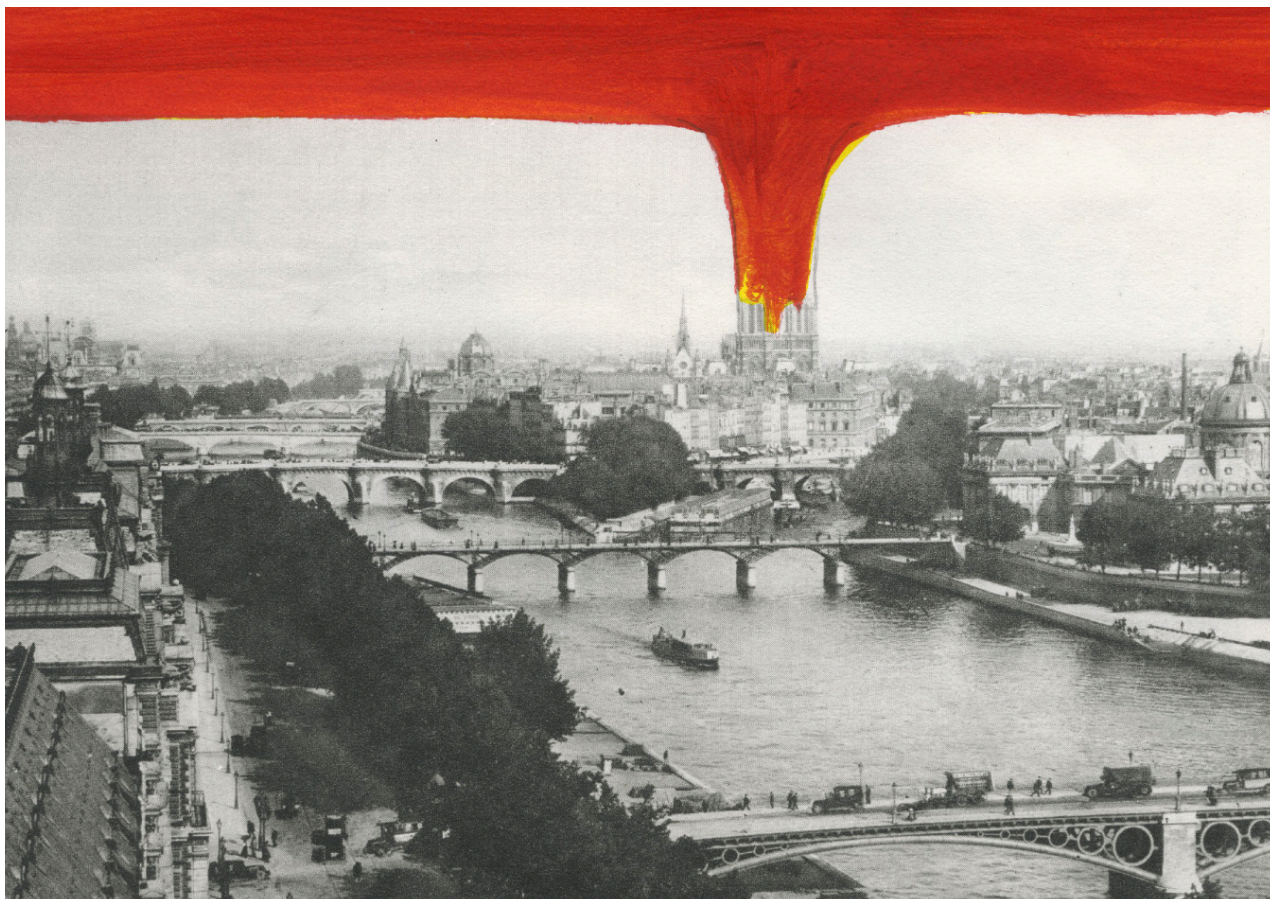


Esther Schipper

ROMAN ONDAK

Perfect Society

September 13 – October 26, 2019



Roman Ondak, *If*, 2019, ink on cutting from a book

Esther Schipper is pleased to announce Roman Ondak's first solo exhibition with the gallery. Entitled **Perfect Society**, the exhibition includes new sculptures, a painting, and works on paper.

A major theme in Ondak's oeuvre, most of the works take as point of departure found objects—be they utilitarian or everyday, from the world of construction, athletic equipment, art and design, or mass-produced ephemera. Slight alterations, added modifications, and/or precise restructuring of elements create works of art that, while playing on echoes of its original shape, function or state, exude a simple, classical sense of beauty and rhythm.

Organized to create a delicate looking convex surface rising from the ground, the large-scale sculpture, **Perfect Society**, 2019, is assembled from several thousand short pieces of heating, water and gas pipe of varying diameter. Its central circular shape, around which curved parts of pipe are loosely placed, at first resembles the characteristic orderly structure of a sunflower's blossom or a hive's honeycomb. The motif of bees and flower is a metaphor for energy: both for the warmth generated by a beehive and the sun and as a model of social interaction in which each part is contributing to the good of the whole. Arranged by decreasing diameter from the center to its margins, leaving the bent parts at its periphery, the repurposed pipes (salvaged from a public building near the artists' studio) come to symbolize hierarchical order and uniformity and, as the title suggests, stipulate an analogy with utopia.

Aeon, 2019—a construction of wooden beams on a metal frame suspended from the ceiling—recalls the handrails of a staircase. Extending from the ceiling to float above ground, it forms an enigmatic geometric shape suggestive of Greek key or meander, found on ancient Greek vases or the ornamental freezes of Roman temples. The logic of its construction appears to shift as we walk around it. Combining the formal language of domestic architecture and ancient ornamental pattern, the work creates a beautifully evocative yet simple shape. Imagining the correlate staircase takes the viewer on a fantastic journey. **Vertigo**, 2018, equally plays on the notion of an absent staircase: two modified handrails from the artist's house, installed at a distance above one another on the wall, create a marked absence.

A fourth work, **Becoming a Row**, 2019, continues this theme of repurposed everyday objects: constructed from individual wooden drawers, cut and nestled into a geometric pattern of ever smaller surfaces, the objects used for ordering things, are brought into dysfunctional arrangement, defying order but also embodying a dizzying geometric diminishment.

Repurposed from the realm of athletic equipment, a five-meter-long gymnastics beam, the top covered with red dust, becomes a narrow band of alien soil, complete with the artist's footsteps. An oblique reference to the large-scale recreation of a Martian landscape for his 2004 solo exhibition at the Kölnischer Kunstverein—the work is entitled **Mars Walk**, 2019—, the footsteps introduce a lingering performative presence, just as the sculptures can function as traces of the artist's home: pipes and handrails in the current exhibition, or, for example, door- or window handles in previous works.

A found canvas and a collection of prints and postcards continue Ondak's modification of existing paintings and prints. The painting, **Open End**, 2019, has been altered—adding a pattern and excising a small section—giving new meaning to an unfinished canvas the artist found. The suite of black-and-white prints and postcards depict views of Notre Dame in Paris. In a reference to the recent fire of the Parisian landmark, bright red clouds rise from the church's towers and fill the sky. As in previous works, such as **Across that Place**, 2008–11 on the history of the Panama Canal or his 2010 series **Glimpse**, inserting himself into historical prints of Mount Vesuvius, Ondak focuses on the cultural memory constructed by artists and designers of mass-produced ephemera.

With poignant emotional immediacy, the allusion to a disaster considered an international cultural tragedy, provoking personal memories and individual acts of mourning, highlights a shared yet individualized experience. Yet many of the other works draw on such shared moments and mnemonic traces: the touch of a wooden handrail, the ubiquity of cast-off pipes, the everyday activity of opening drawers. The melancholy quality of the now dysfunctional objects is given a hopeful spin: repurposed, given a voice to subtly inspire the viewer's imagination to fill the absences with their own memories and visions of real and imagined encounters.

Roman Ondak was born 1966 in Zilina, Slovakia. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bratislava and Slippery Rock University in Pennsylvania. The artist lives and works in Bratislava. Ondak represented Slovakia at the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009. In 2012, he participated in dOCUMENTA (13) and was named Artist of the Year by Deutsche Bank in Berlin. He was recipient of the Lovis-Corinth Prize 2018.

The artist has had numerous solo exhibitions, among them: **#12 Roman Ondak**, mezzaterra 11, Belluno (2018–19); **Based on True Events**, Lovis-Corinth-Preis, Kunstforum Ostdeutsche Galerie, Regensburg (2018); **Objects in the Mirror**, BASE Progetti per l'arte Arte, Florence (2018); **Man Walking Toward a Fata Morgana**, The Arts Club of Chicago, Chicago (2017); **History Repeats Itself**, KUNSTEN Museum of Modern Art, Aalborg (2017); **The Source of Art is in the Life of a People**, South London Gallery, London (2016); **Storyboard**, Times Museum, Guangzhou (2015); **Roman Ondak**, Kaldor Art Projects, Sydney (2014); **Some Thing**, The Common Guild, Glasgow (2013); **Escena**, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid (2013); **Roman Ondak**, Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris/ARC, Paris (2012); **do not walk outside this area**, Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin (2012); **Within Reach of Hand or Eye**, K21, Düsseldorf (2012); **Time Capsule**, Modern Art Oxford, Oxford (2011); **Before Waiting Becomes Part of Your Life**, Salzburg Kunstverein (2010); and **Measuring the Universe**, DAAD Galerie, Berlin, Museum of Modern Art, New York, and Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2008–10).

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