

## PR11/10

**Tom Schmelzer:** Beautiful outside my head forever

5 November – 15 January 2010

Opening: Thurs 4 November 2010, 19:00 hrs

A life-size baboon in a bishop's robe that, with one hand, is gathering his brocade coat and with the other swinging a soap bubble bottle. A machine that is gradually grinding one-and-a-half kilos of precious pearls to dust. Worms as thick as a finger winding their way on a lacquered wooden box while producing knocking sounds. The objects and installations of the Munich-based artist Tom Schmelzer have a disturbing quality – they shock the observer. At the same time, they fascinate by the elegance of their execution. Without a doubt: This artist intends to provoke. But he achieves this in a most entertaining manner and with precise technical refinement. His choice of topics is rather substantial: Evolutionary history, criticism of capitalism and, last but not least, an analysis of the narcissistic art establishment. With the baboon installation "Homo Bulla", for example, Schmelzer refers to the belated genuflection of the Archbishop of Canterbury, who acknowledged the teachings of Charles Darwin only in 2008. Until then, the Anglican Church still considered it a heresy when someone claimed that human beings are descendents from apes. With the soap bubbles, moreover, he is citing a baroque vanitas motive, the crystal ball, representing wisdom and the fragility of life.

"Tom Schmelzer doesn't just touch on sore spots, he directly strikes the eye with a fist," the Sueddeutsche Zeitung wrote on the occasion of an exhibition last year. And this was meant in an altogether positive sense. More often than not, political art comes across as aesthetically laundered with fabric softener or bloodlessly conceptual. Tom Schmelzer, on the other hand, finds formally seductive forms of expression for complex socio-political issues. He doesn't shy away from taking a stand. He also skillfully plays with the most varied nuances of humor: from a fine sense of irony to crude obscenity.

Sometimes he will take his fellow artists to task. While some works indirectly cite the work of contemporaries like Damien Hirst or Maurizio Cattelan, others blatantly make fun of the art market's mechanisms of delusion. His hat object made of 140 scarab beetles – an eccentric memento mori – is at the same time an unconventional homage to the British fashion designer Alexander McQueen, who passed away recently.

"I understand the role of the artist as that of a translator – one who brings together things that actually don't belong together, creating new experiences and helping the observer to gather insights. In this sense, my works represent models for the reality of those illusionary dreams we all have, or for the dark realms we don't want to look at," says Tom Schmelzer about his work. It is the artist's greatest strength that, in view of all conceptual rigor and intellectual clarity, truly sensuous works of art emerge, which are not easily forgotten.

Tom Schmelzer was born in Munich in 1966. He has studied the fine arts, medicine and philosophy in Munich, Oxford, Toronto and St. Louis, and did his doctorate in the field of neurology. Aside from exhibitions in the German Historical Museum in Berlin, the Haus der Kunst in Munich and the Kunstverein Wasserburg, he was already represented in group shows at WTC in 2007/2008. The exhibition "Beautiful outside my head forever" is Tom Schmelzer's first solo show in Hamburg.