

TimeOut New York

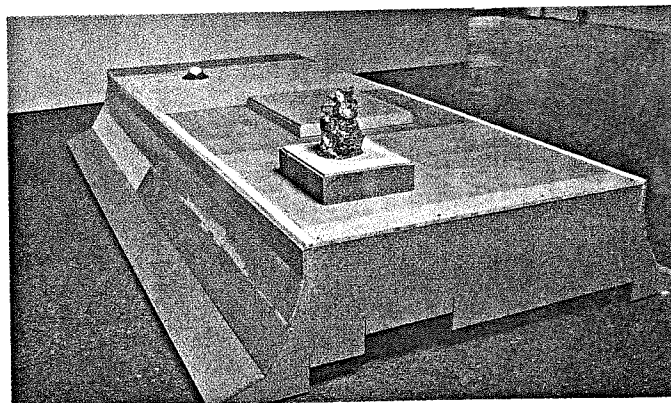
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Manfred Pernice, "Commerzbank" Anton Kern, through Mar 20 (see Chelsea).

Kurt Schwitters was famously hated by many of his fellow German Dadaists. George Grosz reputedly slammed a door in his face on their first meeting, and Richard Huelsenbeck refused Schwitters membership in Club Dada, despising his "bourgeois face." Undeterred, Schwitters founded his own branch of Dada, Merz, from the German word *Commerzbank*, and collected urban detritus for use in his abstract collages. Not content with producing mere objects, Schwitters overhauled his apartment—dubbed the *Merzbau*—building nooks, cabinets and columns that extended through floors and out windows. He used these as reliquaries for the treasures he amassed from the street and solicited from friends.

It seems a fitting retribution that an artist spurned by his peers should now find an interlocutor in another German artist—Manfred Pernice. In "Com-

merzbank," Pernice assembles various benches, playing on the German homonym *bank* and its alternate meaning, "bench." Some are haphazardly pieced together from plywood; another is made of cast concrete with shoddily inlaid tiles. One particleboard form features a hatch, which, if opened, might disclose a precious—or preposterous—object. Atop this bench sits a hideous glazed ceramic figurine (its construction is depicted on a nearby monitor), casually placed near strewn buckets of concrete and tin cans. Another arrangement of wood benches, with cubbyholes underneath, affects a domestic appearance; a dorm-style lamp anchors an arrangement of photos and an ash-tray laid out as if on coffee tables. Like Schwitters's *Merzbau*, Pernice's benches become curious shelters for objects with deeply personal—and thus often inscrutable—associations. But while Schwitters's sculptural and architectural hybrid redefined the very notion of home, the site of Pernice's critique in "Commerzbank" remains an opaque allusion.—*Eva Diaz*



Manfred Pernice, *Plateau (Frau saft)*, 2004