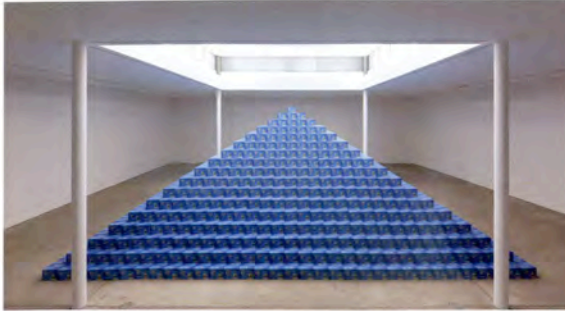


GLADSTONE GALLERY

Hal Foster, "Cyprien Gaillard: The Recovery of Discovery," *Artforum*, December 2011,
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BEST OF 2011

“Cyprien Gaillard: The Recovery of Discovery”

KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin

HAL FOSTER



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Opposite page and above: Cyprien Gaillard, *The Recovery of Discovery*, 2011, cardboard, glass, metal, beer. Installation views, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin. Photos: Uwe Walter.



Above: Thomas Struth, *Pergamon Museum I, Berlin*, 2001, color photograph mounted on Plexiglas, 77 1/2 x 97 1/2".

Depending on your mood, Gaillard's show was either an open invitation to festive sociality or just another bout of public drinking in Berlin.

YOU ENTERED KW THROUGH A COURTYARD, then walked down a narrow corridor to a viewing platform. Below you, in a basement gallery, was a large pyramid of blue boxes perfectly stacked—if, that is, you happened to be the first one to the opening. By the time I got there, the pyramid was still intact but its contents had been ransacked, for the boxes held seventy-two thousand bottles of beer free for the taking and giving, drinking and disposing. By the end of the show, the ziggurat was a ruin, a mound of soggy cardboard with a perimeter of broken glass, like a funeral pyre in a Berlin club after a two-month-long bash.

Cyprien Gaillard, a Parisian artist based in Berlin, imported the beer from Turkey. Common in Germany, the brand was Efes, which is the Turkish name for Ephesus, the ancient Greek city in Asia Minor famous for its Temple of Artemis, one of the seven wonders of the antique world, destroyed by a Christian mob in AD 401. Gaillard also meant to evoke the celebrated Pergamon Altar, which was part of the acropolis of the eponymous ancient city, also in Asia Minor, before its frieze was removed in the 1880s to Berlin. With its reconstructed stairway, the altar is still housed on Museum Island, nor far from KW: a case of preservation that is arguably one of destruction and certainly one of expropriation. As you looked over the cases of beer, not only the status of such monuments across time and place but also the debate about antiquities in the present came to mind: Where should such glories as the Elgin Marbles come to rest? The "cosmopolitan" position argues for London, of course, the "national" position for Athens, but these questions are always more complicated in the end. Since both Ephesus and Pergamon are located on what is today Turkish territory, the resonances of

the Gaillard installation were also more specific: My thoughts wandered from the old German romance with classical Greece, out of which Enlightenment antiquarians contrived the ideal of antique art that has launched every neoclassicism since ("noble simplicity and quiet grandeur," in the famous phrase of Winckelmann); to the Nazi projection of an Aryan Greece as the ancient precedent for the imperial Reich, with Berlin reimaged by Hitler and Speer as a classical "Germania"; to the second-class status of Turkish "guest workers" in Germany to this day; to the controversial question of German multiculturalism, declared a failure by Chancellor Angela Merkel just a year ago; to the ambiguous place of contemporary Turkey, not yet a member of the EU (even as the union falters) but already a power in the reconfigured Middle East; and so on. The Pergamon frieze depicts the revolt of the Olympian gods against the giants, a conflict between new and old orders, and during the run of the show last spring, "gigantomachies" were again raging across Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa.

Along with these unusual cultural-political connections came expected art-historical associations: The boxes called up those of Warhol and Judd alike, and in so doing reinforced the sense that Minimalism relied on the seriality of the commodity form as much as Pop did. Smithsonian was evoked, too, through both the perfection of the ziggurat and the inevitability of its collapse. Closer to home, Gaillard also looked to the social sculpture of Beuys, and it was difficult not to see the installation as a comment on the current state of relational aesthetics as well. But such fine cultural and art-historical concerns notwithstanding, what kind of provocation was it really, in the end?

Depending on your mood, the show was either an open invitation to festive sociality or just another bout of public drinking in Berlin. At the opening, the pyramid was occupied like bleachers at a sports match or concert, but here the audience became its own event. The free beer did attract a crowd beyond the denizens of the art world, but like any gift this largesse also produced some ambivalence. The Efes cost forty thousand euros, which were paid, indirectly, by German taxpayers, who would soon balk at a further bailout of Greece—another act that many Germans regard as one of preservation and many Greeks as one of destruction. ("Why should we support all those people on the dole in Greece?" versus "Why should we spend our working lives paying back German banks?") Certainly the nasty remains of the installation did not present a rosy idea of community. For foregrounded here was not so much the irreducible antagonism in the social that relational aesthetics is said to gloss over, but rather the psychic instability of the crowd as seen from Gustave Le Bon, through Freud and Elias Canetti, to recent students of hooliganism—an instability that rendered the installation insecure as both structure and event. It was almost as if Gaillard suggested that participation is only a degree or two of separation from vandalism: *vandal*, as in "a person who deliberately destroys or damages public or private property" and/or "a member of a Germanic people that ravaged Gaul, Spain, and North Africa in the 4th–5th centuries and sacked Rome in AD 455." □

HAL FOSTER IS TOWNSEND MARTIN '17 PROFESSOR OF ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY. HIS *ART-ARCHITECTURE COMPLEX (VERSO)* AND *THE FIRST POP AGE: PAINTING AND SUBJECTIVITY IN THE ART OF HAMILTON, LICHTENSTEIN, WARHOL, RICHTER, AND RUSCHA* (PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS) HAVE JUST APPEARED.

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