

Like the Laboratory Nature

In observing the works Christiane Haase has created since 1998, the diversity of media is what might strike us first: knitted and pullover objects she found were arranged into wall installations, then figures in bronze and wax followed, then a series of wool objects and diverse works in polyurethane, followed by a group of works in room-filling paper maché and finally the newest ceramics. Typical for this in a double sense materially remarkable abundance is the use of traditional and contemporary working materials and the close relationship of the individual objects to sculpture in an extended way. Furthermore, the artist seems to be fascinated by those classical phenomena of aesthetics that – beginning with the artwork – show general dichotomies or even basic opposites like nature and culture, art and design, idea and material, content and form, surface and volume, shell and body, beauty and functionality. Her works are certainly exemplary for the cross-over evident in contemporary art, which perhaps is due to Haase's studies, since she shifted from architecture to art with a tendency towards product design. Above all, however, the artist is involved in the everlasting Pygmalion problem of the transformation of inorganic matter into organic matter and – though much less often – the reciprocal principle of the transition of the transient into the permanent, whereby the revival of material by form is less important to Haase. Instead of material aesthetics, she seems to put more emphasis on the newest laboratory equipment and to have made great progress towards evoking an artificial-artistic nature. For her early installation *verstrickt* (entangled) (1998), many pullovers were robbed of their actual function, pulled over flat polyurethane forms and put up on the walls. From a sculptural standpoint, only the shells of the respective living bodies are of interest, which can now only serve as simple outer-surfaces or, at best, reliefs. The work title and the connected configuration of the differently coloured and also used pullovers bring forth associations about the many forms of human communication and relationships. As parts of the interactive installation *Rollanleitung für Pulloverwesen* (Rolling Instructions for Pullover Beings) (1999), the aforementioned pieces of clothing were used as free objects that – by using the instructions of the artist – could not only be formed in many different ways, but apparently could also be brought to life. In the following, location oriented work, *Heat* (2000), not only what was on the inside was turned out to the outside. It seems almost loving, the way the artist wraps the heating pipes in pieces of pullovers, and in this reciprocal way warms the warming metal pipes. Not only was the technical apparatus helped to fulfil its function; it was also treated as an organism.



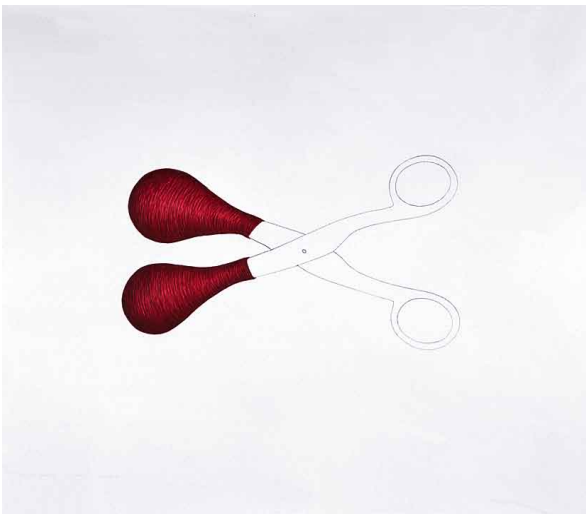
verstrickt (entangled), 1998/99, second hand sweaters, ca. 3,50 x 10 m



Die Hüterinnen (Fundstücke), 1999, bronze, ca. 20 x 5 x 20 cm

In contrast, the bronze *Hüterinnen* (Fundstücke) (Watchwomen >Found Objects<), (1999), are meant to continue to fulfil their original purpose. However, Haase doesn't want to recognize it as the simple act of opening and closing. The bubble shaped, seemingly organic growths make the objects, otherwise readily recognizable as keys, not only look like evolutionary predecessors of today's instruments, but they also seem to be alive. With the title she has given this multicomponent sculpture, the artist seems to be presenting prehistoric specimens of a particular kind – and with that living beings. The poured – and therefore explicitly crafted – material is a contradiction. At the same time, bronze was not chosen as an academic sculptural material, but rather it obviously corresponds to the metal of the keys, which can even be moved. If these opened doors normally lead into rooms of reality and to a certain extent of memory, then Haase's *Hüterinnen* could be seen as being associative in themselves. The drawings grouped together under the title *Wollungen* (Woolings) preceded the installation o.T. (mit Wolle) (untitled >with wool<) (both 2000). Diverse objects and figures are conceived and accordingly clearly sketched like prototypes. In contrast, the intended *Wollungen* already appear in colour on paper, with very formative lighting and inner structure. With her work o.T. (mit Wolle), Christiane Haase is most clearly recognisable as a sculp-

tor. At the same time, she would be just as convincing as a designer, although as a more or less anti-utilitarian one. Her sense for balancing formal opposites – if one will, for the ponderation – becomes clear by her wrapping of hard corners and edges to make soft and cone-shaped forms. The fact that in the end the most diverse dangers of injury are sensitively and still effectively to be avoided this way is signalled by the *Wollungen* in the form of an oversized blood-red drop, drawn to describe its outer appearance. However, the group of works *Stein-Zeit* (Stone Age) (2001) refers to apparently historically important tools. Again, the artist addresses only purposeful, but now abstract forms: She promotes the grip or handle to the rank of an independent sculpture. That is reminiscent of Brancusi, who exhibited a few of his wooden pedestals in 1926 as autonomous sculptures in New York, freeing them of their service function. In addition, he transcended their material, which was deemed as being inferior, by placing some of the pedestals on podia, actually delivering them into a spatially higher sphere. Christiane Haase now leaves the field of classic sculpture, but she extracts vital parts of commodities. She pours them in bright red polyurethane and allows these forms, just as simple as they are artistic, to compete with the natural stone, which, on the one hand refers to the pre-historic handgrip as the predecessor of the modern, ergonomic rubber handle. On the other hand, the raw stone splinters as the waste product of a sculpture symposium show the traditionally preferred material for sculptures, with which the colourful polyurethane sculptures effortlessly unify themselves on equal terms.



Wollungen, one of 12, 2000, pencil and water colour on paper, 21 x 26 cm

without title (with wool), 2000, table, wool, 1,5 x 0,75 x 1 m

Stein-Zeit, 2001, sandstone, polyurethane, each ca. 15 - 20 cm long



The following Alien Tools were further specified in the title as *Werkzeuge für ungeahnte Aufgaben* (Tools for unexpected tasks) (2003). These tools, also in green, blue and flesh coloured polyurethane, complete a comprehensive group of works, to which – next to two convolutes of bizarre drawings (*Alien Tools*, 2001 and *Alien Tools I-III*, 2003) – the filigree and yet room-filling wall installation *Alien Invasion* (2001/2005) also belongs. Its single, arabesque and colourful paper objects are mutants and usually recognisable as the utensils such as scissors, massage balls and shower heads, which they meant to be. In their seemingly flowing, energetic outlines but still in systematic formations, they are reminiscent of decorative interior designs of (Japanised) art nouveau, and so it's not surprising that the artist incorporated her impressions as a "foreigner" during her stay in Asia into these "alien tools". Although the Alien Tools with the model number A.T. 170-2 etc. are also not formally axial symmetric, they do prove to be strictly composed – or styled – objects. Sealed in their packaging, which supplies function search instructions on the reverse side, they were not only on sale as "tools" on the art market but also, appropriately enough, in hardware stores.

The event *Alien Tool goes Public* (2005) may have primarily confused and perhaps even irritated today's fast-paced consumers and users. But maybe one or the other potential buyer rediscovered his repressed sense of aesthetics and beauty of certain everyday objects – and also of the *Alien Tools*.

While the artist's work and work processes had been clearly structured and very directed until then, she undertook the contrasting attempt to model more spontaneously, automatically and more unconsciously with *Kontrollverluste* (Losses of Control) (2005). Accordingly, the irregularly curved paper maché figures look like flickering, soft and formable masses. Their coloured, sanded surfaces appear monochrome, but still restless, and the effect of a perhaps even porous membrane is enhanced by many objects, diverse in form and material, that are fixed to the voluminous basic bodies. Thus, without a microscope, one feels able to detect what Ernst Haeckel once referred to as a "Plasma soul". As a pantheist, he believed that the entire cosmos was alive, which he tried to illustrate with his popular science charts of the *Kunstformen der Natur* (Art Forms of Nature) (1899–1904). On the other hand, Christiane Haase created Nature Forms of Art with her *Kontrollverluste* and even more so with her newest ceramics, *Parasit* (Parasite), *Der Ahne* (Ancestor), *Die Versuchung* (The Temptation) and *Vertrauen* (Trust) (2006). At first glance, the *Versuchung* seems to be similar in form and to a certain extent in colour to Haeckel's famous Discomedusae/Disc jellyfish. But the tentacles of the artificial creature remind us more of worms or intestines, teeth and the backbone of vertebrates, whereby the docked-on form of the upper part is more similar to the stations of a space shuttle. Thus one could think that the artist had helped herself to some isolated cells and tissue in special laboratories, but had then decided not to use them in a gene technological way. Although the *Parasit* is even partly covered with artificial fur, it is not an organic or soft sculpture, but rather a work made of fired and glazed clay. Colourful, shiny ceramic is quite strongly associated with arts and crafts tradition. Particularly the nature aesthetics Haeckel propagated found practical application in the design of lamps, small furniture and other commodities of the period. But also the perhaps more likely comparison to Henry van de Velde, because of the material, is not valid because the forms that Haase presents to the observer are simply not entirely beautiful and good, and are certainly not useful objects. Exactly that is what makes the artist's choice of material so extraordinarily convincing. The immanent contradiction and suspense of the form, colour and material of her ceramics keeps the abstract figures not only from slipping into being decorative. In this way, the most varied imagined images and associations are set free, which are further enhanced by the work titles and the presentation of the "deformities" in an installation. Accordingly, the *Ahne*, anchored to the wall with its mussel-like, many-armed parts, might be able to reproduce itself, or it might hook itself onto a host with its upper left growth, in order to even mutate to a parasite. Its heart-shaped form is distantly reminiscent of Frank Stella's *To Wilhelmine von Zenge*, Chemnitz, September 5, 1800, 8 A.M. (LL#7) from the Heinrich von Kleist series (1993). However, the aluminium of Stella's poured and collaged, sharp-edged parts, sprayed in industrial colours shows the artistic-technical work process from the very beginning, whereas the organic forms and often the (flesh-) colours of Haase's figures appear to be more biomorphic. Only the combination of their segments has a disquieting and unsettling effect, and this time, one cannot explain it away by referring to aliens. Perhaps, however, we can be comforted by the thought that *Die Versuchung* and certainly *Vertrauen*, which is so worthy of sympathy not only because of its form but also because of the movement suggested, incorporate very human qualities, moods or feelings – and are therefore very familiar to us.

Silke Opitz