

PHILIP SEIBEL
THE WORD FOR WORLD IS FOREST
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Prompted by depictions in the fairy tales by Brothers Grimm and Herder, the forest in German literature is romanticised with towering trees, abundant greenery and stretching vistas into an arena where normal rules don't apply and anything can happen. For 'The Word for World is Forest' – the title borrowed from Ursula Le Guin's novel set in an Edenic forest, Berlin-based artist Philip evokes ambivalent feelings: the drabness of domestic appliances intertwined with the sensations of wading through grass and marvelling at the looming nature above.

The four sculptures are hung above human height, across both floors of the gallery. Intrigued by the habits of worshippers, Philip's research leads him to cathedrals, tombs and shrines which so often ask observers to crane their necks. Philip strives to instil his art with a similar transcendence. 'What,' he asks, 'are the mechanisms that let us experience the sublime?' His laborious process combines antiquated woodworking techniques with surfaces, materials and methods of industrial fabrication. Despite not replicating radiators – their form and placement more reminiscent of air-conditioning units – all four are titled 'Radiator' followed by a word often sparked by an anecdote or the location of a first idea: 'Moyland' is inspired, he says 'by an actual radiator I admired asserting itself amidst the Beuys drawing collection at the Schloss Moyland in Bedburg-Hau, and 'Mai' refers to Robert Schumann's love song 'Im wunderschönen Monat Mai'.'

However homespun or ambiguous their origin, Philip aims for an equation of contradictions – merging traditional craft techniques with contemporary sleights of hand. He contemplates variations in the process – often acquiring a found object before manipulating its intention. In 'Radiator (Morgen)', for instance, he recasts a wax relief, a transfer of Albrecht Dürer's drawing 'Head of an old man', before cropping and carving it to leave it in a state of ambiguity. Each sculpture is a facade of the mundane receptacle it first appears to be, individually manipulated to confuse and deny expectation.

The gallery becomes a medium for him to manoeuvre, too – Philip paving the gallery in a forest-floor of carpet tiles from a previous corporate office. The effect is unnerving: he succeeds in usurping the space's normal role as an environment for contemplation; the antithesis of calming nature itself. Meanwhile, the eight drawings in the window, all depicting faint murmurs of form from his forest wanderings, are displayed on the kind of anonymous cable displays used in estate agents' windows. Again, he defies easy viewing: whether it's a sculpture or a drawing, Philip presents his art imperviously, making us long to get closer, but struggling to. Like worshippers, or walkers, always looking up.

Written by Ted Targett

