ist attacks of 2001 and, as the gallery text informs us, expressing optimism for the future of her city. Given that source, as well as what else was on display in the large, three-level space, the wall-mounted piece—its lit bulbs seemingly dimmed by the skylight in the room that it alone occupied—was nonetheless an ambivalent statement on the theme of public assembly. Coley seeks out sites that have been recorded many times over history. In the video The Land Marked (2001), for example, he utilized consecutive looped animations to depict the demolition of both the 16th-century Tower of Belém in Lisbon and the two industrial chimneys that once tianked that Portuguese heritage site, juxtaposing the sanctioned vista with an imaginary one: the tower is cleared away while the modern chimneys are allowed to remain. Here, with the “Honour” series (2012), Coley presented black-and-white photographs that he either appropriated or took himself at locations associated with public memory or protest, concealing critical passages with gold leaf. A placard at Occupy Wall Street, Rodin’s The Burghers of Calais, a crowd gathered at a Vietnam War memorial—all are gilded in the manner of highly valued decorative or devotional objects. Nearby, on a cardboard-covered table, he arranged eight abstract sculptures that rendered a set of fully redacted protest signs (and a lone flag) in white-painted steel. The contextual clues in this work, Choir (2012), are completely removed, causing the objects to appear spectral rather than simply abstracted.

An upstairs gallery contained 18 recycled gravestones, some leaning against the wall, others lying flat. Here, too, Coley has removed crucial information, this time by literally excising the names of both the deceased and those commemorating them. And yet it is through such identifying markers as the language of the inscription, the dates of birth and death, and the rare glimpse of a city name that these remaindered memorials cling obstinately to context. The uncomfortable question of how the gravestones were obtained in the first place only heightens the sense of displacement they evoke. Ultimately, Coley implies that in a world of porous borders but strengthening national and religious boundaries, “a place beyond belief” is either unattainable or, if attainable, may not be a place we wish to inhabit at all.

—Milena Tomic

ZURICH

GER VAN ELK

BOB VAN ORSOUW

Show after show, including this solo presentation of works by Ger van Elk, confirms the ongoing relevance of the artists Szemann selected for the exhibition “Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form” (Kunsthalle Bern, 1969). Photographer, painter and filmmaker van Elk (b. Amsterdam, 1941) has enjoyed significant acclaim in Europe and the United States throughout his career, though he is less widely known than such peers as Richard Long and Lawrence Weiner. Titled “On Appearing and Disappearing," this show, curated by Gijs van Tuyl, attempted to redress this imbalance by bringing together 16 of van Elk’s works from the 1970s and ’80s.

Van Elk was a young artist when Fluxus emerged, and abstraction and Arte Povera were also topical and highly influential during his early career. His approach to such shared currents is always humorous and personally engaged. In response to Barnett Newman’s “Who’s Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue” series (1966-70), for example, he created Red, Yellow and Blue (1987), an overpainted photograph in which he appears to be physically struggling with splotches of color, trying to force them into a pristine white triangle that occupies the upper portion of the composition. A photographic diptych, The Discovery of the Sardines, Placerita Canyon, Newhall, California (1971), has surreal or even biblical overtones—fresh sardines emerge from cracks in a patch of highway, seemingly as a result of an earthquake. A miracle, albeit a staged one, is taking place in the West Coast sunlight. Yet a car, in the American driving tradition, speeds right past, its driver focused not here but on some destination. Do van Elk’s photographs and films record or construct actions and images? The unresolved question brings a frisson to the show’s one film work, The Flattening of the Brook’s Surface (1972). Here the artist, in a rubber dinghy, floats across a canal, vainly attempting to smooth the water around him with a plastic trowel. Comparisons with his friend Bas Jan Ader’s various watery enterprises are inevitable. With van Elk, however, the stakes are lower, the comedy delicately
pitched so that even if the risk is smaller the work remains poignant.

A modest exhibition like this one could never do justice to a career as long and varied as van Elk’s. Both his investigation of contemporary landscape inspired by the great Dutch tradition and his grappling with sexual politics were largely overlooked here. And there is doubtless much to learn about the period between his relatively early works and two new ones that, shown in office areas of the gallery, consist of photographs printed on canvas and painted white to the point of near erasure. A full-scale retrospective is surely overdue.

—Aoife Rosenmeyer

BERLIN
“HERMAN BANG WRITES A LETTER TO HIS PUBLISHER”
BUCHHOLZ

In this exhibition, uncharacteristic for a contemporary art venue, gallerist Daniel Buchholz and Berlin-based artist Henrik Olesen collaboratively mined the private affairs and public persona of Danish literary giant Herman Bang (1857-1912). Correspondence and handsome publications lined the narrow ground-floor space, while enlarged, at times damning, caricatures of the prolific author were assembled in an adjacent gallery. Bang achieved notoriety and a divided reception after the Danish government censored his first novel, Hopeless Generations (1880), for breach of sexual mores. Though he was lauded as a preeminent writer of impressionistic fiction, his homosexuality repeatedly sparked fascination and ridicule.

Following an extensive showcasing of German illustrator Marcus Behmer (1879-1958) at Galerie Buchholz in 2008, this exhibition continued the venue’s focus on Northern European queer intellectuals. (Behmer designed an edition of Bang’s Eccentric Stories in 1905.) Indeed, this aspect of the gallery’s program bears affinities to Olesen’s own research-based works, which have probed painter Thomas Eakins and computer scientist Alan Turing, among others.

Bang’s range as a cultural critic spans a book of literary criticism compiled at age 22 and a posthumously published defense of a homosexual esthetics titled