

DANIEL TURNER

Three Sites

15.9.2022–8.1.2023

Kunsthalle Basel

Combustion. Incineration. Dissolution. Liquification. Dispersion. Daniel Turner's art lies as much in what we commonly think of as the creative act as it does in well-calibrated destruction. His first such undoing occurred about fifteen years ago, when he set ablaze the entirety of his artistic output: a series of large-scale paintings made between 1999 and 2006. Wanting to move toward making sculpture, he felt the need to start over. This inferno generated a tabula rasa for what followed. But it also suggested a schema of the artist's subsequent work: he chooses sites from which to extract particular objects or architectural elements that he then transforms, almost alchemically. In the past, these have included door handles, chairs, steel bed frames, sinks, or cutting surfaces from such places as mental health facilities, cafeterias, professional kitchens, civic centers, or decommissioned cargo ships. He would melt and cast the objects, reduce them to particles, or otherwise transmute them into spare installations, minimalist sculptures, paintings, or even ephemeral stains on walls or floors. The results are at once austere and unassuming yet also inexplicably electric, disquieting even.

Since his very first bonfire, Turner has doggedly engaged in an inquiry into the lives of objects. He probes how things, in their very materiality, are infused with the contexts for which they were made and in which they existed,

which might also include the bodies they heated, the hands that touched them, the conversations that might have been held in their presence. The resultant artworks do not presume to tell us something about what once occurred around them; in fact, they don't demonstrate much of anything unequivocally. That is not their point. But the artist ventures that they might just emanate something stored within their very materiality: an unsettling transmission of affect that permeates his work, invisibly but evocatively.

For his first exhibition in Switzerland and his largest to date, Turner delves into the particular triangulation of psychiatry, the pharmaceutical industry, and chemical production in and around Basel. Having selected a former mental health facility, a former pharmaceutical research site, and a former chemical laboratory (all either on the brink of demolition or having gone through major renovations in their shifting of functions), he culled elements from them such as radiators, an oil tank, wall partitions, administrative documents, curtains, or other remnants. These now inhabit his show in sometimes altogether new forms.

ROOM 1

Three solid metal bars mark the start of the exhibition. Stark, solemn, and made from more than a half-ton of radiators from each of the artist's three designated sites. These conduits of energy, purveyors of heat, and providers of essential sustenance—veritable bloodlines of their respective buildings—were melted down and cast into minimalist form. Each dons a title, such as *(Novartis WKL 135) Radiator Bar*, and with it, a mention of the provenance of its materials, for example: Ciba-Geigy, Novartis, Rhystadt. More than indicating a singular point of origin, however, the chronological listing hints at the changes of ownership and histories of the sites from which the piece is born. On the surface, these, like so much of Turner's work, recall the minimalism initially forged in the 1960s and '70s, with its allegiance to clean lines, industrial fabrication, and platonic geometries. But the artist deploys this aesthetic to quite opposite effect. Focusing on the emotional, psychological, and historical entanglements of objects, Turner asks: Can an object bear witness? Does it have a memory? Does whatever was said, done, thought, or made in its presence somehow linger and leave traces?

ROOM 2

Vitrines in the room contain found material from a building that was previously owned by the German chemical giant BASF and, before

EN

ROOM 4

10
NOUN 30:30, 2022
 Mixed media
 (Provenance:
 Ciba-Geigy, Novartis,
 Rhystadt)
 Dimensions variable

ROOM 5

11
(Holdenweid) Burnish 2, 2022
 12
(Holdenweid) Burnish 3, 2022
 13
(Holdenweid) Burnish 1, 2022
 14
(Holdenweid) Burnish 4, 2022

Gesso, canvas, steel burnish
 (Provenance: Kantonale
 Heil- und Pflegeanstalt
 Friedmatt, Psychiatrische
 Altersstation Holdenweid;
 Impulszentrum Holdenweid)
 Each 274.32 × 365.76 × 3.5 cm

ROOM 3

9
*BASF / Novartis /
 Holdenweid*, 2022
 HD video, b/w, sound
 12 min. 13 sec., loop

ROOM 2

4
(BASF) Leitungen, 2022
 Brass, steel
 (Provenance:
 Ciba-Geigy, BASF,
 Swiss Life)
 Dimensions variable

5
*(Ciba-Geigy)
 Kältetechnik*, 2022
 Archival documents
 (Provenance:
 Ciba-Geigy, BASF,
 Swiss Life)
 Dimensions variable

6
*(Ciba-Geigy, BASF)
 Hauptverteiler-Strips*, 2022
 Mixed media
 (Provenance:
 Ciba-Geigy, BASF,
 Swiss Life)
 Dimensions variable

7
(BASF) Block, 2022
 Wood, oil
 (Provenance:
 Ciba-Geigy, BASF,
 Swiss Life)
 Ca. 3 × 40 × 130 cm

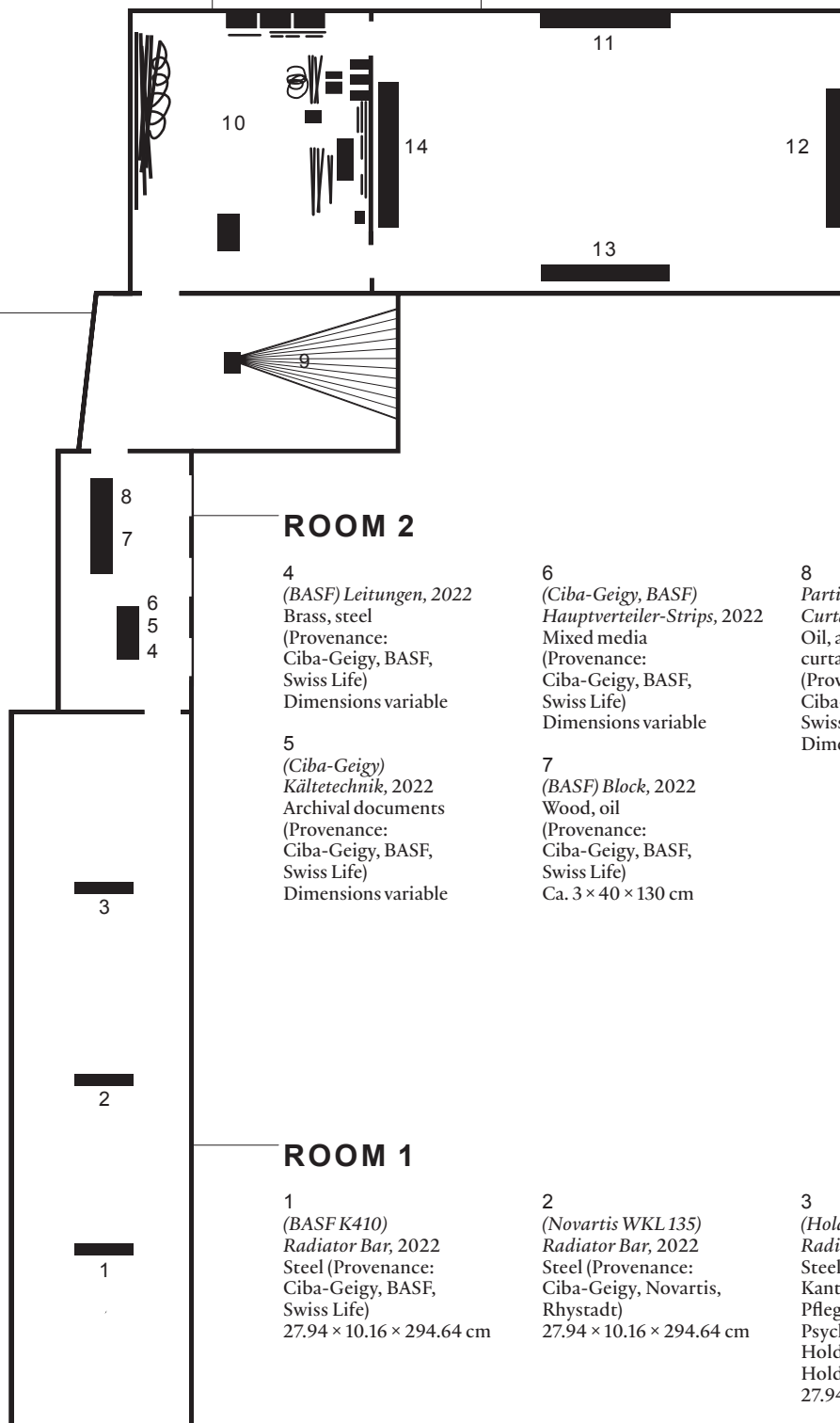
8
*Particle Processed
 Curtains*, 2022
 Oil, acid,
 curtains, vessel
 (Provenance:
 Ciba-Geigy, BASF,
 Swiss Life)
 Dimensions variable

ROOM 1

1
*(BASF K410)
 Radiator Bar*, 2022
 Steel (Provenance:
 Ciba-Geigy, BASF,
 Swiss Life)
 27.94 × 10.16 × 294.64 cm

2
*(Novartis WKL 135)
 Radiator Bar*, 2022
 Steel (Provenance:
 Ciba-Geigy, Novartis,
 Rhystadt)
 27.94 × 10.16 × 294.64 cm

3
*(Holdenweid)
 Radiator Bar*, 2022
 Steel (Provenance:
 Kantonale Heil- und
 Pflegeanstalt Friedmatt,
 Psychiatrische Altersstation
 Holdenweid; Impulszentrum
 Holdenweid)
 27.94 × 10.16 × 294.64 cm



that, the property of Ciba-Geigy, a now-defunct Swiss manufacturer of textile dyes, pharmaceuticals, and agrochemicals. Every one of Turner's chosen sites, as becomes clear, is a palimpsest of ownership transfers that reflect Basel's urban and industrial developments. Turner devotes one of the vitrines to documents, like maintenance reports on Ciba-Geigy letterhead from technical inspections of the building's climatization systems, or cards used by the telephone switchboard, noting on which in-house telephone line someone could be reached. Relics of a bygone era, marked by age and obsolescence, this corporate detritus points to the complex infrastructures that connect air, heat, steam, or communication lines that once flowed through the company. In another vitrine, we find other sundry found objects, including oil-tinged planks and a bowl filled with a darkened emulsion, the latter the outcome of the artist dissolving a set of the building's curtains in a chemical solution. The original curtains had caught the artist's eye because, against the clinical coldness of the site, the soft, undulating textile felt inexplicably auratic and mysterious, like it was already sharing the emotions and memories with which it was imbued. His treatment of the curtains with acid thus performs a molecular transformation of the fabric (but also its emotional charge) into a new liquid form.

ROOM 3

A black-and-white video documents in successive still images the states in which the artist encountered the different sites from which he wrested the elements that make up the show. Without voiceover or any other commentary, we hear only the droning tick, tick, tick of a still-operational clock at one of the sites. As metronomic as a heartbeat, it is strangely oppressive, too. In such places, whether a chemical lab or a psychiatric clinic, the regulation of time (itself a product of the industrial revolution) is a tool of discipline and scientific measurement. As a soundtrack to his film, it adds an eerie percussiveness to the documentation of the three forlorn and almost post-apocalyptic-looking locales.

ROOM 4

Material culled from testing rooms of the former Novartis (former Ciba-Geigy) building lines the room. It includes dozens of stacked and leaning partitions once used to create spaces of confinement—green and brown panels that bear traces of oxides and corrosive elements. Hoses and electric wires are coiled on the floor. Additionally, grey plastic work tables,

positioned much as the artist found them in their original location, give the impression that something has just occurred, although it is entirely unclear what that is. Revising the relationship art history has long had with the tradition of Marcel Duchamp's readymade—where, say, a store-bought bottle rack or urinal becomes sculpture through repositioning and renaming—Turner sees these materials as art not just for what they are or were, but specifically for what he calls “their stored energies, be they light or dark.”

ROOM 5

The exhibition's final room is dedicated to the site of a former psychiatric ward in Holdenweid, just outside Basel. The artist took parts of the ward's oil tank for heating and machined them into filigree-like shavings, bound together to form a kind of steel wool. He then prepared the surfaces of large canvases with multiple layers of specialized primers and burnished them over many months of methodical rubbing by hand with this fabricated steel wool—such that this material (a transmutation of the oil tank, one cannot forget) mars and literally lingers on the surface. To look for long at the results is actually difficult, and to capture their effect in a photograph even more so: the human and camera eye struggle to find focus in their peculiar, blurry presence. They are at once materially saturated and evanescently ghostly, indexical imprints and figurative abstractions. However, to call these “paintings” seems wholly inadequate, emphasizing the difficulty of thinking of the works as following the conventions of pictorialism in two dimensions and not instead as radically flattened sculptures.

Whatever their medium, Turner's artworks have a strange tremor to them. While the artist is conscious that there will be wildly varied associations attached to any of the sites he has mined—whether of psychological angst, institutional care, scientific innovation, corporate greed, or questionable laboratory testing practices—he himself is uninterested in advancing either a critical investigation or blanket condemnation. His is an archeology of sorts, the output of which remains decidedly discreet and ultimately Sphinx-like. In transmuting materials, Turner wagers that they take something of their previous lives with them; he sees his role as distilling these into something like a haunting.

Daniel Turner was born in 1983 in Portsmouth, Virginia, US; he lives and works in New York, US.

The exhibition is made possible through the generous support of Peter Handschin and the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, with additional support from The Maria Leuff Foundation and the Nadia Toscano Memorial Foundation, as well as in-kind contributions from Impulszentrum Holdenweid and KLYBEQ – an urban development project by Swiss Life and Rhystadt.



The mediation projects are realized through the support of the Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne, the Beisheim Stiftung, and the Canton of Basel-Stadt.

Thanks to

Rita Ackermann, Joseph Allen, Thomas Hasse Biniasch, Caroline Black, Dominik Buechel, Concetta Diebold, Glynnis Dolbee, Philippe Druel, Miriam Flury, Philipp Fürstenberger, Thomas Gläss, Yolanda Grolimund, Peter Handschin, Cornelia Huber, Ross Iannatti, Adrian Kohler, Marco Kränzlin, Simone Meyer, Gabriel Mörsch, Christian Mutschler, Jacek Rokicki, Chun-Oh Ryser, Michael Schnyder, Martin Stoecklin, Roberto Toscano, and Melina Wilson

Kunsthalle Basel / Basler Kunstverein is generously supported by the Canton of Basel-Stadt.



Kanton Basel-Stadt

Kultur

Support for Kunsthalle Basel's yearly program is provided by Saint Laurent.

SAINT LAURENT

GUIDED TOURS THROUGH THE EXHIBITION

Every Sunday at 3 pm guided tour, in German (Except on Sundays when the tour is in English)

Curator's tour by Elena Filipovic, in English
18.9.2022, Sunday, 3 pm

Tandem guided tour, in German
23.10.2022, Sunday, 3 pm

Kunsthalle Basel and SAM Swiss Architecture Museum offer a joint tour of their current exhibitions, highlighting the intersections between architecture and art.

MEDIATION AND PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Mal•Mal – draw from a live model in the current exhibitions, in English and German

28.9.2022, Wednesday, 6–8 pm

19.10.2022, Wednesday, 6–8 pm

16.11.2022, Wednesday, 6–8 pm

Materials will be provided.

Workshop, in German

4.10.2022, Tuesday, 9 am–5 pm

In cooperation with Theater Basel, a performative workshop will take place in the exhibition.

mittwoch-matinée, in German

28.12.2022, Wednesday, 10 am–noon

As part of the museums basel event series, the current exhibitions will be explored and discussed together.

For all tours and events, registration is kindly requested at kunstvermittlung@kunsthallebasel.ch, where you can also get more information.

In the Kunsthalle Basel library, you will find a selection of publications related to Daniel Turner.

Follow us on Instagram and share your photos and impressions with [#kunsthallebasel](https://www.instagram.com/kunsthallebasel).

More information at kunsthallebasel.ch