

Press Release - 24 January 2017

Hans Schabus: The Long Road from
Tall Trees to Tall Houses

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Hans Schabus, who became known through a series of bold projects such as his journey by boat through the sewer system of Vienna in 2002 or the superstructure he erected above the Austrian pavilion at the 2005 Venice Biennial, constantly expands the possibilities of sculpture with his spatial measurements. Born in 1970 and living today in Vienna, Schabus is notorious for his sometimes drastic interventions in existing architecture. The title-providing series *The Long Road from Tall Trees to Tall Houses* is comparatively restrained; upon closer inspection, however, it may very well be considered one of Hans Schabus' most ingenious works. Its focus is on the artist himself but also - this is a recurrent motif in his art - on managing to cover a certain distance and measuring a space. In 42 days from June 19 to July 30, 2015, he traveled some 5,350 kilometers by bicycle - from the West Coast to the East Coast of the USA, from Redwoods National Park north of San Francisco to New York City. Each day at noon, he stopped and used his smartphone to photograph the route that lay before him. He transferred the material that arose through controlled happenstance during his journey onto 42 pictorial panels for an exhibition in 2016 at the Salzburger Kunstverein. The panels were arranged chronologically in the exhibition space in a circle around the artist's now disassembled bicycle hanging from the ceiling as a vertical sculpture.

Had Darmstadt's city centre not been destroyed in the Second World War, the local Kunstverein might still have its first, 19th century exhibition building, similar to the one in Salzburg. It was replaced by a modern steel, glass and tile building designed by the post-war architect Theo Pabst, which was expanded in a more postmodern style in the 1980s. The dimensions of the main gallery (4.5 x 21.7 x 9.6 m) are roughly comparable to Salzburg, therefore it would have been possible to present the 42 panels analogous to the idea of the self-closing circle realised there. This was, in fact, considered initially. However, Schabus then decided to incorporate more of the galleries, including the upper floor. Akin to a receding movement, most of the panels gravitate away from the main room, where they sometimes hang on their own or sometimes in pairs, but always still in chronological order.

Hans Schabus had a circular hole carved into the gallery wall of the Salzburger Kunstverein with a core drill. *Konglomerat* [Conglomerate] opened the exhibition space like a pressure relief valve and produced

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an unexpected reference to the location, since beyond bricks and mortar, the debris from drilling also contained conglomerate, which is a sedimentary rock quarried in Salzburg itself.

The *Darmstädter Löschdecke* [Darmstadt Fire Blanket] (2016) consists of Schabus' aforementioned bicycle, reassembled* and leaning against a wall this time. It is covered with a felt blanket, which almost gives the impression of a game of hide-and-seek. Cut accordingly, saddle felt is used for the padding of horses' harnesses among other things. As with the 135 metre-long chain, which defines a so-called «interior,» this piece, thinking laterally (Fahrrad = Drahtesel in German which translates to bicycle = wire donkey) also derives from Schabus' temporary readymade, his bicycle. Furthermore, this is also a homage to Joseph Beuys who created a single large «scenario» with the *Block Beuys* in the Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt (Darmstadt State Museum) over several years.

*(For the Salzburg scenario he took apart his bicycle and hung its individual parts from the ceiling.)

Highnoon (Pabstsäule) [Highnoon (Pabst-column)] (2017) could be, as the title alludes, the model for a column of empty beer cans stacked on top of each other sky-high. The appropriation of the American beer brand «Pabst» emphasises the connection to Schabus' bicycle tour, but also curiously acknowledges the architect of the Kunsthalle Theo Pabst who taught at the Darmstadt University of Technology and as a Bavarian perhaps felt as a stranger in the Apfelwein region of Southern Hesse. The column can be also correlated with the «Langer Ludwig», a landmark of Darmstadt in the form of a monumental column crowned by a bronze statue that once had a libertarian political message, and where drinkers regularly loiter at its foot.

In preparation for the exhibition, Schabus visited Darmstadt once in each of the years 2015, 2016 and 2017. Each and every time he brought along the local newspaper, and tore out the word «Echo» from it, and then placed this torn-out text into a frame with the same dimensions as the newspaper, in the original, according space where the word had been printed in the newspaper. Does *Echooo* (2017) perhaps allude to the fate of the contemporary artist who, busy with all of his appointments, only receives a few impressions from his travels? Or is it to be understood as an invitation to perceive the flowing space of the Kunsthalle as a resonating body and letting one's thoughts float within? The reverberation could be understood as the aftereffects of previous scenarios within the respective current one, particularly as if one thinks of the echo chamber of a sound studio that gives more volume and power to the recordings.

Already when approaching the building, visitors may notice a criss-crossed chain through the glass facade that will accompany them through the entire building while they walk along the panels. The 135 meters of metal are braced with chain tensioners and bolstered by books, where the chain goes around a corner. These aren't just any books, they comprise the reading matter that Schabus used to prepare for his USA

trip. Thus it once again becomes apparent that everything associated with the creative process can again arise at another point. The title itself, *Über das Verschränken der Räume* [On the Entangling of Spaces], sounds like an aesthetic discourse on sculpture, form and function alone and appears to be more complex than Schabus' 2011 installation *Meterriess* [Meter Level], where he had cut into the exhibition walls of the Institut d'art contemporain, Villeurbanne, Rhône-Alpes. The chain element «forms an eight and defines a spacial core, a so-called interior, which, held together, opens up a path through the building. The panels follow on the outer walls and reveal the view of the outside.» (Hans Schabus) Schabus thinks of the chain as the primary means of interacting with the building. His expression «core» is ambiguous in this case insofar as he evokes, on the one hand, a thing's substance and, on the other hand, the transient so-called lost form of the casting process. The chain doesn't just establish a space, but is itself a sculptural object as a relief on the wall.

Hans Schabus: The Long Road from Tall Trees to Tall Houses is curated by Dr León Krempel, Curator and Director. The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue published by Revolver Publishing and a programme of talks and events in the Kunsthalle.

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