

STEVE REBER | *Operate on Low* | May 14 - June 25, 2022

In *Operate on Low*, Steve Reber's second solo show with Devening Projects, the artist presents an installation of new uncanny sculptures that weaves personal histories into and around the current state of American culture. Produced through the lens of an obsessive tinkerer—or possibly an eccentric model maker—each work in this show alludes to the mechanics of transformation. We see apparatuses suggesting athletic purpose or something found in a fancy gym; there are devices you might see in a futuristic Pilates studio; or a contraption used in a spotless auto body shop. You'll even encounter a station at the gallery entrance that one might use to transact—changing money at a bank, paying for gas or picking up a coffee. Called *Take your body with you*, this piece has all the recognizable features of any purchase made during the past two years of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Plexiglas, although transparent, diminishes the possibility of an intimate exchange. The work in *Operate on Low* carries with it all the mystery of a brilliant Surrealist mind at work, but one fully engaged with the current state of the world.

One senses that each piece in this exhibition is designed for a particular function; as a result, our curiosity about how the gears, levers and knobs work is profound. The allusion here is that if only we knew how to operate these innovative machines, our destinies would be fulfilled, our dreams made manifest, our lives bettered. They are each so perfect in design and so sensually tactile, that it seems clear that gratification would come with the flick of a lever. The personal transformation we desire through physical exercise, spiritual enlightenment or body enhancement is temptingly implicit in these enigmatic works.

Reber is a master of form. His ability to express and communicate through material, surface, color, proportion, weight and scale is one of his greatest skills and one of the strongest features of this new work. Each element is carefully weighed, pondered and activated only after thorough testing for the most impactful consequence. Despite an assertive sense of geometry and hard edge, the work generously invites physical contact. Subtle matte surfaces, woven cloth fabrics and slightly pebbled planes work in unison while remaining autonomous. The merger of these many beautifully calibrated qualities allows each part to stake a decisive place in the whole. As the Swiss architect Peter Zumthor said, "*Construction is the art of making a meaningful whole out of many parts using the proper materials.*" It's Reber's careful attunement of subject to form that so gracefully carries forward his intention.

Steve Reber makes work that appears highly specific but leaves plenty of room to imagine and wonder. Like any beautifully designed thing whose function is destined, the new sculpture in *Operate on Low* invites us into a world choreographed to take us to that fantastical place where we are better looking, smarter and more refined.

Reber's work was recently included in *Anemic Compass* at the Hyde Park Art Center and the Dock 6 Design and Art Series #9, both in Chicago. His recent solo shows include *Thought Models and Mental Habitats* at the Robert F. DeCaprio Art Gallery, *Threshold Amnesia* at Three Walls and *New Work* at the Chicago Cultural Center. He has participated in numerous group shows including *Burn It Down* at Heaven Gallery in Chicago, *Focus 5* at the Illinois State Museum, and *New Art from Chicago* at Road Agent in Dallas. He was the recipient of an Artadia Award in 2006 and Illinois Arts Council grants in 2006 and 2000. He also received State Arts Council finalist awards in 2004 and 1999. Reber has been an active faculty member at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago since 1998.