

CONRADI

Philip Gaisser
One Could Look South and See North
2012

Nonchalant and focused but without any oppressive pathos, Philip Gaisser's "One Could Look South and See North" transforms Galerie Conradi's rooms into a contemporary cabinet of wonders. Zurich to London round trip, please. For a bronze sculpture that weighs eight tons and is more than twenty feet tall: Auguste Rodin's "Gates of Hell," the masterwork on which the artist worked for thirty-seven years and the framework for the creative output of a lifetime—many of Rodin's famous sculptures were originally conceived as parts of this ensemble. There are eight casts of the object worldwide; the Zurich copy was restored in 2006 and then went on loan to London. At the time, the newspaper "Die Welt" described this transaction as "the Gates' one-week descent into hell: presumably the most complex and costly foreign trip ever made by a work of art from Switzerland." Philip Gaisser now brings the sculpture and the transport equipment to Hamburg. But not the real thing, of course. We encounter Rodin's tableau—the artist never saw its complete realization because the original commission had been revoked at some point—in the form of a large black-and-white photograph. A small aluminum model represents the support structure on which the cast was shipped.

The exhibition installation thus spans the distance between two contrary conceptions: the Gates of Hell as an archive of ideas, and the invention of curious and highly specialized technical equipment. In an architecture made of window blinds, Gaisser, who has a keen eye for the sites and forms of the presentation of his photographs and creates customized display fittings for each show, joins several intersecting aesthetic and thematic threads. A family resemblance links the photograph of an electrostatic generator built in 1890 to a shot of a railroad bridge built for the ICE bullet train that was never taken into operation. A slide show running on two 6 x 6 projectors superimposes earlier with recent photographic works. The square format, a new element in Gaisser's oeuvre, frames a selection from his archive, photographic copies of images that possess sculptural depth and not only blend into one another but sometimes quite literally overlap. Affinities emerge, dissipate, consolidate. Dimly lighted like a club, the gallery space reshuffles how we allocate our attention. Instead of emphasizing the elegiac aspect of photography, Gaisser excites our curiosity about his pictures and other inventions.