



Reto Boller
"Straight Story"
Nov. 5–Dec. 24, 2022

Laurens, Iowa, 1994. Alvin Straight, a retired farmer, wants to visit his infirm brother, although he has neither a car nor a driver's license. So Alvin takes an old riding mower on a strange odyssey across the American Midwest. The trip from Iowa to Wisconsin leads through expansive landscapes and endless roads, resulting in unexpected encounters. David Lynch, the director of this film, which is based on a true story, rightly called the film an anomaly in his work: *The Straight Story* (1999) is a virtually unadorned story without any dark undercurrent. Without the lawn mower, but with a similar directness, Reto Boller also invites us to undertake a joint journey: at Galerie Mark Müller we encounter five new work complexes by the Swiss artist that release the ambiguity of traces and situations with a penetrating urgency and recognizable intent.

Reto Boller creates supposedly familiar stories of everyday life, embracing their coincidental character, beauty, and precariousness. The exhibition thus combines various moments and materials, taking advantage of their unruly potential on a formal and thematic layer. The middle of the gallery space is equipped with a strange stage. The rug placed upon it is a *locus delicti* in a dual sense: if the blood leads us to suspect a crime, upon closer inspection we realize that what we had assumed to be a trace left by the perpetrator is actually roughly applied paint. The paint of the artistic "deed" changes the structure of the rug into a moving surface that is more like a red desert landscape, without veiling the actual makeup of the paint and the rug. As an everyday object, exceptional situation, and pictorial support, *Roter Teppich* (Red Carpet, 2022) attests to Boller's interest in exploring the concrete material and referential qualities of paints, objects, and work titles, thus creating oscillating dimensions of meaning.

A look to the left reveals an additional textile element. In contrast to the rug, the violet parachute is placed directly on the floor and curves up in several places as if the remaining air from its descent could not escape. Four concrete blocks weigh down the material, preventing the air sport device from fulfilling its intended function. *fixiert* (fixed, 2022) is surrounded by a revealing ambiguity: an irreversible landing of the parachute, whose colorful suspension lines and folds seem almost ornamental or like a drawing. The bright orange warning sign (Hand, 2022) on the front wall of the room also contains these opposites. The pictogram modified by the artist might refer to an immanent situation of danger, but standing directly in front of the print, the captivatingly saturated coat of paint applied over three-by-three meters virtually absorbs us physically.

As puzzling and ambiguous as the narratives here might be, they always encounter material immediacy. The five standard steel angles that serve as supports for various pieces of clothing are beguilingly direct. Pants, shoes, belt, T-shirt, and sweaters hang from the wall at a height of one-and-a-half meters, thus lending the impression of an architectural element that lines the wall and the exit to the gallery's courtyard. They illustrate physical absence, but also fulfill the function that the title suggests: *Kleiderhaken* (Clothes Hooks, 2022). Following the architectural train of thought, the hanging clothing can even be interpreted as abstract caryatids, five supporting wall figures from Greek antiquity. The hoodie thronging on stilt-like aluminum profiles (*A-22.1* (Artist), 2022) would thus be an atlas leaning against the wall that seems to support not the ceiling, but the floor with his long silver arms.

The exhibition "Straight Story" takes up different moments of a more or less continuous history or search for evidence that never excludes the possibility of an individual direction of reading. Boller explores various non-linear narratives that constantly turn back, branch out, condense, and proliferate. For this very reason, it is impossible to definitively determine the start or end of his works. The works are constantly rotating chains of association that line up in an entirely invented story, but with a decisive difference: in Reto Boller, they are always based on true facts.

Marlene Bürgi