



## Wagner & Friends

**Robert Steinberger**

*let me go... down*

**Thursday 6th April 2017, 8pm**

Performance

**Saturday 8th April, 8pm**

Performance followed by discussion between Robert Steinberger and Nathan Schocher, philosopher and gender theorist, Zurich

‘My Dear [...] I want to perform for you. I want to give you a show,’ writes Robert on the invitation to the performance *let me go... down*, continuing ‘I might fail, I might not be good enough, but I want to try.’ A perfectly staged show is closely related to embarrassing, even mortifying failure. Not only in love, sexuality and eroticism, but equally in the artistic format of performance itself.

Robert Steinberger investigates these ideas in *let me go... down*, and interweaves them into a work with text and sound with musician and drummer Guillaume Trionfo. The performance oscillates not only between show and failure, but also between two figures. While the artist Robert Steinberger moves confidently on stage and runs the gauntlet of the public gaze, Robert reveals insecurities and desires and exposes himself to the avaricious will of the viewers. Jointly, these two figures create layers of fiction and reality. One seems to expose his alleged innermost desires, the other is only a shimmering surface. And we are continually unsure if both are not duping us. This apparent vulnerability of performing Robert seems to draw us in and yet generate unease. The craving for enduring love as well as for sexual adventure and the fear of rejection are known to us. A moment of losing control always seems to occur in the process. Be that in unconditional – requited or unrequited – love or in sexual ecstasy: emotions and body are in danger of getting out of control and exposed. This can be exciting and stimulating, but can be equally mortifying.

It is no coincidence that Robert Steinberger’s research for *let me go... down* was driven by his fascination for what he calls the two ‘colossal topics’ of eroticism and death. An orgasm is called ‘la petite mort’ in French. And, accordingly, connections can be found everywhere. While Sigmund Freud located a mixture of libido and death drive in sexuality, the emergence of AIDS in the 1980s was accompanied by a discursive link between sexual pleasure and death. Literature and art create convergences too – such as in the erotic depictions of Shakespeare’s tragic character Ophelia in *fin de siècle* painting. Robert Steinberger dealt in particular with the writings of the surrealist author and philosopher Georges Bataille (1895-1962), who found the shared nature of death and eroticism in the self-loss and disappearance of self which reveal themselves both in erotic desire and in death. The texts spoken and sung in *let me go... down* are a mixture of Robert Steinberger’s own writings and quotations. They derive from Bataille’s writing but equally relate to contemporary pop culture, so they could also originate from songs by Janet Jackson or Rihanna. “Get nasty” breathes Robert Steinberger into the microphone – or is this now the vulnerable, exposed Robert? The ambivalence of the performing figure is revealed once again in this layering of theoretical writings, pop cultural references and his own texts; a figure that notionally discloses something personal and perhaps hides behind other people’s words and gestures.

As an ephemeral artistic format that emphasizes action, performance has always drawn the focus of attention onto the body. It is the fleshy, vulnerable, gendered body of the artist that is staged. And, accordingly, it is the performing figure that exposes themselves to the public and runs the risk of making a fool of themselves, indeed of failing. 'I'm ready to humiliate and destroy myself, to become someone new. With you.' writes Robert, and therewith not only describes the sometimes delightful and sometimes embarrassing indignity of an erotic encounter, but also putting himself on view on stage. The 'you' addressed is thus not only the sought-after partner, but always also his viewers. In the term performance is also, not least, the concept of performativity as a strategy for identity construction: a continual, and compulsive, repetition of gestures or actions in the sense of Judith Butler's thinking, which establishes the social construction of gendered identities as a kind of sociocultural citation of norms and laws. This concept can be applied to the art world too, in which the spectacle and the perfectly presented body are of huge importance. The performance let me go... down can thus additionally be read as an attempt at refusal.

let me go... down is a collaboration between Le Foyer and Wagner & Friends.

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**Robert Steinberger:** Born 1989 in Cologne, Germany. In 2001 earned BA in Visual Arts at San Diego State University, CA, USA. Lives and works in Zurich, Switzerland. Aside from performance, video, and fiber art, Robert Steinberger curates and writes as part of his artistic practice, working both solo and collaboratively. He co-founded the artist and curatorial collective FRICTION in 2011. He has exhibited and performed works at LISTE Basel, Stadtgalerie Bern, as well as Theatre Gessnerallee, Haus Konstruktiv, Réunion, Perla-Mode in Zürich, and the Art Institute in San Diego, CA, among others. FRICTION filled the artist-

run space Perla-Mode 2012 – 2015 and Nordflügel at Gessnerallee Zürich April 2015 – March 2016 with performances, exhibitions, and festivals.

[www.robertsteinberger.com](http://www.robertsteinberger.com)

## Le Foyer

In the spirit of the term 'foyer' – describing an antechamber or a lobby, as well as a focal point or a point of divergence - the discussion and exhibition platform Le Foyer, founded in 2011, pursues discursive art mediation that enables informal discourse based on conversation and exchange. As artists select an interest or a private passion as topic of discussion and then talk about it in public with a guest of their choice, peripheral areas of artistic practice come into focus. These are the foundations of the discussions as well as the starting points for exhibition projects. Le Foyer is led by Gioia Dal Molin and Anna Francke.

[lefoyer-lefoyer.blogspot.ch](http://lefoyer-lefoyer.blogspot.ch)

## Wagner & Friends

Wagner & Friends is a curatorial project. Its Initiator Andreas Wagner cooperates with different partners for exhibitions, performances or festival.

<https://www.facebook.com/wagnerandfriends/?pnref=lhc>

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