

BERLIN

Barking Dogs United

SCHALTER

Crossing a threshold takes only a single step, but at Schalter your way of walking was instantly transformed, as your feet came to rest upon one of dozens of skateboards covering the floor in long rows. Involuntarily, you bent your knees to keep balanced on the springy boards that rolled out from beneath your feet at each step. As you wobbled your way into the next room, the boards creaked, and you had to avoid stepping on their raised tips. The skateboards were joined in such a way that there was always an entire row of them rolling back and forth underneath as you explored the otherwise empty rooms of the project space. In front of the refrigerator in the galley kitchen, the skateboards had quite a bit of free play, while in the narrow corridor you might have had to kick off fairly vigorously to experience any movement at all. In the very back room, the tentatively advancing viewer found two skateboards mounted on the wall, each displaying an underside adorned with the image of a six-headed dog and the legend BARKING DOGS UNITED.

These words refer not to a group of noisy pets but to the team of artists responsible for the skateboard floor: Naomi Tereza Salmon and Nikos Arvanitis, who have been working together under the name “Barking Dogs United” since 2006. Using the simplest of means, they seek to sharpen viewers’ perceptions of their environment. This show is titled “What we want is what you want”: an outright lie, if we are to believe the duo’s manifesto, which informs us that they are aiming for something different—they’re no longer content to be artists. “Barking Dogs United work for a future in which there will be no more artists,



View of "Barking Dogs United," 2008.

only no-artists," they write, taking a jab at Beuys's dictum that everyone is an artist. They want to know how art can bite, how it can change society. But barking dogs seldom bite—nor do artists who bark. The very name Barking Dogs bespeaks the duo's helplessness at a time when even the harshest criticisms leveled at the art world are inevitably co-opted by the marketplace. This helplessness is reflected in their manifesto. Instead of spelling out an aesthetic program in the grand gestures of the avant-garde, they describe their daily lives thus: "Barking Dogs United do watch porn movies and do masturbate. Do believe in Bender"—referring to the character in the animated television series *Futurama*—"do play with guns, and do shoot bulbs happily. Do work, do get sick, do go

out for dinner, do brush their teeth, do wash their feet, and feel so good. Do play lotto, and do want to win. Fuck."

The sticking point in both BDU's manifesto and their skateboard floor lies in the discrepancy between the claim and the reality: The boards don't roll quite as smoothly as they should and the manifesto can't tell us how to become a non-artist. But both give a sense of what might be possible. And that's more than one usually gets to see in galleries these days.

—Daniel Boese

Translated from German by Oliver E. Dryfuss.