

Kunstraum — Dornbirn

Toni
Schmale
—



16. Februar
— 9. Juni 2024

Toni Schmale *TANKE*

Overview

Toni Schmale at
Kunstraum Dornbirn

Press Preview Wednesday, 14 February 2024, 10:30 a.m.

Opening Thursday, 15 February 2024, 7 p.m.

Artist Talk Friday, 16 February 2024, 2 p.m.

Exhibition Duration 16 February to 9 June 2024

After-Work-Tours

Thursdays at 6 p.m.

14 March, 11 April and 16 May 2024

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Contact

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Toni Schmale has installed an environment entitled “TANKE” at Kunstraum Dornbirn, the central element of which is the petrol station referred to in the title. Technically abstract in a highly aesthetic fashion, apparently dysfunctional and potentially out of place, “TANKE” (2023/2024) allows moments of consternation and transformation to take immediate effect in an exciting interaction with the industrial architecture. Weaving together the characteristics and social function of the site “petrol station”, and its historical and socially-based narratives with new sculptural works, Schmale creates a timeless story with fictional echoes.

“I longed for sound-protection walls and dreamt that gas would just run out, that all cars would break down and the Tanke would be overgrown with wild meadow flowers of the Wienerwald, that my friends would suddenly turn up and we would have an after-work beer.” (Toni Schmale 2021)

Schmale’s dream story of reclaiming nature conjures up the image of the modern ruin. But does it also evoke a utopia? A vision of a new era, for which the automobile was once central to human history?

Questions of this kind are not answered within the art work. What is certain, however, is that humanity is facing difficult and multifarious challenges – climatic, political and social. Schmale encounters this complex reality sculpturally in a way that combines abstraction, absurdity, ambivalence, irony, humour and bewilderment as pointed aids and stylistic devices, and takes them to the formal extreme. She chooses the site of the petrol station as the basic sign system and reduces it to a few basic systemic elements – two petrol pumps standing on a concrete base and a framing roof structure rising five meters high.

These component are clearly identifiable, but they obviously refuse to function as a whole. The roofing appears to be a mere skeleton of itself. The steel parts fulfil their task in accordance with the required calculations of statics; they showcase their materiality and performance, indestructible and beyond all influences; but they don't pump petrol. The slim columns with the hoses on the sides are just contour. Everything is rigid and silver-grey and cold – hot-dip galvanized steel as the perfect materialization of eternal immobility.

The new sculptures distributed throughout the room formally and narratively expand the setting of the petrol station. In these works its functionless nature is carried forward, now extending to material and form in their entirety. Alone the manufacturing process of the

individual works makes this clear: for instance, the roof of the petrol station needs technical planning, processes essential for every building. For the petrol pumps, however, it is necessary to choose the right degree of abstraction, which balances the relationship between the intended symbolic function (here in the sense of symbolic recognisability) and mere imitation in such a way that it produces an aesthetic, physically noticeable tension. In the new works “sucker #1 #2” and “sucker #3”, Schmale remains in the figurative world of the petrol station, of the tyre air pressure gauge and the vacuum cleaner. She fuses well-known shapes and props with invented ones. Against the hardness of the steel, she wrests from the material soft lines that oscillate between machine and body. In a 2020 interview, Schmale sums the effect up as follows: “The feeling arises that the sculpture could be capable of something, but it makes no suggestion as to what action might be required.”

In this stringent refusal to make a determination, bemusement and ambivalence are integral parts of the viewer’s response. This runs like a common thread through Schmale’s entire oeuvre. Again and again we doubt our own understanding, bounce off the surface only then to be plunged into the depths of human existence. Schmale is internationally known for her very specific formal language. Using metal, concrete and rubber, she develops sculptural works of varying dimensions in which, for example, associations with fitness or torture devices are not arbitrarily but rather referentially enfolded. These associations extend further into the spheres of fetish, physical optimization, sexual gratification and self-dismantling. Schmale expands the concept of sculpture in a constantly advancing search for the nuances of material conditions and forms, for the obligatory examination of the resultant object’s usability and function as critical social commentary. Themes of stereotypical gender attributions or constructions, of social power relations, and of the interaction of both, resonate in Schmale’s work as a subtext that is revealed, for instance, in the ironically humorous titles. These make access to the work both easier and more difficult. In any case, they provide clues as to what the form should be or what potential it can disclose in the mirror of time.

Looking at the tersely titled “TANKE” in Dornbirn, the zeitgeist and its lineage of historical narratives plays an active, activating and easily graspable role. Through the formal citation of a globally identifiable place that is an integral part of the everyday life of millions of people, Schmale succeeds in establishing a communal basis for all viewers. Inherent in this installation is a fictionalized moment, one that is not only played out through the fluid design but also seems to oscillate between the status of a ruin and a sign-post to the future. The whole setting poses the question of temporality.

Toni Schmale *TANKE*

Press release

Schmale further plays with the petrol station as a site of displacement by showing the installation here in a former industrial assembly hall that is now the exhibition space of an art association. For an identical counterpart of the work has been standing in the Vienna Gürtel since 2021, in Stefan Weber Park, a strip of green sandwiched between multi-lane roadways. In her installations in public spaces, Schmale integrates, comments on and challenges the characteristics and social function of the urban spaces and landscapes for which the concepts are created. Thus, through its globally functioning model character and the multi-perspective cultural coding, "TANKE" can be a place of communication in Dornbirn and Vienna. A meeting point that allows both surface and depth, depending on use and our needs.

Toni Schmale

Biography

Toni Schmale was born in Hamburg in 1980 and now lives and works in Vienna. From 2003 to 2009 she studied media art at the Leipzig University of Graphics and Book Arts. In 2009 she moved to the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, where she studied performative art and performative sculpture, graduating with a diploma in 2013. In her final year she received the Prize of the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts; in 2011 she had already been the recipient of the Birgit Jürgenssen Prize; and in 2017 she was awarded the Msgr. Otto Mauer Prize, which was followed by her solo exhibition at the Vienna Secession. In the same year she received the BALTIC Artists' Award, which was also accompanied by an exhibition.

In 2021, Schmale won the Vienna KÖR Art in Public Space competition, after which her sculpture "TANKE 24/7" was installed in Stefan Weber Park in Vienna. In 2023 she showed her work "gefähr*innen" as part of the exhibition "Public Matters" in the Belvedere Garden in Vienna, and in 2022 the permanent installation "zugbrücke" was realised at Mauterndorf Castle, Salzburg. Schmale has had solo and group exhibitions at the Salzburger Kunstverein (2013), the Moscow International Biennale for Young Art (2014), the nGbK – New Society for Fine Arts in Berlin (2016), Mayday in Basel (2022), the Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb (2022), the Kunstverein Bielefeld (2022), Belvedere 21, mumok (2023, 2021, 2017), the Kyiv Biennale (2023, 2015), RIBOCA3 in Riga (2022) and the Kunsthaus Graz (2023).

Toni Schmale *TANKE*

Merchandise “CRUISING TOUR 2024”

Merchandise

CRUISING TOUR 2024

For Toni Schmale’s exhibition "TANKE", a part of CRUISING TOUR 2024, Wally Salner, in cooperation with Maria Ziegelböck and Susi Klocker, produced as merchandise a limited locker pin-up calendar and a T-shirt edition.

Schmale created the photo series for the CRUISING TOUR 2024 merchandise project as part of the sculpture ensemble “gefähr*t*innen” (companions), located in the garden of the Belvedere 2023 in Vienna.

Calendar

A3, 13 colour illustrations
Limited edition, 300 pieces
45 €, including VAT.

The calendar was produced by
Publisher: Toni Schmale for Wally Salner
Conception / Art Direction: Wally Salner for Toni Schmale
Photographs: Maria Ziegelböck
Photoassistant: Marie Luise Baumschlager
Graphics: Susi Klocker
Cast: Anahita, Catharina, Da, Toni



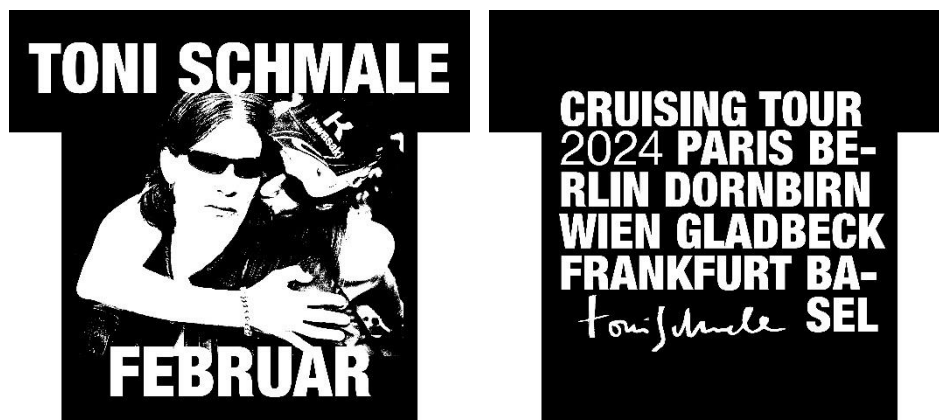
Toni Schmale *TANKE*

Merchandise "CRUISING TOUR 2024"

Merchandise

T-Shirt:

Wally Salner for Toni Schmale
Flock print b/w, L one size fits all
Limited edition, 30 pieces
75 €, including VAT.



Support

The exhibition programme is realized thanks to the support of our subsidy providers, sponsors and project partners!

Subsidy Provider Stadt Dornbirn | Land Vorarlberg | Republik Österreich

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The installation „TANKE” was produced in collaboration with Phileas – The Austrian Office for Contemporary Art"

Kunstraum Dornbirn was founded in 1987 as a non-profit association with the aim of presenting and communicating contemporary art. Since 2003, the exhibitions have found ideal conditions for the showing of large-scale installations in the historic assembly hall of the former Rüscher-Werke, a machine factory in Dornbirn's Municipal Gardens (Stadtgarten). The quality of the architecture in its original, raw state offers space for the presentation of current trends in international art. We show established, internationally renowned artists and newer positions in about four exhibitions every year.

The exhibition history of Kunstraum Dornbirn is marked by international artists such as Judith Fegerl and Chiharu Shiota (both 2023), Monika Sosnowska and Robert Kuśmirowski (both 2022), Tony Oursler (2021), Atelier Van Lishout and Claudia Comte (both 2020), Hans Op de Beek (2017), Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg (2016), Berlinde de Bruyckere (2015), Not Vital and Tue Greenford (both 2012), Jan Kopp (2010) and Mark Dion (2008), and Austrian artists such as Peter Sandbichler (2021), Bernd Oppl (2019), Thomas Feuerstein (2018) and Roman Signer (2008).

Location and infrastructure

Vorarlberg is located in the four-country region around Lake Constance, with fast routes to and a lively exchange with Germany, Switzerland and Liechtenstein as well as other parts of Austria. The region is not only scenically attractive for tourism but can also boast the further appeal of the most diverse institutions' dense and high-quality cultural activities in the performing and visual arts.

The large brick assembly hall was built on the grounds of the Rüscher-Werke in 1893. In 1999/2000, the area was redesigned as municipal gardens in an international landscape planning competition. The re-design preserved important buildings of the Rüscher-Werke such as the assembly hall and created an urban recreational and cultural site. With a length of 30 metres and a width of 14 metres, the hall measures a total area of 420 m².