

currents 103

CLAUDIA SCHMACKE



SAINT LOUIS ART MUSEUM



Dark Matters, 2009

Claudia Schmacke is the 2008–2009 Henry L. and Natalie E. Freund Fellow, which includes two month-long residencies at the Washington University Graduate School of Art, Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts, and a Currents exhibition at the Saint Louis Art Museum. During her October residency, Schmacke taught at the Graduate School of Art while working with the museum to develop her new installation, Time Reel (in Gallery 337) and to work on her video piece, Dark Matters, which premieres at the Saint Louis Art Museum (in Gallery 301). The exhibition also features the video Umbilicus. Claudia Schmacke and Charlotte Eyerman, curator of modern and contemporary art, discussed Schmacke's Currents exhibition.

Charlotte Eyerman: Do you see the installation and video works in this exhibition as departures or continuations of your previous work?

Claudia Schmacke: Both. There is continuity and reference to previous works, but there is always a new question. My work is often very related and responsive to site and movement plays a very important role. It reflects how we experience space-time and how we create a model of time that separates the continuum into past, present, and future. What is time? Something we cannot define in a formula. When we try to capture it the moment escapes. I became interested in film and the passing of time in that medium. There is not only the projection of the images but also the way these single moments are preserved on the reel. The title of the installation *Time Reel* refers to this storage of time. The wall that the tubing penetrates acts architecturally, as the reel does for the film. It is the support and the organizing structure. But the focus of my interest is in the movement around this center.

CE: Film is a reference point in your sculptural installations, but the connection seems more metaphorical than literal. In the video works, viewers have a filmic experience watching images move on the wall. It's physical and temporal but not necessarily a narrative

experience. Would you talk more about the relationship between your installation work and the video work?

CS: Yes, it is a more metaphorical connection. I am not interested in illustration, but rather how film structures the passing of time as in French filmmaker Chris Marker's works, for example. My installations are very physical. They try to visualize a constant flow or a continuous rise and fall. They refer to networks that are partly visible, partly invisible. In the videos I also investigate ephemeral and experiential phenomena. The videos and installations are united by the same underlying interests but become very different in practice. I find it helpful to work in both mediums and switch between them.

CE: What are your research goals and methods?

CS: My research is influenced by my interest in modern physics, but art functions differently than science. My works ask questions: What is the underlying structure behind the phenomenological world? How did space-time evolve? Art does not define an absolute or seek to prove formulas. Creating means becoming aware of limitations, accepting failures, and recognizing the uncertainty of perception. My installations allow for direct encounters as well as for reflection. Direct observation is a very important factor. It enhances awareness and opens up unknown dimensions. The spatial experience engages elemental phenomena and at the same time suggests a virtual or secondary reality beyond it. In both the installation work and the videos, I research elemental and natural forces and reflect upon the duality of nature and culture, the way we see and are seen, shape and are shaped. The video *Umbilicus*, for example, refers to physical experiences in the body. Sometimes the image seems like an eye, then a tunnel through the body, a passage through a hidden space. It is a mirror of a twisted space, turned upside down. It simultaneously undergoes a transformation to become a field of electric flashes.

CE: How did you develop such a strong interest in water and air as materials?

CS: Physical and material conditions were of great interest during my graduate studies. Water was present in a metaphorical sense as in *Radiator*, which I cast from paraffin wax, a material that changes from a solid into a liquid state when heated. After I finished graduate school at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, I received a grant to go to Italy to research the work of Leonardo da Vinci and the concept of space and perspective. During that time I became aware of the theme of water in his work. We can only perceive one element in relation to another. In order to observe anything we need a frame of reference, a duality. This borderline is essential for our perception, this duality between me and the other, the possibility of encounter.

CE: I am very interested in the connection with Leonardo, especially because he was as much scientist as artist. Your work similarly intertwines these threads. Was it his *Deluge* drawing that inspired you, since it is about water?

CS: My first experiments with water as a medium happened simultaneously with my studies of Leonardo's work, in particular the *Leicester Codex*—especially his drawings of the deluge and others. Studying the flow of water around obstacles was important for me. His technological inventions led me to research engineering and the mise-en-scène of water in the Renaissance gardens, with their complex system of networks and mechanisms.

CE: I always associate gardens on that scale and in that context as part of a world of opulence and power. They are a demonstration of man's power over nature. And there is such a long history in Italy of controlling water—the Roman aqueducts come to mind. On one hand there is a practical element of moving water and using it to enhance human life or comfort; and on the other hand, there is the sheer spectacle of it. Both require mastery and technical skill. When did you start to use water in your work?

CS: It took a while for these ideas to incubate. My first works with water in motion emerged about two years after my Leonardo studies. I wanted to make it visible as a present flow, referencing the network of veins in our bodies and through our continents. These networks are very complex: there is a part that we see and a hidden part. *Time Reel* operates on a similar principle: there is the visible and the hidden part, with the pumps behind the wall, like the heart of a strange organism. I chose the tubing because it is a contemporary material and is used, for example, in the food industry. On our planet water moves in a circulatory system—it evaporates, is filtered, is in a

constant flow. In the domestic realm it is often hidden in opaque networks. The problem is that we take it for granted as an endless supply. Water is a very precious resource, it should not be owned by anybody. Life without it would be unthinkable. Many people die from the lack of clean water, while it is treated as a globalized commercial good or luxury product. This absurdity is reflected in my work, which strives to make visible its potential for both phenomenological beauty and endangerment.

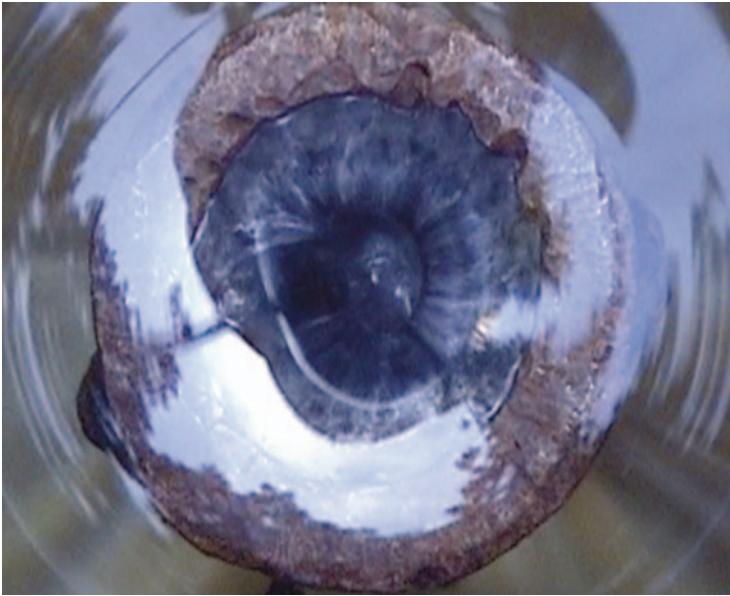
CE: What about the green dye that colors the water in the tubing you use for *Time Reel*?

CS: It is used for the detection of leaks in medical and biological research. The military used the dye as a signaling device for personnel who await rescue from the sea. A tiny amount casts a wide swath of this fluorescent green to help identify location. It is a marker, which fades over time from sunlight, so there is a built-in expiration. These properties make it interesting to work with, especially in the context of a temporary exhibition.

CE: The titles of these works operate on several levels. They are descriptive, but also metaphorical and witty. In addition to the film reference of *Time Reel*, there's a pun on the notion of "real time." *Umbilicus* invites a mediation with our own bodies, to that point of connection that we all have to our mother's body, and yet it's also a distinctly non-bodily image. And *Dark Matters* puns on the idea of matter as a substance and matter as an issue to consider.

CS: My works always invite multiple levels of viewing and thinking. In both mediums there is a tension between the ephemeral and the enduring. The videos are image sequences, literally light projected in space. In *Dark Matters* the imagery is mostly black, a projection of darkness as light. I filmed black tar and the movement of gas bubbles penetrating the tar's membrane. The title of that work refers to dark matter, hypothetical matter that does not interact with the electromagnetic force, simultaneously stating that the "dark" matters.

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Umbilicus, 2006

CLAUDIA SCHMACKE
German, born 1963

University Kassel, Hochschule der Künste Berlin and Gerrit-Rietveld-Academie, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 1983–1989
BA Fine Art, University Kassel, Germany 1988
Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, Germany 1989–1992
MFA Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, 1991

Works in Exhibition

Time Reel, 2009

Installation, transparent tubing, water, pumps, fluorescent dye

Umbilicus, 2006

Video, DVD, 25:20 minutes, edition (7+2 AP)

Dark Matters, 2009

Video, DVD, 4:22 minutes, edition (7+2 AP)

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2009

Art on Site, National Centre for Contemporary Art, Nizhny Novgorod, Russia

2008

Claudia Schmacke, Plane Space Gallery, New York, New York
Anke Becker. Claudia Schmacke, Casa di Goethe, Rome, Italy

2007

Claudia Schmacke, Rebecca Container Gallery, Genoa, Italy

2005

Nagare, Galerie Aube, Kyoto University of Art and Design, Kyoto, Japan
Claudia Schmacke, Plane Space Gallery, New York, New York
Claudia Schmacke, Orangery, Castle Rheda, Rheda-Wiedenbrück, Germany

SAINT LOUIS ART MUSEUM

One Fine Arts Drive, Forest Park
St. Louis, Missouri 63110-1380
Telephone 314.721.0072
www.slam.org

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Wasserwerke, Nassauischer Kunstverein, Wiesbaden, Germany

2003

Claudia Schmacke, Plane Space Gallery, New York, New York

Claudia Schmacke, Goethe-Institut, Salvador-Bahia, Brazil

Claudia Schmacke, Museu di Arte Sacra, Belém, Brazil

2001

Claudia Schmacke, Kunstverein, Recklinghausen, Germany

Selected Group Exhibitions

2009

3. Moscow Biennial/Art on Site, National Centre for Contemporary Art/Goethe Institut, Moscow, Russia

2008

Art for Art's Shake. Torre Prendiparte, Bologna, Italy

2007

Vorgebirkspark Skulptur, IG Kunst Park, Cologne, Germany
Rolli contemporanei, Palazzo di Croce, Genoa, Italy

2006

Westfälische Kulturarbeit, Westfälisches Landesmuseum, Münster, Germany

2004

1st International Lodz Biennale, Lodz, Poland
Die Werft, Galerie Münsterland, Emsdetten, Germany

2003

A River Half Empty, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, Connecticut

2002

Looking in, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, New York, New York

2001

BrückenMusik VII, Deutzer Bridge, Cologne, Germany

12 Views, The Drawing Center, New York, New York

Photoimage, Goethe Institut, New York, New York

Stadt Landschaft Fluss, Neuer Kunstverein

Aschaffenburg, Germany

2000

Trajectories, Smack Mellon, New York, New York

Riverside, Norwich Gallery, Norwich, England

Still living, Smart Project Space, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Selected Fellowships and Grants

2006

DaimlerChrysler grant, Casa di Goethe, Rome, Italy

2005

International Research Ceter for the Arts, Kyoto, Japan

2004

Villa Triunfo, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, grant from Arts Foundation of North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany

2003

Grant from Cultural Ministry Northrhine-Westphalia

2002

Vordemberge award, Cologne, Germany

Smack Mellon Studios, New York, New York

2001

Art Omi, Ghent, New York

The Bemis Center for Contemporary Art, Omaha, Nebraska

2000

International Studio & Curatorial Program, New York, New York

1999

Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas

Selected Bibliography: Books and Catalogues

2007

Gerhard Kolberg. *Grünfläche in Vorgebirgspark Skulptur 2007*. Cologne: IG Kunst im Park

2005

Lilly Wei. *Controlled Flow in Water Works*. Frankfurt/M: Gutleut Verlag

Deborah Everett. *Fluid Encounters in Water Works*. Frankfurt/M: Gutleut Verlag

2003

Jessica Hough. *River Half Empty*. Ridgefield: The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art

Selected Bibliography: Articles and Reviews

2005

Christopher Lyon. "Report from Poland 1/Constructing a Biennial." *Art in America*, April, pp. 54–57

Deborah Everett. "Claudia Schmacke: Fluid Encounters." *Sculpture*, Vol. 24, No. 1, Jan–Feb, pp. 18–19

2003

Gregory Volk. "Claudia Schmacke at Plane Space." *Art in America*, September.

Front cover:

Big Board (parking garage, Gasteig, Munich, in the scope of "Overtures am Wasser") (detail), 2005; water, hoses, pumps, water tanks, fluorescent dye, black light, dry wall;
© Claudia Schmacke; Image courtesy the artist

All works in this exhibition: Courtesy of the artist

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