

Exhibition title: Service / No Service  
Artist: Bert Neumann

Catalogue text for the 2019 Prague Quadrennial

In Bert Neumann's final work at the Volksbühne on Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, the words NO SERVICE were hung above a room in which the separation between stage and audience had been completely abolished. For the entirety of the 2015-17 seasons, Neumann transformed the theatre into a streetscape, replacing the rows of seats with asphalt that slanted upwards to the upper foyer. This redefined space, surrounded by glittering black Niagara tinsel, is indicative of his working methods: Neumann transformed mobile, temporary or even entire spatial architectures into open systems enlivened by actors, directors, prompters, camera operators, dressers, technicians and audiences alike. The spatial setting of being both inside and outside at the same time constantly challenged the routine of the theatre. Through his frequent use of everyday materials from pop culture such as tinsel, plastic chairs or awnings, Neumann sought to develop a recognisable and memorable aesthetic: "I am interested in materials and objects that have a certain intrinsic value, that tell a story of their own accord."\*

The Hate & Love wagons tell a long story as part of the fairground, and as part of public life. Originally old worn-out circus wagons, they were restored in the Volksbühne's workshop, where Neumann redesigned them and later took them on tour for René Pollesch's *Tal der Fliegenden Messer* as part of the *Ruhrtrilogie*. They were simultaneously wardrobes, dressing rooms, tea kitchens, sleeping quarters and stages for video broadcasts. In 2018, they were acquired by the Bert Neumann Association (BNA). Working with Neumann's estate means using references from a repertoire of concrete materials and mobile formats that not only constitute working methods but which should also continue their discursive intervention in theory and practice.

Hanging materials have been a common thread in Neumann's artistic work since the 2000s. Often painted red and white, or sometimes black and white, these allowed for the creation of non-static theatrical spaces that could quickly and easily be transformed into something else.

Behind Neumann's aesthetic choices lies an attitude that he also believed constituted a common ground for the kind of collaboration that asserts the sovereignty of the individual (i.e. of actors, directors, stage builders and artists, etc.): "One should not act on behalf of others, but on behalf of oneself."\*\*

\*Bert Neumann in Kralicek, Wolfgang, "Fairground of Emotions", *Falter* magazine, issue 23/10, p. 24.

\*\*from conversations with Bert Neumann.