



Silhouetten (für Ernst Mach), 1992,
cast iron, 11 x 8 x 7 1/2"; mirror 12 1/2".



Leopold Kessler, Cart/Viennabike—Combination, 2003, supermarket cart and
bike, 59 x 47 1/4 x 39 3/4".

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the wall. *Silhouetten (für Ernst Mach)* (Silhouettes [for Ernst Mach]), 1992, a cast-iron bust turned on its head, also appears in a mirror, not only the wrong way around but right-side up. Raetz builds two profiles, hardly noticeable at first, into one bust so that they appear in their reflection.

In the face of the flood of images surrounding us, Raetz seems to be a Minimalist. His formal language generally boils down to outlines of generic landscapes and figures. This painstaking constructor is less interested in which landscape images meet our retina than in how they do it—so he usually delivers them sideways. The classic, in this respect, is *Zeemansblik*, 1987, whose Dutch title means "The Sailor's Gaze," though "*blik*" can also mean "tin." From a sheet of polished zinc, Raetz formed two joined circular forms to suggest a view through binoculars. Through a fold, a kind of horizon appears in the middle, which, thanks to the refraction of light, causes an ocean landscape to appear when we walk in front of the object. In Raetz's universe, a bent piece of metal becomes a view of the open sea.

Following Magritte, Raetz always looks for the backdoor into the image. He is no Surrealist, though, for he seeks neither the absurd nor the uncanny, instead tinkering with the transition between seeing and symbol making. Mostly, everything needed is already available to us—to grasp it just requires seeing it from a different perspective. For this, one would need years of experience and a gifted vision. Raetz has both.

—Stefan Zucker

Translated from German by Sara Ogger.

VIENNA

LEOPOLD KESSLER GALERIE KUNSTBUERO

Austrian artist Leopold Kessler, born in Munich in 1976, understands art as a kind of social service, a public act accessible to all, even though the public probably won't even notice his scarcely perceptible interventions. The results are often unpredictable happenings in the contested territory where the real world and the artistic realm meet. Disguised as a manual laborer in a blue coat and an orange vest, Kessler goes stalking through the urban streetscape, installing speakers and microphones or rolling some three-quarters of a mile of electrical cable through the streets of the city, as he did not so long ago for *Akademiekabel* (Academy Cable), 2004, his thesis project at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste, Vienna. The effects of these actions can be fantastic: The cable connected the academy with the artist's own apartment—and supplied electricity, gratis; in other works, streetlights could be randomly turned on and off by remote control (*Privatisiert* [Privatized], 2003) and surprise announcements stopped commuters in their tracks (*Freisprechanlage* [Intercom], 2004).

Placing greater value on investigating knowledge and social relations than on aesthetics, Kessler playfully pries out the system's secrets, studying the limits of what is technically legal yet still subversive. "I am concerned with the relationship between the individual and society," he says, "with how the gap between personal development and the strictures of living in a community is overcome, or not. I position my interventions in the public

between generally useful services and vigilantism. They take existing functions and uses and alter, repair, or sometimes just expand on them." Every now and then, though, Kessler's praxis veers into traditional artistic territory. In this case, he exhibited an example of what counts for him as sculpture: a hybrid of Vienna's newly introduced coin-operated rental bikes and the classic shopping cart; he'd withdrawn both objects from their intended public use by inserting the key of the cart into the lock of the bike, disabling both. Similarly, his photographs of a London telephone booth (*Sicherung/London* [Security/London], 2005) play on the theme of public versus private, as Kessler equipped that booth and six others with an internal deadbolt for extra privacy while making calls.

The video *Depot* (Safe Deposit Box), 2005, documents Kessler's latest process piece, which is ultimately a kind of social analysis: He'd noticed that the word "*Polizei*" in the light box over the entrance to the local police station was missing its "o." He replaced it with a removable letter, which allowed him to use the light box as a sort of piggy bank. For five weeks Kessler showed up each day with a ladder and stashed money in the light box or, alternately, took it back out, all without being noticed; although the police symbolize the idea of public protection, they could not even police their own symbol. In a society where personal freedoms are becoming ever more restricted, as rules and regulations hem us in, Kessler finds disobedience seductive, transgression sexy. So it's not surprising when (in *Blinking Jesus*, 2005) he hijacks the lighting system for the statue of Jesus in the Basque city of San Sebastian to send out a message in Morse code: "Be not afraid."

—Brigitte Huck

Translated from German by Sara Ogger.

KARLSRUHE

"MAKING THINGS PUBLIC"

ZENTRUM FÜR KUNST UND
MEDIEN TECHNOLOGIE

The night before my visit to "Making Things Public," I had a bizarre dream: After a modification in the electoral process, and because the major political parties were not able to come up with a fully legal candidate, the State Assembly, urgently convened, had appointed Bruno Latour, the philosopher and sociologist of science, President of the French Republic!