

October 22, 2025

Dear Reinhard,

I hope this letter finds you well. I'm writing from Washington, D.C., where the leaves have just begun to turn and the air is crisp in the mornings. I've long been intrigued by your work and have found myself increasingly moved by its enduring and deepening relevance in a time marked by upheaval, reevaluation, and an urgent need to reckon with our histories. At the risk of centering myself and my country, I can't escape the connection between your work and this city and the halls of power that govern the United States just a few miles away. Aesthetically and conceptually, I can't help but think about your work in the display cases that line the walls of museums along Constitution Avenue, the mahogany desks that fill the floor of the Senate Chamber, and the velvet ropes and chrome stanchions directing the public where they can and can't go on their tour of the U.S. Capitol building. Your work has haunted and inspired me for years, but only in the invitation to write for your exhibition in New York have I come to reflect on it in the context of living in a city like this one--so steeped in its own monumental narratives--and through that I've come to a new understanding of a particular force in your work.

You point to the aesthetics of power and bureaucracy in your felt-lined vitrines, stacked chairs, and dark wood finishes. We are so eager to try to fix history in place with authority and finality, and yet your work is a reminder of the fragility inherent in these systems. A strange theater of documentation undergirds our attempt at understanding the past and the ways we enshrine memory. In a city like D.C., where the aesthetics of power and transparency are largely performative, your work is an important lens through which to consider the artifact as much as the system of display itself, and the potency of intentional framing. Your use of materials like glass, steel, wood, and industrial fixtures resist offering clear narratives, opting instead to expose the frameworks--physical and ideological--that shape how meaning and, for better or worse, history are constructed. Your precise craftsmanship and restrained aesthetics create a sense of quiet intensity and for some, an unsettling ambiguity. Your work seems to impart an ominous tone, a low reverberation that hangs in the air. I feel this same reverberation when I'm in a government building downtown or walking among the monuments at night. Beneath your industrial materials and formal rigor I've always felt a current of mourning--of things lost, broken, or never fully possessed at all. At the same time, an everyday humor, absurdity, and playfulness serve as important counterbalances.

And in how you title your work, a Kafkaesque archival impulse that reads as an act of subversion. Artworks, historically, are dated and sealed. Finished and complete. Your work is open to being reconstituted, recontextualized, and restructured--and are timestamped as such in their titles. A sculpture about the past incorporating its own past into its own title. It seems to me like an attempt to try to grab time, freeze it, and annotate it. Is there a thing more slippery than time? I'm sure you feel this not only in your life in Düsseldorf and in your studio (and of course in being a father; I have two young boys myself), but in your returns to New York over the years. I read you first visited in 1977, with your first exhibition at the Prince Street location of Luhring Augustine in 1993. A number of works shown in 1993 in that SoHo gallery are on view again in this exhibition in Chelsea, over 30 years later. I can only imagine what these works have seen between now and then. Who have they seen and who has seen themselves in the distorted reflections of your glass panes? And the found objects incorporated, what lives did they lead before being brought into your orbit?

I've always thought of your objects as records of time in and of themselves. Your material palette is distinctly of a time before now. A time of solid wood doors, lacquer, lead paint, and fluorescent tube lights. I sense a preoccupation in your work with the things and systems we inherit: railways, bureaucracies, museum display cases, industrial production lines. You seem to suggest that modernity isn't something we can escape or transcend—it is the very architecture in which we live and through which we remember. And yet, you transform that architecture—not by rejecting it, but by exposing it. And in this modernity, we grapple with capitalism, war, joy, innovation, regression, and one another. We grapple with the uneasy realization that the very structures built to organize and contain our lives—our histories, our labor, our sense of order—also confine us. What you reveal is not a nostalgia for a lost authenticity, but a deep awareness that memory itself has become infrastructural: archived in vitrines, routed through railways, filed in drawers. The human and the mechanical, the personal and the institutional, the past and the present—they collapse into one another and often contradict each other.

As I write this, the U.S. federal government is shut down. The corridors of government buildings are largely vacant, galleries of the National Gallery of Art quiet and empty, with pundits on television only beginning to guess as to when federal employees will return to work. Nearly 1 million government employees are working without pay or furloughed entirely. Meanwhile, construction teams have begun demolition of the East Wing of the White House at the direction of Donald Trump. The East Wing, whose primary function is to house the offices of the First Lady, will be replaced by a gilded 999-person capacity ballroom. Those offices, the East Colonnade, and the Jacqueline Kennedy Garden will be replaced with a ballroom that, according to the National Trust of Historic Preservation, will “overwhelm” the White House at nearly double its size. There's a potent metaphor here—between the paralysis of the federal government and the timing of the construction of the \$300-million-dollar Trump ballroom. A public admission of the fragility of institutional frameworks, while the symbolic architecture that houses the framework is being physically dismantled. Function gives way to façade. History deconstructed, and the spectacle of luxury and performance takes center stage. Your work, for me, is a recounting of the fallout of this kind of aestheticization of politics. We see not the triumph of political spectacle, but its decay into administrative form—the quiet, melancholic continuation of an aestheticized politics to serve the self-interest of those in positions of power. A low, ominous tone hangs in the air.

This is all to say how much I appreciate your work and no matter how far one might be from West Germany, you've produced a body of work that transcends the specifics of your context. While I'm tempted to say this is an ideal moment to consider your work from a U.S. perspective, the truth is that any time in the past 40 years would have been a relevant and productive time for Americans to think about their own country through the lens of your work. We got to where we are because of a refusal to honestly reckon with our past. Thank you for reminding us of the incredible capacity that art has in pursuing this kind of self-reflection and criticality.

With all my best, from the Nation's capital,
Yuri

Yuri Stone is a curator based in Washington, DC

LUHRING AUGUSTINE