

HOŠEK CONTEMPORARY

— EST. 2016 —

GIL RUSS - BATTERY OF THE UNIVERSE

Opening reception: 12th July 2019, 6 - 10 pm

Exhibition period: 13th - 20th July 2019

Curated by Malina Lauterbach

In the 1950s, the US telephone company AT&T presented a groundbreaking new development. At the beginning of the ten-minute commercial for the Bell Laboratories' research department, a small transparent device appears, demonstrating a revolutionary power throughout the video. Dramatic music sounds and with a promising tone in his voice, the speaker announces:

'An old philosopher once said, it is stern work, to thrust your hand in the sun, and pull out a spark of immortal flame to warm the hearts of men. Yet in this modern age, men have at last harnessed the sun - with the Bell Solar Battery.'

The world's first practical silicon solar cell had been invented. A device that would allow sunlight to be converted directly into electricity. More than half a century later, the poignant words sound almost strange in comparison to the current debates about the ecological crisis of our planet. Producing solar power has been a common practice since a while. Constantly declining production costs have made it possible to promote the commercialisation and widespread use of solar technology. As an alternative to fossil fuels, it has become the central subject of controversy over renewable energy since the 1980s. What was initially considered as being a miraculous technology, is now overshadowed by economic and political conflicts of interest. In the work Battery of the Universe by Gil Russ, these ambivalences become apparent.

Gil Russ - Battery of the Universe (2019)

Six sculptures are facing each other. Scaffolds of steel carry large and heavy solar panels, which are either singly attached or combined to a cube. The construction is visible and nothing is concealed, so that the individual components are unveiled. Together they form reduced, geometric figures - a network of struts, screws and plates. They attract attention, they want to be circled and further explored, exposing their substance, their gaps and internal spaces, fronts and backs. The visible becomes an indication for the investigative gaze of the viewer. Structures turn into patterns, colours and shapes correspond to each other, surfaces reflect the environment. And yet, the objects refuse any representation, confronting us instead with our own attention. That very search for the aesthetics of the present underlies the artistic practice of Gil Russ. Moreover, his work as an architect constitutes a driving force, as he is constantly renegotiating the principles of function, construction and form.

In preparation for the technical examination of the material, the artist delves into an intensive research process. For *Battery of the Universe*, Russ examined the history and technology of solar panels, and studied their value chain. The results are collected on Tumblr: <https://batteryoftheuniverse.tumblr.com>. In his sculptures, these visible and invisible points of reference ultimately come together - shifted, manipulated. Within that process, values are being transformed and the usable is being deconstructed. It creates a conceptual space that allows us to associate the supposedly profane with new (old) stories. In that particular state of mind, the alchemical showcasing of Bell's solar cell doesn't seem so far off anymore.

About the artist

Gil Russ was born in 1982 in Frankfurt am Main. After studying architecture at the Technical University of Darmstadt, he worked for various studios, including Max Dudler Architekten and Robertneun. He has also collaborated with the famous Danish visual artist Kirstine Roepstorff. In 2015, he founded *Studio Gil Russ*. Since then he has realised numerous projects at the intersection of art and architecture. Russ held his first solo exhibition at Hošek Contemporary during Gallery Weekend Berlin in 2017. He is currently living in Berlin.

About Hošek Contemporary

Established in 2016 by Petr Hošek, Hošek Contemporary is a gallery and art residency located on a historical cargo ship next to Fischerinsel in Mitte, Berlin. The gallery focuses primarily on site-specific pieces, performing arts and experimental sound works. During the spring and summer months, the gallery is hosting weekly improvised and experimental music installations, with local and international artists.

About MS Heimatland

Built in 1910 in Fürstenberg an der Oder, MS Heimatland was initially operating under the name *Ida* and used for transporting coal to Charlottenburg. After the Second World War, the 58-meter long cargo ship was renamed *Heimatland*, meaning 'homeland'. Until the 90s, the ship was sailing on Elbe and Havel, moving sand and chippings. It served for artistic and cultural purposes for the first time in 2002, when German sculptor Christiane Möbus chose it for her *Nackte Tatsache Tatsache* project. Finally in March 2018, *Heimatland* became the main exhibition space and artist residency of Hošek Contemporary. The boat is permanently anchored in the historic port of Berlin.

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