

# TEXTE ZUR KUNST

## CONTAINERS OF VIRTUAL

Lars Bang Larsen on Hans-Christian Lotz  
at Christian Andersen, Copenhagen

September 2017



Hans-Christian Lotz, "Untitled," 2017, installation views

The new and major installation in Berlin-based artist Hans-Christian Lotz's solo show at Christian Andersen in Copenhagen – his second at the gallery – was set to work just below the threshold of the normal and the familiar. For this untitled show, simple partitions made of wood strips and opaque plastic, slightly taller than a person, divided the space into nine narrow cubicles like a provisional call center or a modest storage facility. Each cubicle was furnished with one or more cardboard boxes placed directly on the floor. Judging from the brand names and slogans printed on the boxes (e.g. one from Karen Volf's biscuits, "Gør folk glade" – "Makes people happy"), they appeared to have been salvaged from shops or supermarkets in Denmark and Germany; one bore the artist's name and Berlin address. Piles of white printing paper filled most of the boxes, along with black-and-white A4

printouts of color photos that had been encrypted into abstract patterns. The density of the images varied by printout, indicating that the photos' information had been scrambled to different degrees, with some consisting of finely chopped visual noise, while others were so grainy and pixelated they seemed on the verge of a gestalt reading. Lotz also presented coded data (ostensibly from the same capture set) as a flicker-animation, which he screened on a couple of 18 cm monitors stripped of their casing and, as with the printouts, consigned to boxes placed on the naked floor.

Distantly echoing 1990s strategies of gesturing with the exhibition space itself, such as Guillaume Bijl's simulated environments or Jens Haaning's production lines, Lotz's installation ultimately offered *too much materiality* – an excess of *Stoff* combined with a deficit of mimetic reassurance – to truly warrant such comparisons.



For example, the artist had the lighting system removed, so that the pale natural light was distributed directionally from the windows into the space, a former garage. This made ambience a protagonist – drawing in the ventilation duct and the high ceiling with its rows of concrete beams, which were all now accorded the same degree of illumination as the aforementioned elements Lotz had added for this show. By denying any singular focus, this strategy served to charge the overall atmosphere in an otherwise uneventful space. The installation’s ambiguous mood was accentuated by one cardboard box containing dried reeds and plant fragments, alongside a number of wooden balls (perhaps leftovers from Lotz’s untitled 2016 vitrines with sawdust and shavings?). This more or less mediated presence of nature seemed like an invitation to think of the boxes not just as stored or forgotten items but as

seeds of a kind, containers of the virtual.

A sufficiently deep rummage through one of the cardboard boxes brought to light a few of the color photos that Lotz had encrypted: what we see are men (all Caucasian) working at bread kiosks in Berlin U-Bahn stations (kiosks, not bakeries: nothing is produced here). Taken without their subjects knowledge, and hence invested with voyeuristic tension, the photos of purveyors of ordinary alimentation had an almost modernist touch, calling to mind art-historical ballet dancers and bar girls. But what does it mean to render indecipherable something so commonplace? Is it an indication of white maleness losing its normative transparency? Of blue-collar labor being consumed by informational economies and logistics? Given the economy of resources in Lotz’s work, another possible reading revolves around ecological precarity and the threat of agricultural

collapse impacting the future production of food. Fundamentals of life that can no longer be taken for granted, or begin to reveal themselves as lacks, inevitably draw new limits in the everyday.

Seriality returned as a structural principle in this show via two series of wall objects, both titled “Rain over Water” (2017). Mutely interfacing with something uncertain, they hover in a media-interstitial space somewhere between painting, photography, and vitrine. In fact, the framed elements that the two series comprise are solar panels manipulated by Lotz at the place of their production. Here he inserted various foreign elements such as Radio Frequency Integrated Circuits (RFIC) and pumice stone (in one of the series, shaped and arranged to look like circuit boards). Most dramatically, the panels feature vacuum-sealed slices of pig brain, an abjectly visceral counterpoint to a logistical monoculture’s immateriality. With its industrial finish, “Rain over Water” renders the unfamiliar violent; in this case, vistaless windshields splattered with pig brains. By sampling markers of awareness and intelligence – human or not – “Rain over Water” is animated by a zombie-like half-life that is unavoidably connected to outside entities: their author, the sun, some pigs, the unknown system that enables tracking of the works via RFIC chips.

Lotz’s semio-material economies call for conjecture based on observation and description of liminal phenomena. Unaccompanied by any explanatory material (no press release, etc.), his laconic, if not hermetic procedures ironically debunk a conspiratorial zeitgeist that valorizes encrypted data as a kind of social ether (or algorithmic essence) key to understanding events in our present. In this exhibition, the beholder was not led to believe in the epiphanic potential of

digital communication. Rather, Lotz, with this contextually vibrant show, elaborated a discourse on the digital and its material cultures that did not totalize the former – and not because it indexed specific surrounding social spaces, but rather because it implied them, materially and systemically. In turn, the sociocultural setting implied was shown to be a compromised one prone to abstraction, overcoding, and (violent) reorganization. Dramatizing relations between the organic and the artificial, object and process, redundancy and complexity, Lotz’s work calls up a plausible horizon for a civilizational space about to appear.

“Hans-Christian Lotz,” Christian Andersen, Copenhagen, May 19–July 8, 2017.