

## Ashley Eldridge-ford On Steve Johnson At Domobaal, London



Steve Johnson, Installation view, 2008

Steve Johnson, 'Imbissbude (Bier, Bionade, Wasser)', 2008

Mixed media, 60 x 90 x 40 cm

What first struck me about Steve Johnson's exhibition, 'Letting the World Pass By', is the parallel between the structures and buildings suspended high on the walls and their counterparts seen from the windows of the Domobaal gallery. Looking up at the closed, self-contained works and feeling frustration at not being able to see, or see into, them was countered with looking outside and having building interiors across the street on display. Both are views, objects, frequently seen as we pass in transit to somewhere else. They are souvenirs to our living.



Johnson's works are carefully constructed replicas of everyday urban scenes that, in their minutely carved detail and ambiguously vacant content, force one to seek the familiar: the single human figure, the detail of a closed umbrella, graffiti on an ominously closed door. The works in the Sculpture Room are each imbued with a sense of unattainability and expectation; two illusive by-products of the contemporary era. Awareness of the experience and passage of time, as well as history, is raised in Johnson's works.



Steve Johnson, 'Doppelverein', 2008

Mixed media, 90 x 170 x 60 cm

Steve Johnson, 'A.M.', 2006

Mixed media, 115 x 150 x 70 cm

Each of his sculptures rests upon several layers of earth and rock strata that give the scenes they support a finality: ashes to ashes, dust to dust. The earth contains layers of history and the remnants and souvenirs of generations; with such, they support each subsequent generation. These are not all



historically important scenes: one is the terminus of a bus station 'Schrumpfende Städte (Shrinking Cities)', 2008, the other a snack bar at a roadside lay-by 'Imbissbude (Bier, Bionade, Wasser)', 2008 but the third 'Doppelverein', 2008, surprisingly, is: the Gardening Association, a clubhouse of sorts, located in Treptow Park, Berlin. This temporary structure has stood the test of time, including invasion by the Russians in East Berlin during the Battle of Berlin in 1945. The park was a singular source of food for many during the Second World War and was witness to fierce battles. It is no wonder that the windows and doors are firmly closed; the building gives nothing away.



This ubiquitous sense of the impenetrable creates alienation; perhaps not better expressed than by the singular figure facing away from the room in 'Schrumpfende Städte'. A man has arrived at the end of the bus line and stands with nowhere to go and no means to get there.

Each scene is a souvenir or an amalgamation of memories and moments from Johnson's own experience of living and passing these, or similar, structures in his daily commute in London and Berlin. The sculptures and watercolours in the next room are equally subjective for the artist and it requires time and the exploration of their importance to delve into his choice of their representation. Buildings, streets, venues, cities, act as memory triggers to thoughts, experiences, events that once took place and, returning to, or passing them, can transport us back in time. Johnson's work gives us access through these works to scenes from his life, so that we can see better those of our own.

*Ashley Eldridge-Ford*

Steve Johnson: Die Welt Vorbeiziehen Lassen (Letting the World Pass By)

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**[Domobaal \(http://www.domobaal.com/\)](http://www.domobaal.com/)**

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