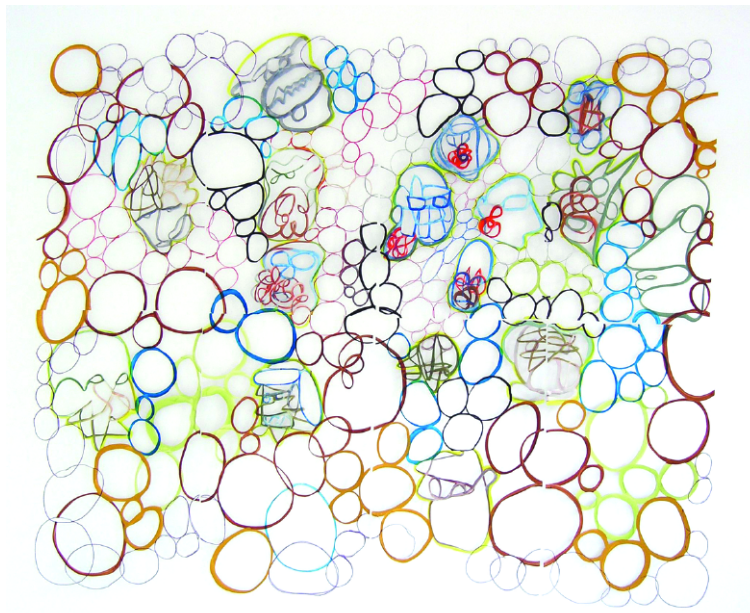


BERLIN

Stefan Saffer at müller | dechiara

To describe Stefan Saffer's work as "politically conscious" or "socially relevant" might conjure up an image that would belie his delicate, frothy cutout creations. Colorful and intricate, sometimes with three or four paper or cardboard sheets layered on top of one another, the works play with concepts of space and depth or light and shadow, as they cast their silhouettes on the gallery wall. Yet part of their fascination is that these charming and decorative works, painstakingly formed by drawing and by slicing paper with a knife, are more than mere formal studies.

Many of them address Germany's grim socio-economic situation, seen by Saffer with fresh eyes now that he has returned to Germany after a year in New York. *Goldene Kante*—made up of eight separate sheets hung in rows of four—consists of a cutout roulette wheel from which images associated with Germany's power and vulnerabilities radiate. Among these are industrial chimneys (representing the factories that rapidly proliferated in the 1950s and '60s, bringing with them the unions that now make them a liability), post-war housing developments (which were so successful when first built and are now rotting), a mosque, and Christian crosses. In the four-layered *Pac Man*, a plethora of that video game's familiar munching heads form a chaotic mass, their open jaws filled with words made out of paper strands, all complaining about their lot, talking instead of doing. Words alone make up *Sehnsucht* (Longing), a cutout paper poem by Joachim



Stefan Saffer, *StagNation*, gouache, cardboard, drawing cutout, shadow on wall (80 2/5 x 94 1/2 in.), 2004. Courtesy müller / dechiara, Berlin.

Ringelnetz. The two verses, which are a paean to Berlin, stand catercorner to each other, and at first it appears as though the second—in a light gray—might be only the shadow of the first, which is black.

StagNation picks up on the *Pac Man* theme, at first looking like a foamy surface of bubbles but slowly turning into a sea of faces—people stuck in their endless groups, moaning and chattering but doing nothing.

Saffer talks about his process in terms of editing, not only in the sense of cutting, but also of musical sampling, taking a common thing (a musical note, a well-known image), and slicing away at the exterior plane or superficial level to reveal the inner guts, a complex system of nerves and emotions that reflect the world around him.

—Amanda Coulson