

# Between the collective and the individual, between the aura and the relic.

## Robert Fleischanderl

Franz Wassermann is constantly examining the ever-shifting relationship between the individual and the collective. The behaviour of a majority towards a minority, or a collective toward a single person, suggests a power game that is never simple or clear, a struggle that throws into high relief the illogical logic of how supremacy is maintained. Since the powerful are most often the writers of human history, such unpopular chapters usually never see the light of day. Wassermann's earlier projects 'Schubhaft', 'Narben' (an art project on sexual violence), and 'Temporäres Denkmal' (a work about Holocaust victims and the processes of memory) are testaments to his insistence that neglected narratives must be seen and heard, and when taken as a whole attest to his oeuvre's unerring accuracy in conceptualizing and visualizing such cultural silences.

In his most recent work, Wassermann wishes to separate himself from his larger, more aesthetically coherent earlier works just mentioned. LIVING ROOM is a more intimate venture that introduces viewers to ensembles of smaller objects executed in a variety of mediums – painting, drawing, sculpture, video, photography, typography and performance. The variety of formats in a significantly smaller scale installation does not, however, render this piece any less relevant or controversial; in fact, it might multiply its challenges to his favorite topics of the unspoken, the uncategorizable, and the un-Bild. By opening up his aesthetic processes to a wide range of mediums, Wassermann signals his unwillingness to be bound by the restrictions inherent in any one of them and, therefore, his refusal to be categorized, himself.

LIVING ROOM, at first blush, appears to be wildly eclectic. Borrowing from Wassermann's earlier repertoire of imagery and experimentation it interweaves objects, parts of the body, and even insects. What brings all these diverse elements into a meaningful whole is aluminium. This versatile silvery white metal is drawn around all of the objects in LIVING

ROOM by being cast or machined into cabinets, bases, or frames, and as such, gives each object the aura of an individual 'work of art' in need of only the artist's signature to legitimize its existence.

Wassermann is at his most intellectually deft and wittily subversive in his definitive groupings of objects and artefacts. For example, presented on aluminium display trays and then conserved in cabinets made of the same metal, an arrangement of wildly disparate objects has the look of a scientific collection. Whether these trays are meant to excite or disgust they completely succeed in stimulating the viewer to reconsider each artefact both for what it was and for how it has been changed by the context in which it now resides.

It is not a big move, perhaps, to go from an object's aura, as a piece of evidence, to its emotional pathos as a relic. But it is a very big deal to be hit by both of these pathways to meaning at once – by hard facts and strong emotions.

What might be perceived as this artist's renegade nature is better described as Wassermann's extraordinary interdisciplinary reach. He seems almost fearless in his willingness to transgress boundaries and bring things into dialogue that normally would remain discreet one from the other. Even the audience becomes part of the texture of Wassermann's LIVING ROOM. The viewer does this by attending talks, discussions and readings or by exchanging single pieces within the artwork – modifying it at every turn. Wassermann's welcoming of this kind of interactivity gives LIVING ROOM a certain generative quality; one gets the sense s/he is experiencing an ever-changing objet and is struck by the particular beauty of its parts while being simultaneously drawn to the conceptual strength of the whole. Turning slightly from this discussion of synecdoche, LIVING ROOM can be appreciated as either a static piece of art, a product, or for the conceptual strength of its countless creative decisions, in other words, for its process – or both at once. When Wassermann invites an audience into his LIVING ROOM the viewer may enter as family member or as foreigner, as a conspirator deeply in touch with the emotions each object evokes or as an interloper returning to the scene of a crime. In Wassermann's LIVING ROOM the choice is yours, because the emotional evidence is right before your eyes... if you dare to leave that surface and delve deeper

Text for the exhibition: Franz Wassermann: **LIVING ROOM: ME THE COLLECTIVE**

16. November 2012 – 29. Dezember 2012, gallery widmertheodoridis, Zurich / CH