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STEVE BISHOP

by Estelle Marois

If, as the mathematician Henri Poincaré wrote, 'The sensations of others will be for us a world eternally closed,' how can we share an emotional experience? And since the question of transmissibility raises that of preservation, can we preserve an emotion—or the conditions under which it arises—intact, as one might keep a slice of cake in the freezer?

Steve Bishop proposes—perhaps—to answer these questions through the notion of the 'standard'.



photographed by Will Sheridan Jr.



Installation view, *On the Street Where You Live*, Kunsthalle Osnabrück, Osnabrück, Germany, 2024

His practice consists, in part, in using standardised objects and foregrounding their generic nature. *Start Over Every Morning* (Kunstverein Braunschweig, 2019) featured an extremely long worktop composed of twenty-four pairs of kitchen fronts, among the most basic ones might find in ordinary furniture chains. The four melamine panels of *Embraceable You* (2020), adopting the language of minimalism, say nothing more than: 'We form a bedside table'. Bishop strips objects of their incidental details to identify their common denominators and recover their archetypal form. This selective approach recalls the 'truth-to-nature' regime, characterised by the aggressive reduction of reality to an ideal form, as seen in eighteenth-century scientific atlases, which offered readers essentialised images meant to represent all the variations of a species without embodying any one of them.

The entire space of his installations is itself distilled: the selection of objects is minimal, and the gaps are just as significant. In a paradoxical move, it is through extreme abstraction that Steve Bishop's interventions generate entire environments. Thus, *On the Street Where You Live* (Kunsthalle Osnabrück, 2024) conjures, from a few selected elements—a car in front of a garage, inside which a freezer contains a tub of ice cream—an extremely familiar setting, drawn from Western everyday life yet laden with visual references: a housing estate in the Loiret, the suburbs of Bristol, a residential neighbourhood in Illinois; we find ourselves at an aunt's house or in front of a TV series. Something of the middle class, in the broadest sense. Similarly, in *Security* (The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, 2020), the space separating the resin dog sculpture from the soft toy becomes a waiting zone. We immediately project onto the animal, based on experience, the idea that it is waiting for us to play with it. But this is also a waiting space in another sense: the installation itself awaits our projections. It prepares the ground for them, inviting them to inhabit the interval created by its arrangement. And, even more so in *On the Street Where You Live*, an entire environment fills in the gaps of a suburban landscape sketched out by just a few elements: set against the Gothic architecture of the church housing the Kunsthalle Osnabrück—a religious, ascensional, and the-

refore timeless setting—the defining features of standardised domestic life are inscribed. Capitalism leaning against the eternal.

And this is not merely a figure of speech. Through the question of standardisation, in particular, Steve Bishop attends to forms of permanence that, as we often lament, the contemporary world seems to deprive us of. Our grandparents owned heavy wardrobes whose durability spanned several human lifetimes, whereas we live in an age of disposability and plastic. Why, then, do we photograph ourselves in front of the same castle, the same rock, or the same dinosaur—perfectly synthetic—in amusement parks or by the roadside? For *On the Street Where You Live* as well as for *All Ages* (Carlos/Ishikawa, London, 2022), Steve Bishop has assembled series of images showing anonymous people, over several decades, posing in front of the same artefact. The sense of permanence does not stem from the fact that the castle, the rock, or the dinosaur dates from the period it replicates; indeed, no one pretends to believe so. (As if by a kind of feedback loop, the brontosaurus at Cabazon Dinosaur in California was converted in 2005 into a creationist museum, whose owner subscribes to the theory that the Earth was created less than 10,000 years ago with an 'appearance of age'.) It is therefore not a matter of historical authenticity, but rather of an authenticity of affection—the kind that is expressed and shared in these familial or social scenes. And yet a form of historicity emerges, not in the subject but in the medium and its use: the widespread practice of analogue holiday photography, which ended in the late 2000s and marks a closed period.



Installation view, *Start Over Every Morning*, Kunstverein Braunschweig, Braunschweig, Germany, 2019