

ZITA-ЦАРА

CHAMBER PIECE BY
KATHARINA FRITSCH AND ALEXEJ KOSCHKAROW

12 JUNE – 2 OCTOBER 2016

With *Zita-Цара* Schaulager presents a three-room installation by Katharina Fritsch (*1956 Essen, Germany) and Alexej Koschkarow (*1972 Minsk, Belarus). The new sculptures and drawings created for this precisely conceived presentation are the outcome of the artists' intense exchange of ideas and concepts.

"At first we just wanted to make a small model, like a dollhouse."

Katharina Fritsch / Alexej Koschkarow

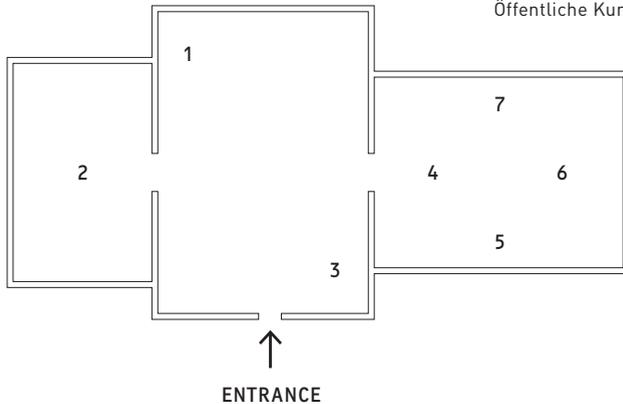
A three-part structure stands isolated on the expansive ground floor of Schaulager. Dwelling-like in dimension, the volume is closed on all sides apart from a front-facing entrance. On entering this "house within a house," visitors are confronted with an altered spatial situation. The scene-like arrangement and proximity of the seven works in *Zita-Цара* suggest an ensemble on stage. *Chamber Piece* borrows another strategy from the world of theater in its concentration on the interaction of individual protagonists. The prevailing emotional and expressive mood that settles over the installation is further intensified by the distanced and precise forms. The size and proximity of the works call for a direct encounter. As though on a stage, a *mise-en-scène* is underway, of which visitors become a part.

Katharina Fritsch

- 1 *Puppen* [Dolls], 2016
Epoxy resin, polyurethane, acrylic
Collection of the artist
- 2 *Sarg* [Coffin], 2016
MDF, blockboard, acrylic
Collection of the artist

Alexej Koschkarow

- 3 *Kalter Ofen* [Cold Oven], 2016
Ceramics, metal, electric light, motor
Collection of the artist
- 4 *Das was keinen Namen hat* [Which Has No Name], 2016
Mixed media
Collection of the artist
- 5 *Bellevue* 2014
Smearing
Graphite on primed canvas
Collection of the artist
- 6 *Schtetl* [Shtetl], 2012
Wood and metal
Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation,
on permanent loan to the
Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel
- 7 *Höllentor* [Gates of Hell], 2012
Smearing
Graphite on primed canvas
Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation,
on permanent loan to the
Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel



As part of the collection of the Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation, *Rattenkönig* [Rat-King, 1993] by Katharina Fritsch is permanently installed on the lower level of Schaulager and can be viewed during the opening hours of *Zita – Шчара*.

“It is not about sensations or contemporary discourse, but about wanting to make something that becomes accessible through looking. In the process, the viewer realizes that everything is in motion, in transformation, ever-changing. The work cannot be pinned down.”

Katharina Fritsch

The clear and precise structure of *Zita – Шчара* is matched by the multilayeredness of its impact. What appears unambiguous at first glance reveals an ambivalence and multiplicity of meanings. The familiar and domestic become uncanny. The double title of this unwritten piece is loaded with an abundance of references, albeit ones not directly formulated in the installation. Rather, they function as cues for a game of symmetries and disruptions, correspondences and contradictions, allusions and references.

“This name, Zita, became a symbol for me of what I was imagining, Austria, the First World War, the situation today.” Katharina Fritsch

“Zita did not work for me at all. That’s why I chose Шчара. I like that fact that most people think it’s the Russian translation of Zita. This false symmetry.” Alexej Koschkarow

The historic figure Zita of Bourbon-Parma (1892–1989) briefly occupied the stage of world affairs together with Emperor Charles I as the last Austro-Hungarian imperial couple during the latter years of the First World War. With the lost war and the demise of the dual monarchy in autumn 1918, Zita and her husband were forced into exile. Zita’s life encompassed multiple epochs of fundamental upheavals in the balance of power within Europe and especially in Eastern Europe: from the First World War, the collapse of the monarchy and the Austrian multinational state, and the Second World War, up to the eve of Communist Europe’s collapse. Never ceasing to maintain her family’s claim to the throne, Zita was kept from returning to Austria until late in her life. In the spring of 1989 she was buried in Vienna with a quasi-imperial funeral. Yet Zita is also an Italian saint from the thirteenth century regarded as a patron saint of maids and domestic servants.

Serving as the counterpart in the title, the river Шчара (in English Shchara) is situated in western Belarus as one of some 20,000 Belarusian rivers, which also include much more well-known rivers such as the Dnieper or the Pripyat. The Shchara was a theater of war in the First and Second World War and evokes the eventful and changing history of present-day Belarus, particularly its western region. In both wars, the area was the site of entrenched battles between German and Russian troops. The meandering course of the Shchara

and its banks lined with impenetrable woods and swamplands made it a line of defense and, especially in the Second World War, a refuge for partisans. Alexej Koschkarow has a connection to the river through his family history: his great-grandfather was wounded there during the First World War. The personal association is anchored as a footnote in the great flow of history, whose course has been cyclically inscribed with wars and changing balances of power.

Zita – Ціпа invites viewers to immerse themselves in an atmospheric visual environment replete with cultural and historical references to themes such as fear, displacement, homelands, exile, oppression, power, violence, and death; themes that are as timely today as ever. The artful staging set in motion by *Chamber Piece* remains open to far more than just one conclusion.

“The works should always stay in motion—they should cause people to marvel, leave them feeling unsettled in a positive way.”

Katharina Fritsch / Alexej Koschkarow

The concept of *Zita – Ціпа*. *Chamber Piece* by Katharina Fritsch and Alexej Koschkarow was developed by the artists and realized in close collaboration with Schaulager.

Concept: Katharina Fritsch and Alexej Koschkarow

Lead: Heidi Naef

Exhibitions Office: Marie-Louise Eliopoulos

Publications: Isabel Friedli, Anna Francke, Julia Keller, and Martina Venanzoni

Research: Jasmin Sumpf, Lea Brun, and Stephan E. Hauser

Exhibition Planning and Construction: Yvo Hartmann, Christoph Kym, and Regula Schweizer

Art Handling: Yvo Hartmann with Esther Hiepler and Sonja Feldmeier

Registrar: Charlotte Gutzwiller

Conservation: Marcus Broecker

Technician: Christoph Kym

Communications: Catherine Schott

Accompanying Program: Jasmin Sumpf

Art Education: Andreas Blättler and team

Personnel and Finances: Edith Rickenbacher

Administration: Gabriella Brancher and Svenja Gammenthaler

Exhibition Guide: Anna Francke, Isabel Friedli

Translation: Julia Thorson

Design: pitschmann. Kommunikation, Basel

Print: Steudler Press, Basel

The artistic exchange between Katharina Fritsch and Alexej Koschkarow began in the 1990s. After two years at the Academy of Fine Arts in Minsk, Koschkarow studied until 1999 at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf—where Fritsch, still today a resident of this city, completed her education in the 1970s. At Fritsch’s invitation they presented their works together for the first time in 1999 at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf. In 2012 the artists repeated their interplay in a Düsseldorf gallery. Now in their third and closest collaboration at Schaulager, the artists again remain true to the principle of showing individually created pieces. The works that come together in the installation were produced independently of one another in the studio and appear as autonomous artistic positions.

“The starting point for my artistic work is always something that can be seen, never something literary. I always proceed from my own eyes—I do not go over and read a book first.” Katharina Fritsch

“The studio is a vast terrain of freedom where things can be approached and engaged in a playful way.” Katharina Fritsch / Alexej Koschkarow

Nevertheless, the concept of *Zita – Ціпа*, the coordination of the individual works, and their elaborate execution are based on an intensive ongoing exchange. The artists are interested in the tension between their distinctive working methods. Fritsch’s objects come across as a coherent whole and are immediately recognizable, while the immersion in Koschkarow’s works takes more time due to their multipartite nature. From the idea to the execution, the works of both artists arise in constant confrontation with questions of material, form, and color—a differentiated creative process characterized by the precise deployment of elaborate artistic techniques.

“We work with contemporary materials, with materials available in this day and age. That includes 3-D printing as well as bronze casting. Many things coexist side by side. Artistic work brings a multitude of things together like no other kind of work.” Katharina Fritsch / Alexej Koschkarow

CENTRAL ROOM

As the largest of the three spaces, the middle room is shared by both artists while the side chambers are each devoted to monographic presentations. The group of figures *Puppen* (Dolls, 2016) by Katharina Fritsch assumes a luminous presence in the central room with an intense shade of yellow: two women, one holding a broom, the other with a hand towel thrown over her arm, in front of them a girl with a ball, all three dressed like peasants in billowing skirts. Their faces are empty, their bearing one of introversion. The proportions and the round volumes are taken from a specific model: small corn-husk dolls produced in Eastern Europe, typically as souvenirs or nativity figures. In an elaborate working process, Fritsch has enlarged them and reduced them to the essentials. Converted to monochrome plasticity, any intimation of organic character gives way to an artificial presence. Through their specific attributes—aprons, headscarves, and utensils—the figures open up a context evoking traditional, rural, and domestic realms.

“Art can do something that nothing else can—the artistic work in the studio, the non-alienated kind, involves a great deal of technical handicraft, but does not get stuck on craftsmanship or perfection—what matters is that it works and that it’s right as a whole; at the point where it works, that’s where you have to stop.” — “On top of that, there’s the belief in the work. What I create can stand alone, taking on a life of its own. This is the act of creativity—making something that can lead an independent existence. That speaks for itself.” Katharina Fritsch

Diagonally opposite is Alexej Koschkarow’s ceramic sculpture *Kalter Ofen* (Cold Oven, 2016), modeled in equal measure on a cozy tiled stove and an exploding hand grenade. Like a lenticular image, both identities are simultaneously perceivable even though the associated functions have been negated.

Through the opened door of the stove, a smoldering fire can be made out underneath the black, charred logs, but without generating any warmth, just as the grenade’s explosion is flash-frozen in white glazed ceramic and does not continue its outward trajectory. Its fury and force are ossified in radiating beams, recalling depictions in comics, and the ascending crown of flames likewise stands still. Heat and cold—like the chills accompanying high fever—are simultaneously palpable. Imminent danger seems averted—but perhaps the threat has merely become the norm, now that war-making has penetrated the domestic ambiance and taken root here.

LEFT ROOM

Off to the left, a narrow door opening leads to the smallest of the chambers. The sculpture *Sarg* (Coffin, 2016) by Katharina Fritsch occupies the space. Though instantly identifiable as an object with a specific function, the prototypical simplification causes it to be perceived first and foremost as a constructivist object made of geometric forms and monochrome planes of color, with its meaning receding in importance. Depending on the angle of view, the work standing on eight “legs” resembles a spider, or—in the most extreme reduction—it could be a jewel with facets accentuated by its artful cut. Through the concentration on the essentials, the deep blue of the casket and the bright orange of the trestles take on even greater intensity. The non-textured surfaces are matte without any reflection, as is typical of Fritsch’s sculptures. The intensive contrast of colors could hardly be more different from the heaviness usually associated with a coffin and from black as the color of mourning. As a *Dingsymbol*, or symbolic thing, a coffin is the embodiment of death with all its connotations. Filling the entire room with its presence, it calls to mind the custom of a wake. At the same time, laid out bare and stripped of ceremonial context, death is also inverted into something comforting and cheerful. Remarkably present yet materially removed, Fritsch has created a work full of explosive force, which is unleashed in the intimate setting of the *Chamber Piece*.

“I think in images and implement them in my art. When standing in front of a finished work, I find myself surprised at how the image has materialized.” Alexej Koschkarow

“My works all emerge from a mood.” Katharina Fritsch

RIGHT ROOM

Change of scenery in the room opposite: here Alexej Koschkarow has created a setting of bleak gloom. In the manner of an eclectic architectural model, the sculpture *Das was keinen Namen hat* (Which Has No Name, 2016) is composed of several, in fact incompatible elements. A massive bunker with embrasures forms the central structure with an opening that recalls the gaping maw of a rearing cobra, for example. Compared to this “upper body”—interpreting the sculpture as an animated creature—the foundation comes across as downright playful with a spiral-shaped shaft and two intertwined staircases. As the crowning element above, athletic females stand in a heroic pose with almost masculine facial features, clad in nothing but martial steel helmets. Armed with sticks and orbs, they are accompanied by fierce dogs ready to pounce—or fetch the sticks of their mistresses. As an ambiguous personification, albeit one trivialized to the status of a pin-up, the he-women embody a type of female that could hardly be more opposed to the domestic, motherly image of the corn-husk dolls. Finally, the rear of the bunker is designed as an abstracted building façade and lends the sculpture its second “face.” Following the montage principle, contrasting architectural set pieces—triumphal arch, staircase, fortification—are brought together. The individual elements are divested of their former contextual meaning, but retain their charged symbolism.

In *Shtetl* (Shtetl, 2012), constructed from countless small pieces of wood, two dense rings of houses line a central town square. The rural impression is reinforced by the title with its reference to a historic type of Jewish settlement, the shtetl. Prevalent throughout Eastern Europe for centuries, these traditional Jewish village communities came to an abrupt end amidst the horrors of the Second World War. Yet long before then, the shtetl had found its way into literature and art as the—occasionally idealized—epitome of a real and true way of life. With the ax prominently placed in the center of the village, Alexej Koschkarow gives these ambivalences a compelling form in his sculpture. With the simple, yet very precisely deployed material—having reused wood from the floor of his studio in a Hasidic neighborhood of Brooklyn—he also establishes a link to Jewish emigration to the USA. The four unstable-looking, bent legs that support the model village give it the appearance of a limping and stooped figure or a long-legged insect.

The sculptures are bordered on both sides by graphite frottage works on large-format canvases. Referring to these works as “smearings,” the artist uses a rubbing technique to transfer the surfaces of architectural elements, such as doors or façade sections, as well as publicly accessible sculptures onto canvas in original scale. Converted into two-dimensionality, the rubbings show dusky, shadow-like forms. The eagle motif of *Bellevue* (2014) is taken from stone sculptures in New York. Hung opposite is the upright-format *Höllentor* (Gates of Hell, 2012). The title recalls Auguste Rodin’s somber bronze work *The Gates of Hell* (1880–1917), but the rubbing is actually from the doorway of a historic building in New York. With the smearings, Koschkarow blurs clear-cut categorizations and sharpens the viewer’s eye for the overtones associated with a motif.

“I deliberately made the smearings somewhat inexact—the contours could be much more precise, of course. They should appear fleeting, like a breath on a surface.” Alexej Koschkarow

As the “king of the skies,” the eagle is a symbol of power and has been used since antiquity as a state emblem and heraldic beast, from the German imperial eagle up to contemporary variations. The doubling in the two canvases tilted towards one another suggests a connection to the double-headed eagle of Austria-Hungary or the recently reintroduced coat of arms of the Russian Federation.

ZITA-ЦАРА

CHAMBER PIECE BY
KATHARINA FRITSCH AND ALEXEJ KOSCHKAROW

12 JUNE – 2 OCTOBER 2016

Opening Hours

Thursday 1–7 p.m.

Friday–Sunday 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.

During Art Basel

Monday, June 13 to Saturday,

June 18, 10 a.m. – 8 p.m.

Sunday, June 19, 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Admission is free

Accompanying Program

An artists' conversation between Katharina Fritsch and Alexej Koschkarow will take place at Schaulager. A program of talks, lectures, and performances will focus both on historical themes raised by *Zita – Цара* and on questions of artistic staging and creation arising from the presentation. The full program will be published online at www.schaulager.org.

Short Tours

German: Thursdays at 6 p.m.

Sundays at 11.30 a.m., Fridays at 12.30 p.m.

(every second Friday)

English/French (alternately):

Sundays at 4 p.m., Fridays at 12.30 p.m.

(every second Friday)

Public guided tours are free of charge

Registration required at www.schaulager.org

or tours@schaulager.org

Private guided tours by arrangement

Events for Schools and Universities

Contact and registration at www.schaulager.org

or kunstvermittlung@schaulager.org

Publication

Catalog, published by Laurenz Foundation,

Schaulager, contributions by Jacqueline

Burckhardt, Robert Fleck, Julian Heynen, and

Michael Rooks, 168 pages, approx. 160 full-

color illustrations; bilingual German / English,

28 CHF

SCHAULAGER[®]

LAURENZ FOUNDATION

Ruchfeldstrasse 19, CH-4142 Münchenstein/Basel, T +41 61 335 32 32, www.schaulager.org