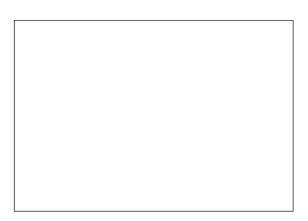
Kept Inside Manuel Burgener Galerie Maria Bernheim, Zurich

Descriptions of works of art go astray. Words and numbers are as fugitive as infinity. Actually, I would prefer to tell you less and less about the art in front of you. Perhaps an uninterrupted hum would be the best description of the art you see. I will now sing a hum of my own composition:

Robert Smithson may not have been entirely wrong when he claimed descriptions of artworks are often misleading, and that's why we should please just omit them entirely. What is the point of description, when we have a human system of sensory reception directly to hand? This is how a text might begin which means to report on something that would like to create a kind of metaphysical emptiness, or make a vacuum visible—a physical fact proved by the absence of material in the space, although in physics the question of absolutely empty space remains unsolved. But it is actually not about emptiness per se, rather about what surrounds it or is contained within it: To start with, then, there isn't very much: nothingness, the impalpable, the virtually immaterial; extension, the external, what is external to us, what we move about in the midst of, our ambient milieu, the space around us, writes Georges Perec. In doing so, he makes reference to an illustration of a sea chart in Lewis Carroll's The Hunting of the Snark, which contains nothing but empty space, like the iconometer of a camera pointed into sheer nothingness.



Manuel Burgener's intervention is an arrangement in this space, one with several variables. An equation in which the unknown variables of total catastrophe—something that can in no way be entirely ruled out—are incalculable, except by pulling the plug. But maybe these unknowns can also be the trigger that sets off an open duel with art practice and the contexts inscribed within it, a sober-ironic commentary on their conditions and claims. A hum of his own composition, or perhaps rather the buzzing of a vacuum-pump: it will literally just remove the air.

Nick Oberthaler, Vienna 2017

¹ Robert Smithson, *The Hum* (c. 1965), in *Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: Univ. California Press, 1996), 328

² Georges Perec, "Species of Spaces / Espèces d'espaces" (1974), in *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* (London: Penguin, 2008), 6.