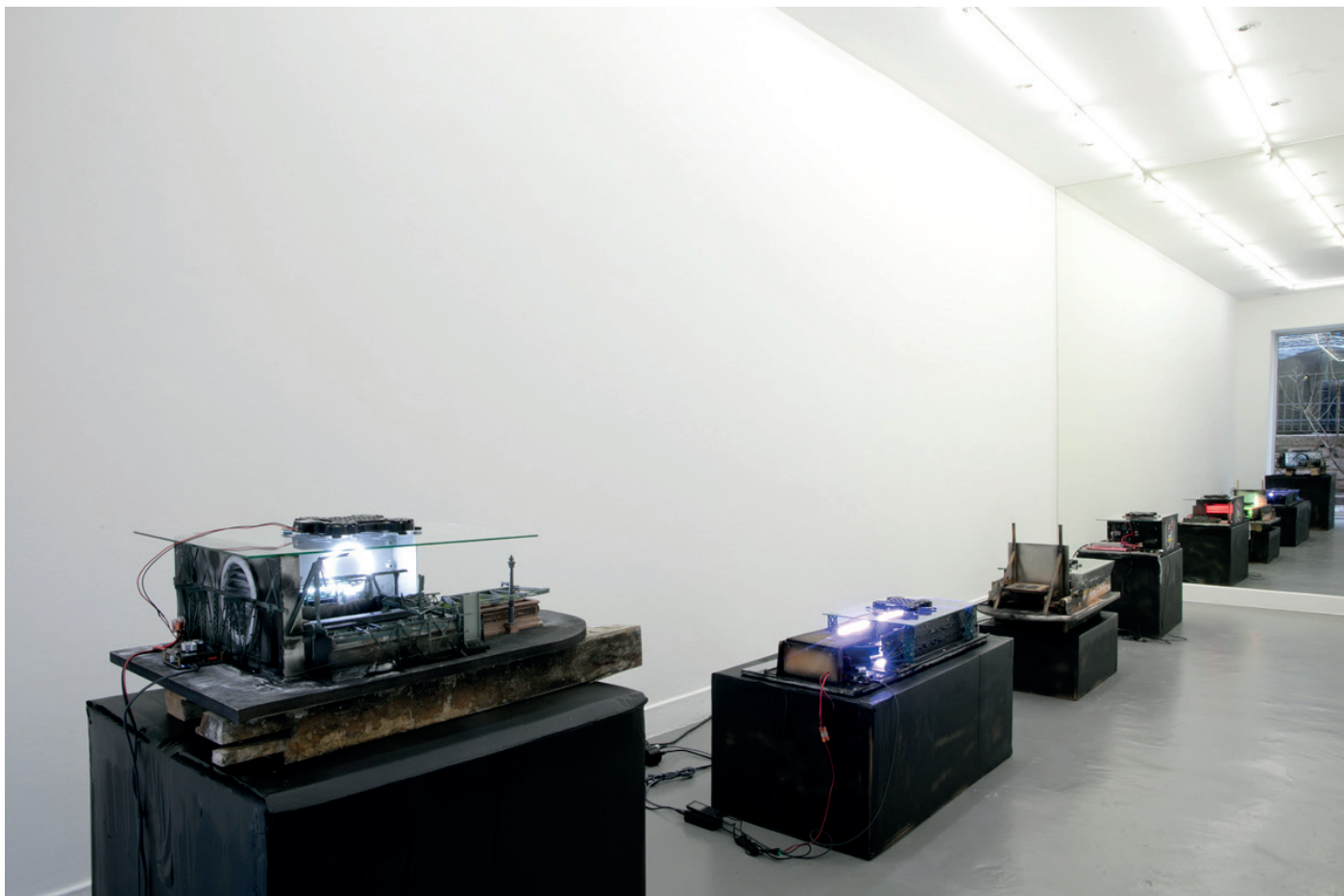
plastic, wood, metal, glass, cardboard, LED, exciter speaker, audio loop 05min27  
50x94x52cm

*untitled 3*, 2023

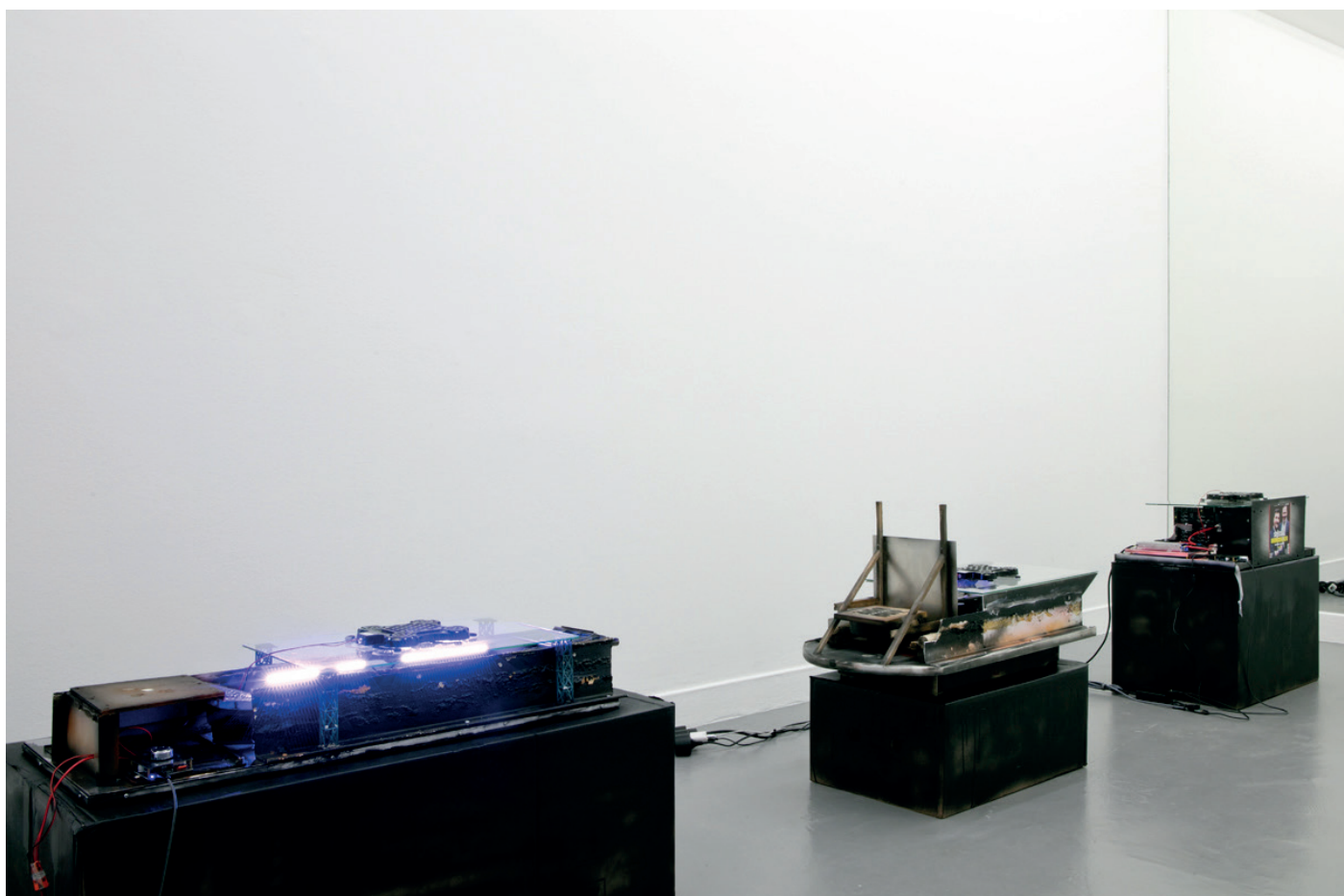
plastic, wood, metal, glass, laser light, exciter speaker, audio loop 06min55  
40x82x67cm

*untitled 4*, 2023

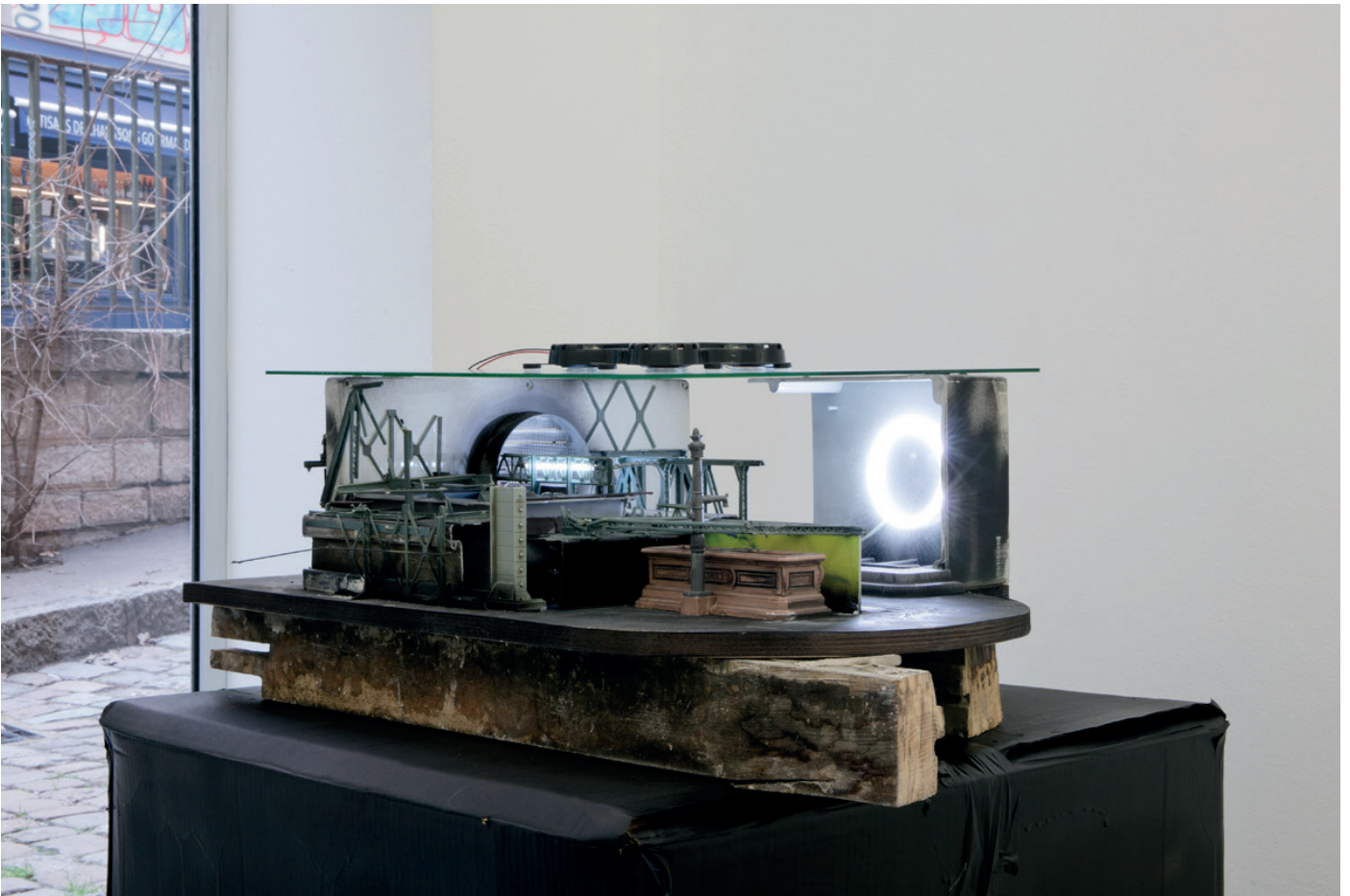
plastic, wood, metal, glass, cardboard, photo print, LED matrix screen, exciter speaker, audio loop 19min56  
41x62x64cm



exhibition's view *Gibber* by Mathis Altmann, La Salle de bains, Lyon, 2023



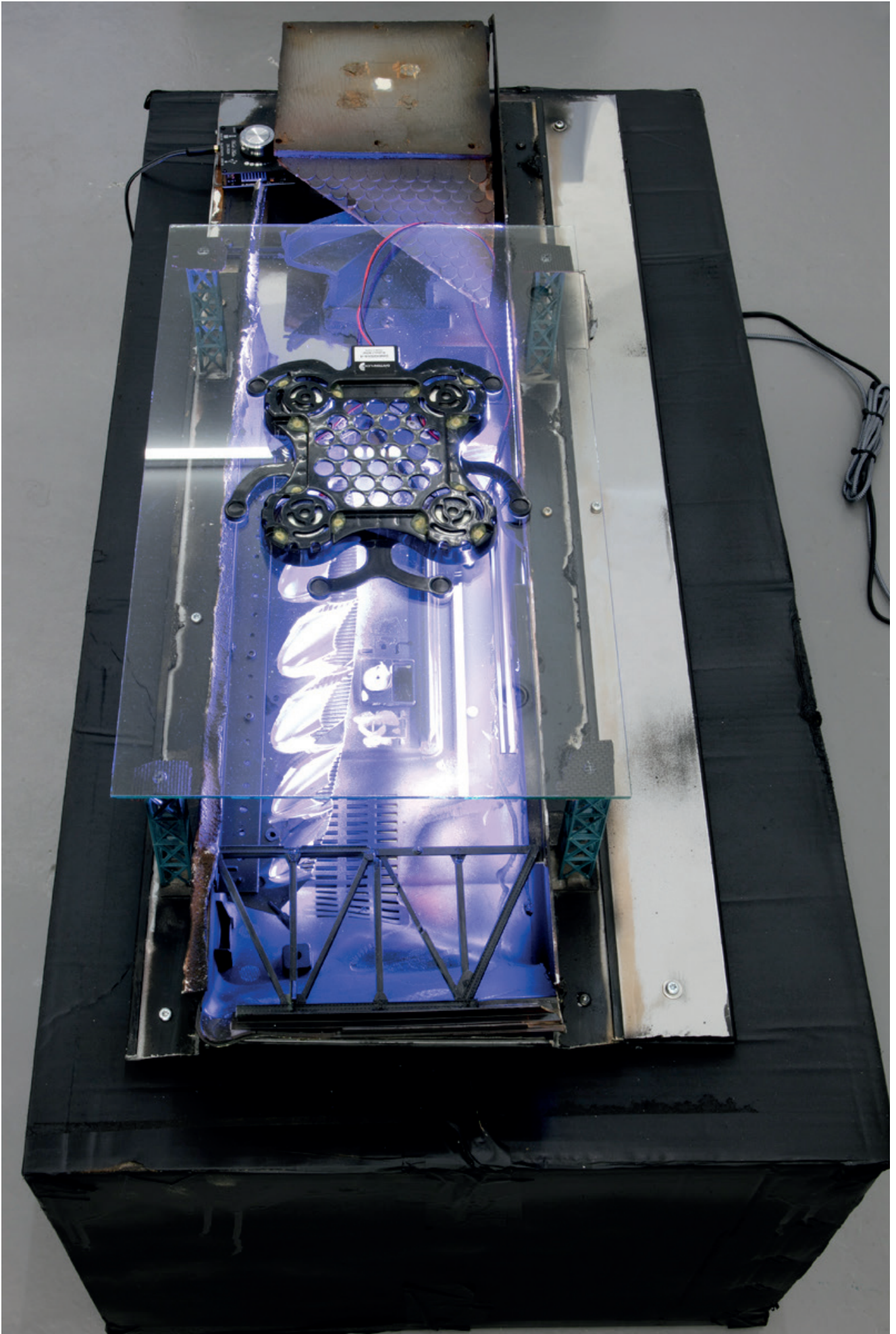
exhibition's view *Gibber* by Mathis Altmann, La Salle de bains, Lyon, 2023



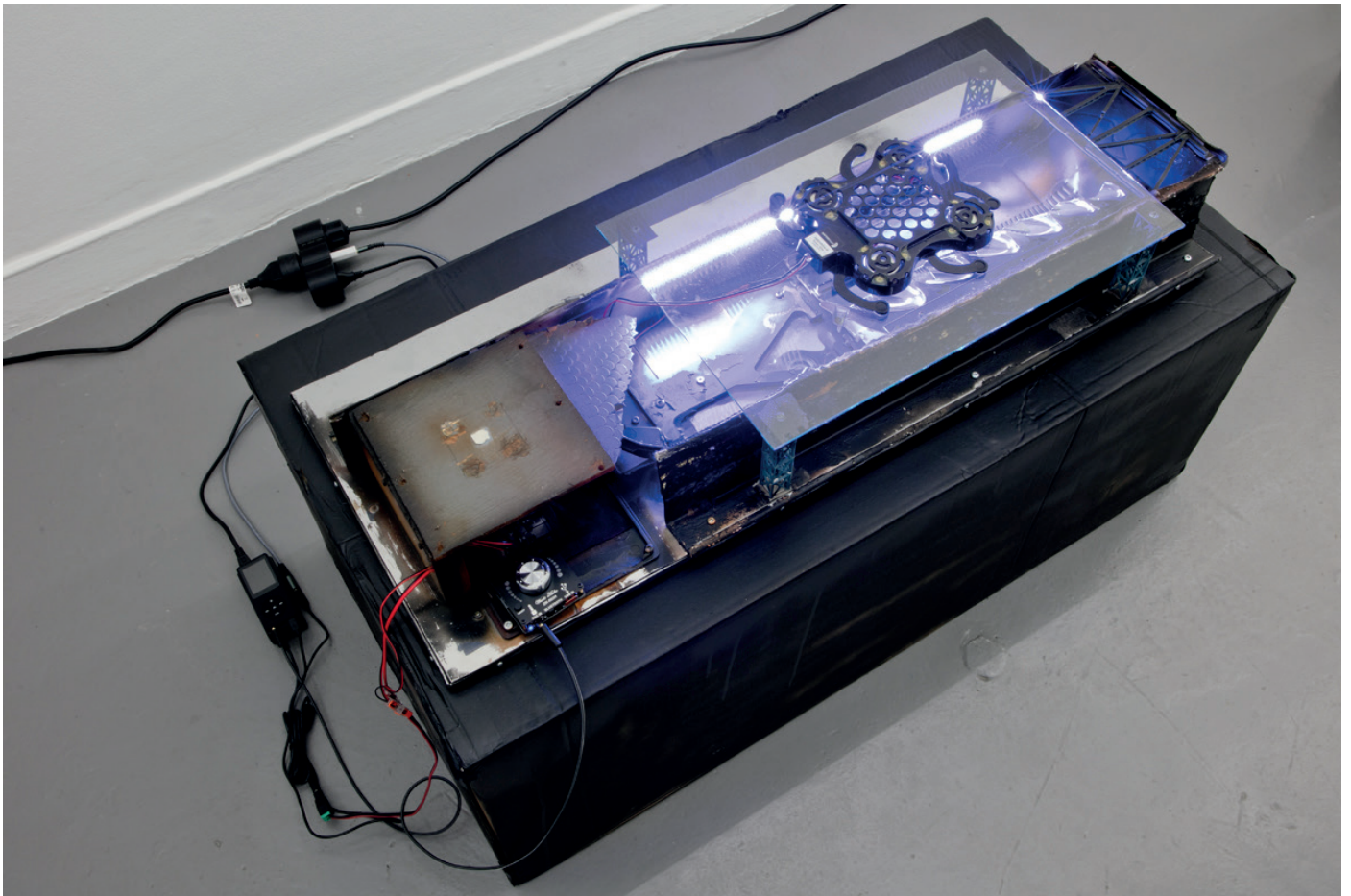
Mathis Altmann, *untitled 1*, 2023  
plastic, wood, glass, cardboard, LED, CCFL, exciter speaker, audio loop 1h34min



Mathis Altmann, *untitled 1*, 2023  
plastic, wood, glass, cardboard, LED, CCFL, exciter speaker, audio loop 1h34min



Mathis Altmann, *untitled 2*, 2023  
plastic, wood, glass, metal, cardboard, LED, exciter speaker, audio loop 5mn27s

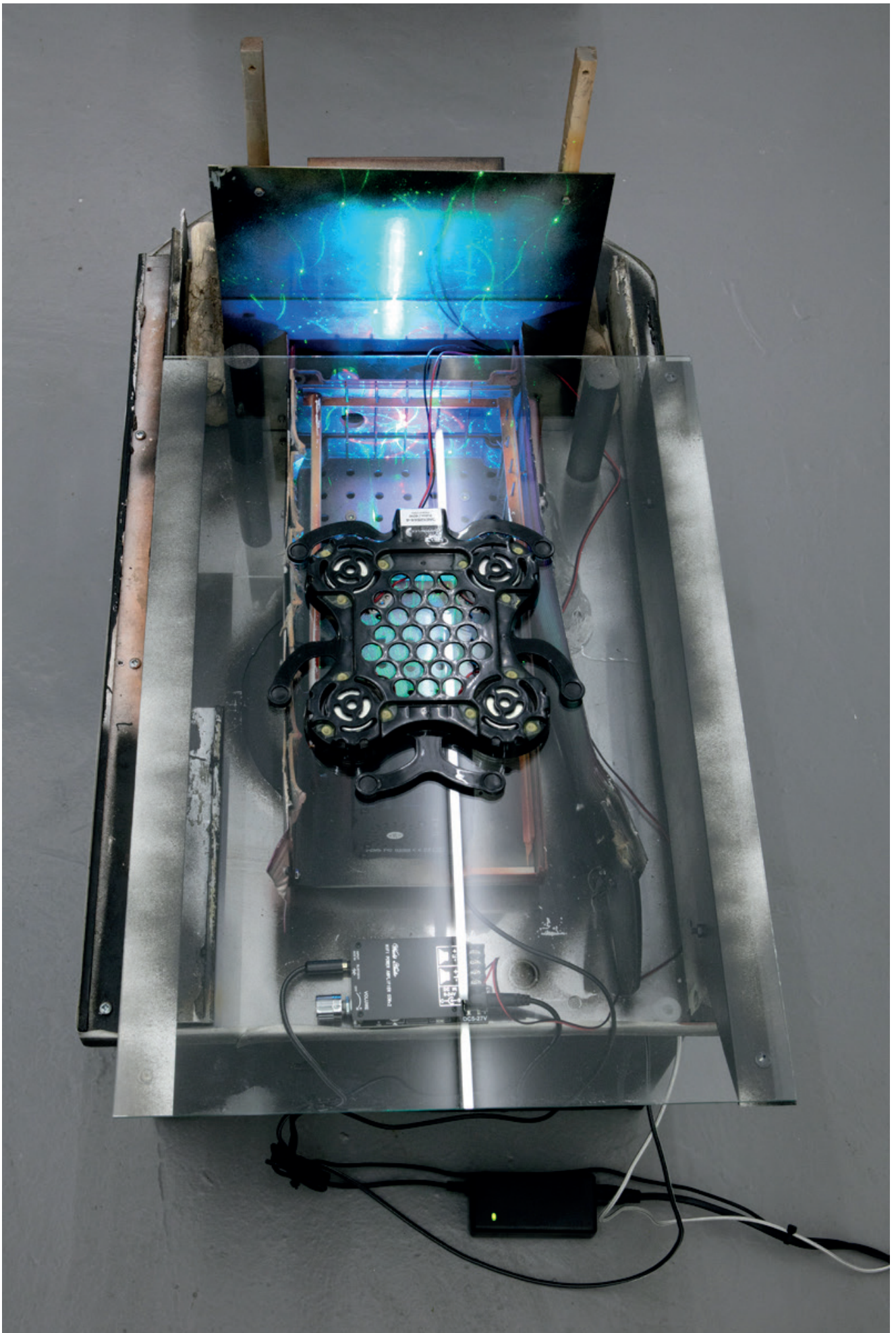


Mathis Altmann, *untitled 2*, 2023  
plastic, wood, glass, metal, cardboard, LED, exciter speaker, audio loop 5mn27s

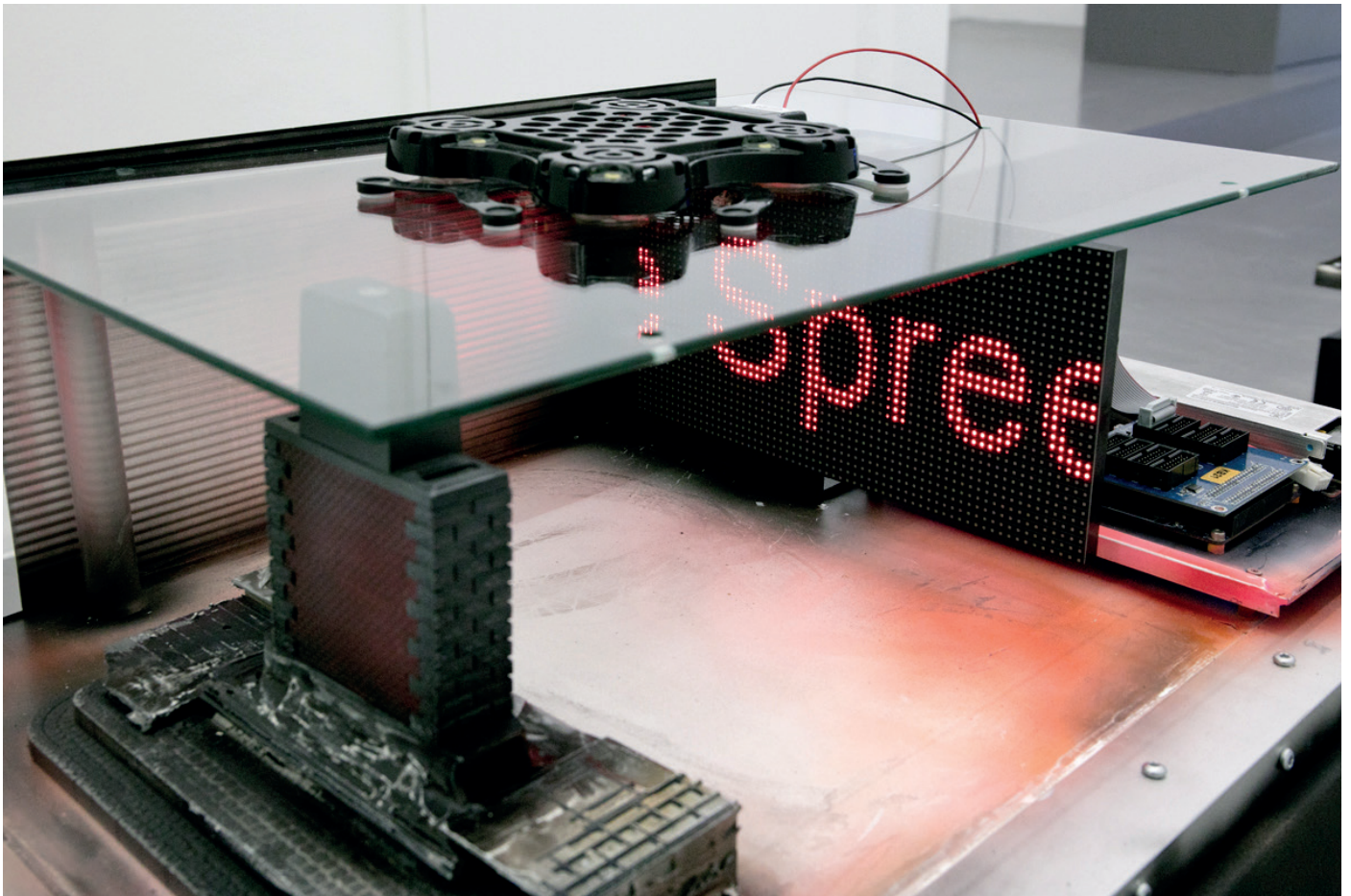


exhibition's view *Gibber* by Mathis Altmann, La Salle de bains, Lyon, 2023





Mathis Altmann, *untitled 3*, 2023  
plastic, wood, glass, metal, cardboard, laser light, exciter speaker, audio loop 6mn55s



Mathis Altmann, *untitled 4*, 2023  
plastic, wood, glass, metal, cardboard, photoprint, LED matrix screen, exciter speaker, audio loop 19mn56s



Mathis Altmann, *untitled 4*, 2023  
plastic, wood, glass, metal, cardboard, photoprint, LED matrix screen, exciter speaker, audio loop 19mn56s  
Photos : Jesús Alberto Benitez



## Room 2

From March 8th to April 1st 2023

LA SALLE DE BAINS

# MATHIS ALTMANN *GIBBER*

### Room 2

Along with his sculpture work based on assemblage, for several years now Mathis Altmann has been developing a series of illuminated signs that work by reappropriation. He has borrowed the signage of one of the international companies that dominate the market for «flexible workspace solutions» by inserting negations in them, viz., *wedontwork*, *wewontwork*, *weneverwork*. Written out in LEDs, these statements undermine the shared imagery backing advertising for the famous brand whose office buildings seem to proliferate in industrial wastelands around Berlin and several other European cities. Yet the exhaustion wafting through the slogan also calls into question the possibility of the urge to protest and fight for change by a generation of activists – including art workers – won over to the idea of meritocracy or complicity in their own alienation through a professional (over) activity that they themselves have produced.

This doesn't stop them from invoking activist statements, touching on art, for example, old motifs about not giving into the system of production like the refusal posed by Herman Melville's *Bartleby*, or the revolutionary spirit of Guy Debord, whose famous «NEVER WORK» graffiti appeared in the streets of Paris in 1953, announcing the development of a theoretical arsenal for a radical critique of existential conditions in the reign of advanced capitalism.

The lighted green cross is one of those visual signs that are burned into the retina of the everyman consumer; it almost partakes of an innate language. To spot it at night or in a rural zone is tantamount to laying eyes on a promise of salvation (for certain hypochondriacs) or stumbling on civilization (for certain city-dwellers on vacation). Altmann's light sculptures fashioned from the pharmacy cross exaggerate the magnetic power of the reappropriated object in an experience that verges on an instance of group hypnosis. On the evening of the show opening, a group naturally formed around the piece, a community of viewers who were willing, like any domestic being in the 21st century, to let their brains emit alpha waves in front of a glowing animation, even one that is pixelated. This sudden primitive vision is reinforced by the unrefined character of that rotating metal bar that is holding the cross with its «head» pointing down in a distant suggestion of some medieval torment or Satanic ceremony. The automobile hood that has been customized with a painting worthy of a fairground sideshow makes it into a sick body covered with pimples and swollen vein-like ridges.

Of course, you should be working, right?

It wasn't quite overtly planned that the Salle de bains's display of this piece by Altmann should coincide with the social unrest taking place in France right now. The artist has long been analyzing our «pharmacological» relationship to work in contemporary society, i.e. when the remedy is also a poison and the source of both the problem and the proposed solutions is one and the same (we are reminded of several things, including those managerial taskforce operations for «workplace well-being»).

Seen as a work in progress, the animated piece is a montage of text and images found on the internet, and as is often the case in Altmann's work, these images attempt to frame the spirit of capitalism in the age of hyperactivity.

list of work:

*Devine Powerlifestyles*, 2023  
pharmacy cross LED, acrylic paint on aluminium,  
video loop 13min30  
263x80x10cm

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in Germany, at Efremidis in Berlin in 2021; in Italy, at the Swiss Institute in Milan in 2018 and in Switzerland, at the Kunstmuseum in Winterthur in 2021 and at Truth & Consequences in Geneva in 2016.

He has also participated in numerous group exhibitions in 2021 such as *Bijoux!* at Fitzpatrick Gallery in Paris; *Nimmersatt? Imagining Society without Growth* at the Westfälischer Kunstverein in Münster; *Macht! Licht!* at the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Germany and in 2020 as *Grand Miniature* in Zurich or *ANNEMARIE VON MATT. JE NE M'ENNUIE JAMAIS, ON M'ENNUIE* at the Centre Culturel Suisse in Paris.

He is represented by Fitzpatrick Gallery.

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du Ministère de la Culture DRAC Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes,  
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Cette exposition reçoit le soutien de Pro Helvetia,  
Fondation suisse pour la culture.



Mathis Altmann, Devine Powerstyles, 2023  
pharmacy cross LED, acrylic on aluminium, loop video 13min30s



Mathis Altmann, Devine Powerstyles, 2023  
pharmacy cross LED, acrylic on aluminium, loop video 13min30s

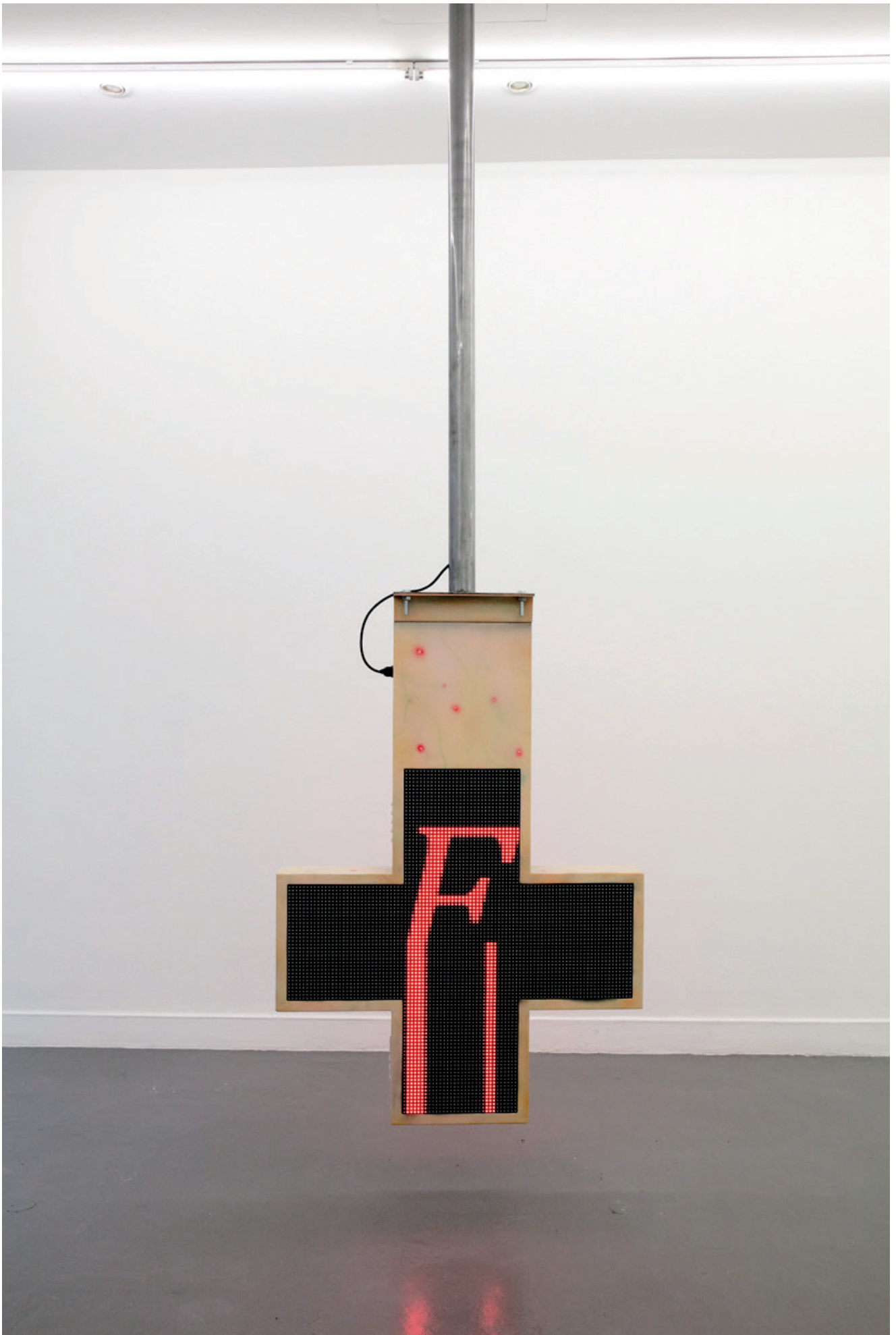


Mathis Altmann, Devine Powerstyles, 2023  
pharmacy cross LED, acrylic on aluminium, loop video 13min30s

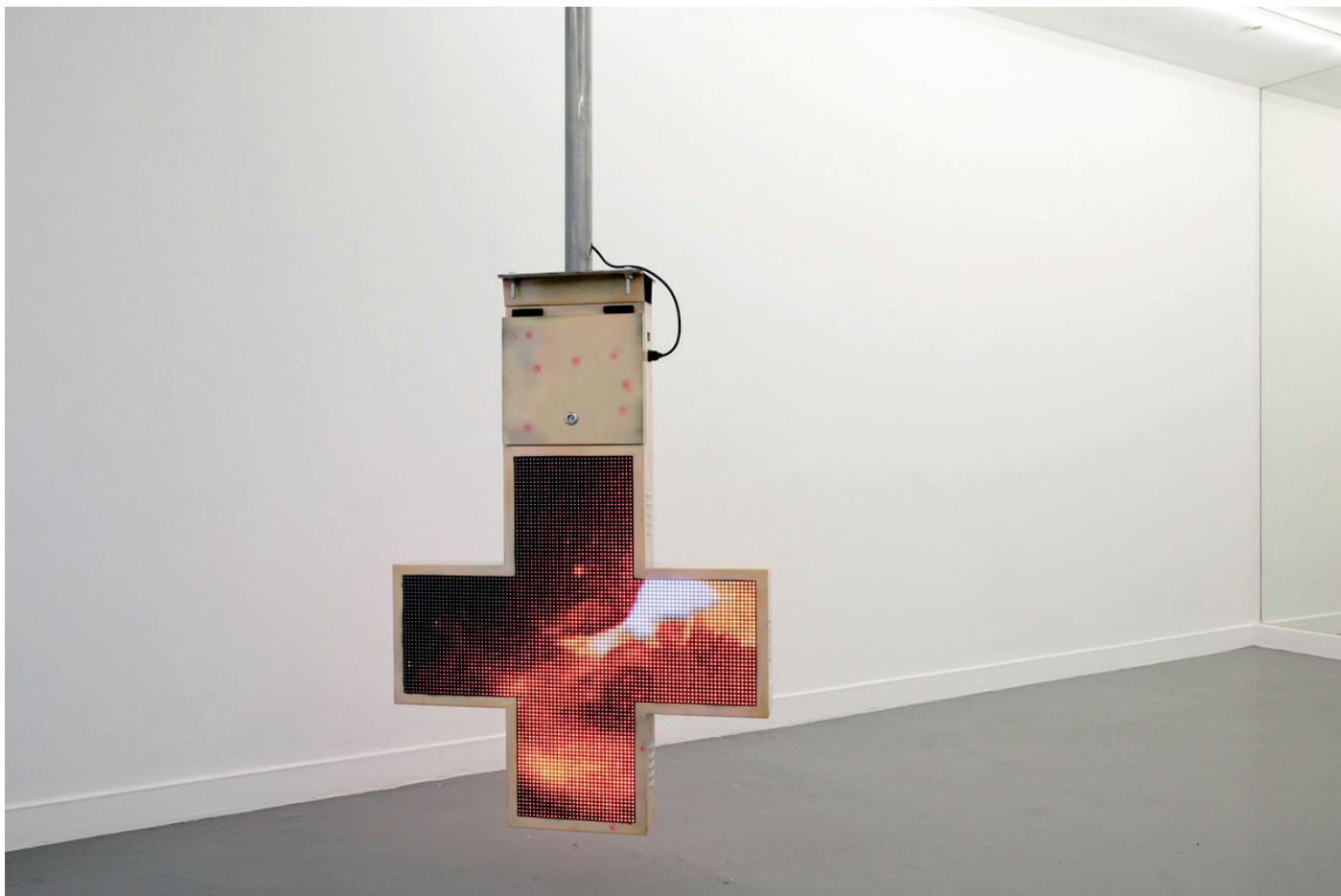


Mathis Altmann, Devine Powerstyles, 2023  
pharmacy cross LED, acrylic on aluminium, loop video 13min30s





Mathis Altmann, Devine Powerstyles, 2023  
pharmacy cross LED, acrylic on aluminium, loop video 13min30s



Mathis Altmann, Devine Powerstyles, 2023  
pharmacy cross LED, acrylic on aluminium, loop video 13min30s



# MATHIS ALTMANN GIBBER

## Room 3

In the gallery before this one, a cross, the kind you see indicating the whereabouts of a pharmacy, while hanging with its "top" pointing down, was broadcasting a kind of sermon in animated images on its LED screen, expounding on the theme of devotion to work. Hypnotic and ambiguous at one and the same time, the cross could have been generated by an artificial intelligence that had been fed a LinkedIn stream of senior managers or maybe the discussion forum of a possible Satanist branch of Workaholics Unanimous... The exhibition's accompanying text mentioned the artist's interest in *pharmakon* (which can mean both poison and remedy in ancient Greek) as a symbol of our relationship to work in the Reign of Capitalism. That relationship has grown worse with the hyperactivity that characterizes the post-COVID phase despite very good resolutions all around, eventually coming to look like a collective neurosis.

But the previous show also involved another kind of neon sign, one that proliferates in the urban landscape and has been reappropriated by the artist Mathis Altmann, namely the signs heralding the multinational WeWork, the leading company in the sale of workspace solutions. One of WeWork's directors recently congratulated himself on "Happy Boulot," a TV magazine on the BFM channel, for having contributed, while working hand in hand with a number of Paris's arrondissements and their administrators, to the "return to the office" of the citizenry thanks to his offer of flexibility.

The decision to exhibit a piece from this series alongside other older works by Altmann for the final chapter of his show at La Salle de bains is certainly not separate from the current political context in France. But this flowery version of a demand made by strikers can be read as something other than an enthusiastic announcement of the coming arrival of "the merry month of May," inasmuch as it comes to us on a hopeless day when a strike is scheduled. Rather it would seem to point to the folk character to which any union protest is condemned by a government that is deaf to what is going on in the streets. Workers only have to accept their lot with the help of a welfare program dreamed up by the brand-new management. Like the subtitle of Altmann's piece says, "inhale/exhale."

The statement might also reflect the prevailing mood of the staff at La Salle de bains, where the City of Lyon has just cut by half the grant it normally awards to the gallery. It's just another part of the context. But here again it links up with a broader situation that makes clear the decorative future of any ethical or political position taken in art and elsewhere.

This goes for even the interior decoration, if we appreciate, in this declaration of a refusal to work, the cozy side of the thing, measured in terms of the portrait of Gandhi in an Airbnb rental apartment. Altmann pays particular attention to signs emptied of their meaning and other symptoms of cultural amnesia that are peculiar to the upscale mediocrity of certain standardized contemporary interiors that are occasionally hyped to prove one's success in society – at the cost of a play of voyeuristic forces.

It was in terms of these forms of estheticization of the household realm that Altmann's work gave rise to sculptures conjuring up sticky and macabre interiors awash in trash and shit, which in some cases are made from dollhouses. They're brought together here with a more recent sculpture that is made from an imitation snakeskin handbag that sports a rhinestone peace & love sign displaying a figurine that tugs vigorously on the heart-strings. Haunted by a presence that is morbid or full of despair, these full and empty spaces inviting viewers to look inside could be viewed as allegories of the unconscious of workers and consumers suffering from an ordinary frenzy.

### List of work:

*Untitled*, 2019  
mix technics  
30 x 24 x 22 cm

*Water ! Good God ! Filth !*, 2017  
wood, foam, plastic, human hair, garage floor paint, metal, cold cathode light  
68,58 x 35,56 x 30,48 cm

*YesVacancy*, 2016  
wood, cotton, glass, flies  
80 x 40,5 x 28,5 cm

*wewontwork*, 2021  
illuminated LED sign, acrylic paint  
288 x 50 x 27 cm

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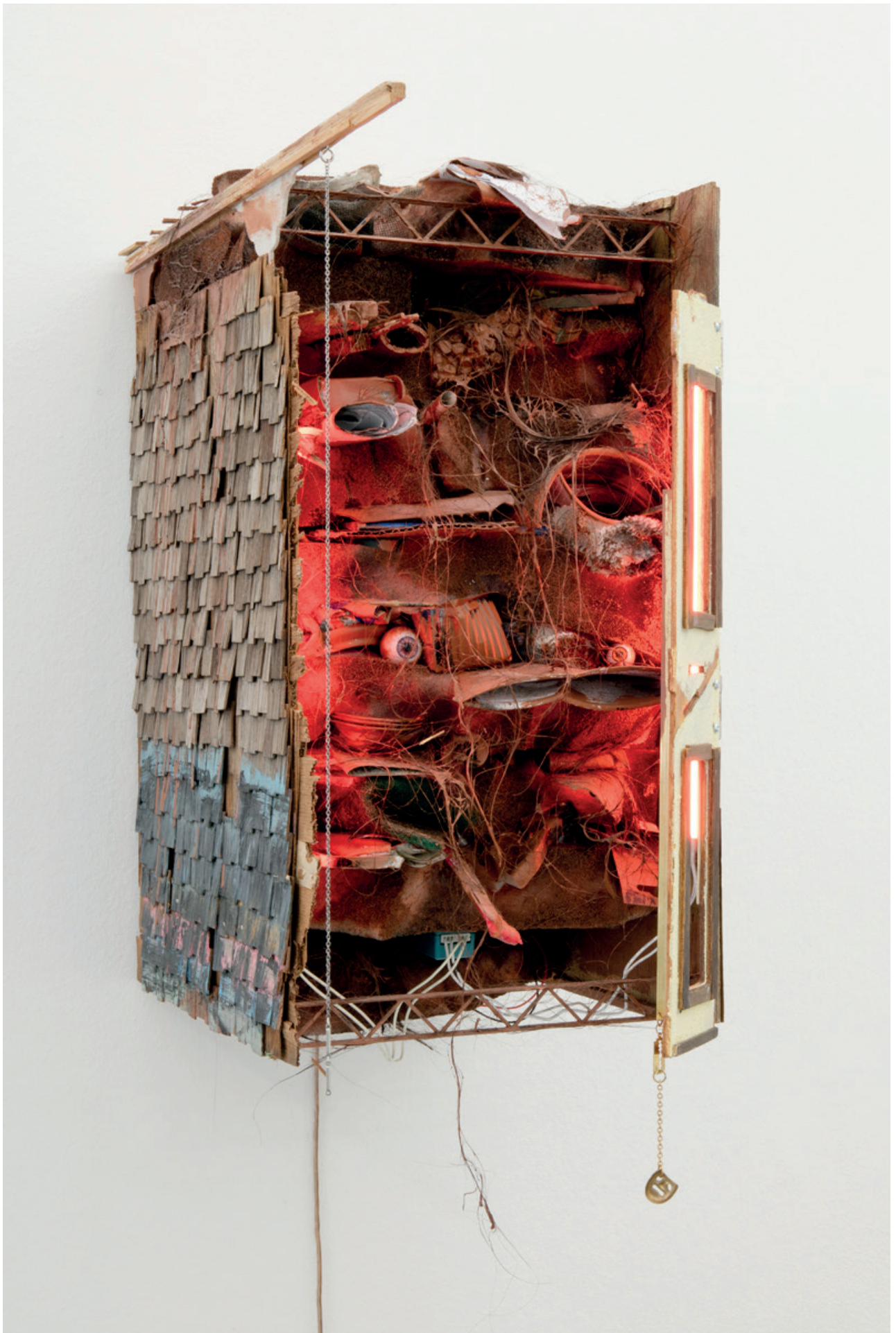
Mathis Altmann, *exhibition view*  
*La Salle de bains, 2023*



Mathis Altmann, *YesVacancy*, 2016  
wood, cotton, glass, flies. 80 x 40,5 x 28,5 cm  
80 x 40,5 x 28,5 cm



Mathis Altmann, *YesVacancy*, 2016  
wood, cotton, glass, flies. 80 x 40,5 x 28,5 cm  
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mix technics  
30 x 24 x 22 cm



Mathis Altmann, *wewontwork*, 2021  
illuminated LED sign, acrylic paint  
268 x 50 x 27 cm



# LA SALLE DE BAINS

La Salle de bains is an association (law 1901) dedicated to the production and the diffusion of contemporary art. It was created in Lyon in 1998 by a group of artists and designers in the heritage of artist run spaces (such as *The Kitchen* which has existed since 1971 in New York). Therefore, it has been characterised by a sharp, forward-looking and international programming, affirming its commitment to a decentralised cultural requirement. It has thus organised the first exhibitions in France of artists who have become major figures on the art scene.

Since 2016, and after several seasons *hors les murs*, La Salle de bains has relocated to a small space in the centre of the city from where a programme is developed according to modalities induced by the size of its premises and deduced from a certain vision of the sharing of art in public space and time. Each invitation made to the artists gives rise to the production of a project in three stages, three appointments given to the public here or there, in the premises of La Salle de bains or elsewhere in the city, like three chapters of the same story, three rooms of an exhibition in an extended definition. This format is conjunctural and transitory. As long as it is applied as a framework for artistic programming, it invites us to perceive and think about the works as much as the ways in which they appear.

La Salle de bains  
1 rue Louis Vitet  
69001 Lyon - FR

Open from Wednesday to Saturday, 3pm to 7pm

La Salle de bains enjoys the generous support of the Ministry of Culture DRAC Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Region, and the City of Lyon.

A project realized with the support of ProHelvetia and Flanders, state of the art.

La Salle de bains, correspondent of DUUU Radio :  
<https://www.duuradio.fr/auteur/la-salle-de-bains>

Contact :  
Coordination, [infos@lasalledebains.net](mailto:infos@lasalledebains.net)

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