

Zita – Ціпа

Chamber Piece by Katharina Fritsch and Alexej Koschkarow

12 June to 2 October 2016

PRESS RELEASE

Katharina Fritsch (*1956 Essen, Germany) and Alexej Koschkarow (*1972 Minsk, Belarus), working in close collaboration, have developed *Zita – Ціпа*, a complex installation, which is now to be presented to the public for the first time at Schaulager. The two artists have created new sculptures and drawings, which inhabit an atmospheric, stagelike space that is further enriched by a multitude of references and narratives.

Katharina Fritsch's iconic, monochrome sculptures have attracted international attention since the late 1980s and she has long been one of the most important artists of her generation. Her motifs are generally everyday, stereotypical figures, whose familiar forms and semantic content she undermines by manipulating proportions, materials and colors, which in turn open up new levels of meaning. One of Fritsch's best known works is *Rattenkönig (Rat-King)*, 1993: permanently installed at Schaulager this piece consists of sixteen huge black rats with interknotted tails. Shifts in meaning and ambiguity are also central to the artistic work of Alexej Koschkarow, who studied at the art academies in Minsk and Düsseldorf. With their characteristic combinations of historical subjects, myths, and contemporary cultural motifs his works explore themes such as the alien and the wondrous. Koschkarow particularly caused a stir with *Befruchtung von Hecken (Insemination of Hedges)*, 1999, and *Beutekunst (Looted Art)*, 2005, – cryptic sculptural works that humorously segue between fictive narration and pseudo documentation. Both Fritsch and Koschkarow engage in differentiated creative processes involving sophisticated artistic techniques that are deployed with immense precision.

The presentation at Schaulager marks the first time that Fritsch and Koschkarow have realized a project together, as opposed to exhibiting together, which they have done on two occasions in the past. Drawing on their wide experience of creating dramatic scenarios the two artists, working in close collaboration, created a space for *Zita – Ціпа*, within which the individual items become part of a larger, over-arching mise-en-scène. The presentation thus becomes a multi-faceted, aesthetic experience for visitors.

Extending across three rooms, this chamber piece – which taps into theatrical practice in the concerted interaction and interplay of individual works – comprises seven sculptures and wall pieces, most of which have been specially made for this presentation.

A group of three female figures by Katharina Fritsch *Puppen (Dolls)*, 2016, in the central room is juxtaposed with Alexej Koschkarow's *Kalter Ofen (Cold Oven)*, 2016, which can be read either as a homely stove or an exploding hand grenade. In one of the adjoining rooms

Fritsch's *Sarg (Coffin)*, 2016, stands as a highly charged symbol that confronts the viewer with its powerful, complementary colors, oppressing and unsettling the latter with its unmistakable form and its sheer physical presence in this confined space.

In the other adjoining room Koschkarow's Janus-like sculpture, *Das was keinen Namen hat (Which Has No Name)*, 2016, which has the air of both a Soviet war memorial and a triumphal arch, meets *Schtetl (Shtetl)*, 2012, which the artist made from wood taken from the parquet floor of his studio in Brooklyn. This sculpture takes the form of a model of a Jewish settlement, which is neatly arranged around a circular village green. But, far from being an idyllic community, this locale is bereft of human beings and in its center an iron axe in a tree stump suggests that this is also a "gallows green" of sorts. The "smearings" *Bellevue*, 2014, and *Höllentor (Gates of Hell)*, 2012, by Koschkarow depict signs and ornaments on buildings and sculptures in public spaces. In these hand-done rubbings the artist transfers a three-dimensional sculpture onto a two-dimensional picture carrier. The detachment of these motifs from their architectural context radically changes their meanings and impact.

In this configuration the works of Fritsch and Koschkarow form an atmospheric image replete with cultural and historical references to themes such as displacement, homelands, exile, oppression, power, fear, violence, and death. The two names in the title, Zita and Шчара (Shchara) call to mind aspects of European history connected to the complex political and social conflicts that played into both the causes and the consequences of both World Wars. Zita of Bourbon-Parma, the consort of Emperor Karl I, was the last Empress of Austria. Following the demise of the Habsburg monarchy in 1918, she spent the rest of her life in exile. The River Shchara in Belarus was an important line of defense in both World Wars.

The themes in this presentation, which were the impulse and incentive for Fritsch and Koschkarow to create *Zita – Шчара*, are informed not only by historical facts and diverse memories but also by the artists' own personal experiences and narratives. The artistry of the staging of this chamber piece sets in motion an interaction between the various works and themes that is open to far more than just one conclusion.

The concept for this project was developed by the artists and realized in close collaboration with the team at Schaulager, led by Heidi Naef, Senior Curator.

Publication

Zita – Шчара is accompanied by a catalog developed in close collaboration with the artists and published by the Laurenz Foundation, Schaulager, ca. 160 full-color illustrations, bilingual German and English, 164 pages, 28 CHF

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