



**tom  
schmelzer  
works**

10/2014  
[www.tomschmelzer.com](http://www.tomschmelzer.com)



i  
| you cannot bore someone into loving art

ii  
| conventional painting is outdated

iii  
| art should not be self-centered

iv  
| if you want to express your angst through your art,  
see your therapist

v  
| choose the media that fits the purpose best –  
every single time

vi  
| establishing yourself as a brand is artistic suicide

vii  
| there are five steps to contentment:  
originality, distinctiveness, power, workmanship, emotion

viii  
| the market is illiterate when it comes to integrity

ix  
| lead! don't follow

x  
| look closer



**life i gave for luxury**

object

silver | gold | platinum, paper, cardboard, felt, embossing

ring size 60, box 12 x 12 x 2,5 cm; edition of 9 silver rings, 9 gold rings, 9 platinum rings  
2007

up to world war II people who gave their valuables to the state to finance the war would get in return a simple iron ring stating: „GOLD I GAVE FOR IRON“. today saturated westerners give their money to certain brands and individuals in order to get „luxury“ in return: they spend it on useless items, to stand out from the crowd. with the risk of thereby loosing the only item of value they really possess: their lives. they race cars and boats, eat rich food, use drugs, drink excessively. if you buy this ring, you get yourself some useless piece of limited luxurious art. to show off and briefly enjoy. yet when worn the sharp edges of the quote: „LIFE I GAVE FOR LUXURY“ will constantly hurt and remind you of the downside of inane behavior.

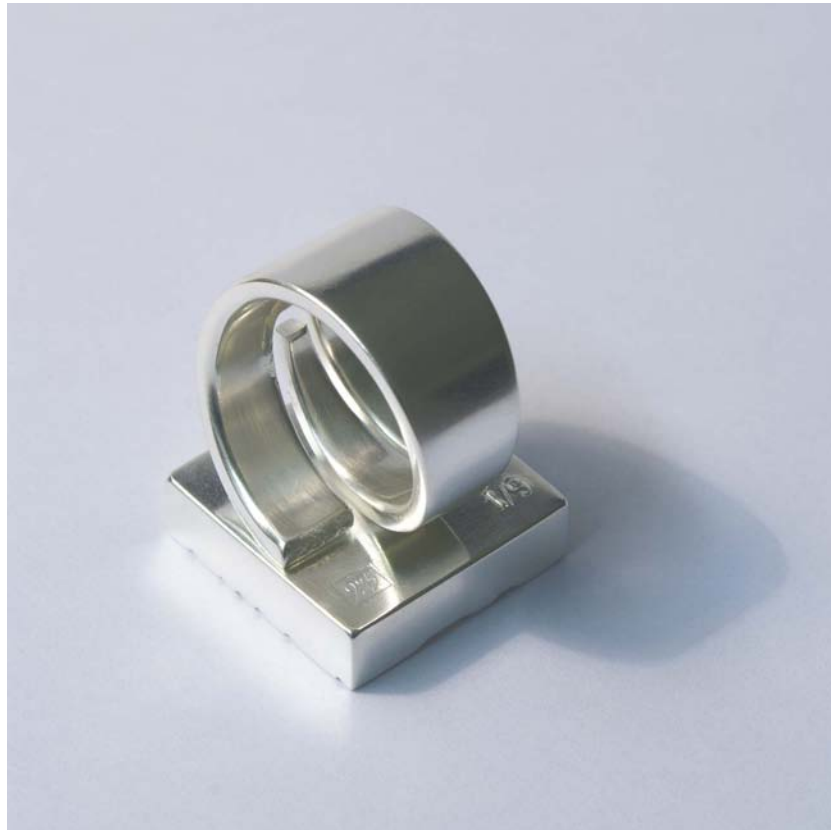


**schoen ist nicht das mass**  
*beautiful is not the measure*

ring  
925 silver (45 gr.)  
approx. 21 x 21 x 28 mm  
size variable  
2013

edition of 9 + 3 a/p

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**life is a killer**

ring  
925 silver (45 gr.)  
approx. 21 x 21 x 28 mm  
size variable  
2014

edition of 9 + 3 a/p



**la danse**  
**or controlled flight into terrain (CFIT)**  
installation

pearls (1.400 g), gold, silver, brass, steel, glass, synthetics, motor  
approx. 33 x ø 25 cm (machine), 90 x 25 x 25 cm (stand)  
2010

the rotation of the machine grinds down the pearls, slowly turning them to dust.



**la danse**  
or **controlled flight into terrain (CFIT)**  
detail





**la danse**  
or **controlled flight into terrain (CFIT)**  
detail



**scarab hat**  
**or the pleasure of your company is requested**

wearable sculpture

140 scarabaeus sacer (holy roller, dung beetle), wood, brass, felt, steel, rubber, viscose  
approx. 195 x Ø 65 cm  
2010

the scarab hat is an antipode to alexander mcqueen's butterfly hat (spring 2008).  
it marks the end of the noughties with its splendor and flightiness, its neocons and megalomaniacs,  
its butterfly paintings and art market-bubbles. it is a reminder. yet we are rolling on.



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**homo bulla or the sacred baboon**

installation

baboon, carpet, cope, alb, miter, bishop's necklace, bubble machine

approx. 500 x 90 x 140 cm

2009-14

"sorry darwin." on september 14, 2008 the following statement was released by the archbishop of canterbury: "charles darwin: 200 years from your birth, the church of england owes you an apology for misunderstanding you." this kneeling down before evolution is late, brave – and inevitable. many more are to follow.

the sacred baboon in the installation, a primate like homo sapiens, is commenting on the haughtiness and the superiority-claim of the human species in general and its faiths in particular. walking down an ecclesiastical carpet the sacred baboon is dragging a cope, wearing a miter and carrying a device that makes bubbles.

the bubbles are referring to the baroque and a then well-known symbol called homo bulla (man is like a bubble) – which is a sign of fugacity, a vanitas-motive, a memento mori ("remember that you are mortal"). usually shown as a putto holding a bubble, this sign stands for the vulnerability and brevity of our life.

appendix: evolution does not care whether you are a human, an ape or an ant. evolution just happens: without direction, uncontrolled and aimless. it has been as such for billions of years and will continue long after our times. the few-thousand year span of the human species is but a fleeting moment in time – and definitely insignificant in any universal reference system. sorry humans.



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**homo bulla or the sacred baboon**  
detail



**homo bulla or the sacred baboon**  
bubble machine





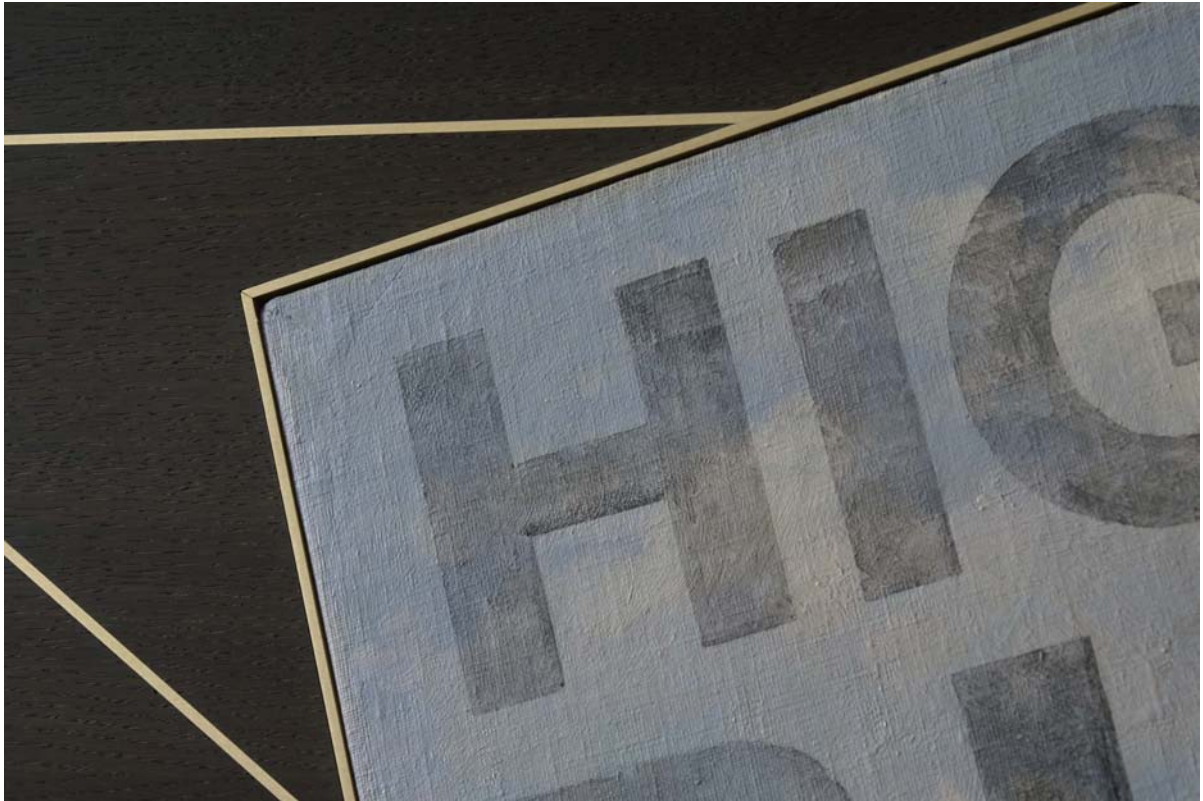
**after all**  
wallpiece

oil on canvas, acrylic, smoked oak, brass, mdf, fluorescent paint  
approx. 169 x 161 x 5 cm; 44 kg  
2014



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approx. 169 x 161 x 5 cm; 44 kg  
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oil on canvas, acrylic, smoked oak, brass, mdf, fluorescent paint  
approx. 169 x 161 x 5 cm; 44 kg  
2014



**paramount**  
wallpiece

oil on canvas, swarovski crystals, walnut, brass, mdf, fluorescent paint  
approx. 120 x 100 x 5 cm; 17 kg  
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**are we dating?**

codpiece

embossed engraved aeruginous copper, leather (horse, lamb), horn  
metal approx. 20 x 17 x 8 cm

2011

a codpiece (from middle english: cod, meaning 'scrotum')\* is a male genital covering that attaches to the front of the crotch to accentuate the area. it is held by string, buttons, or other methods. codpieces were important items of european clothing in the 15th and 16th centuries.

this is a modern interpretation. a crutch to overcome one's inferiority complex. a potent prostheses for those in need. the object anticipates the perception future historians/archeologists will have of our era.

\*also braguette, bragetto, brayette, prallbeutel, gliedschirm or schamkapsel



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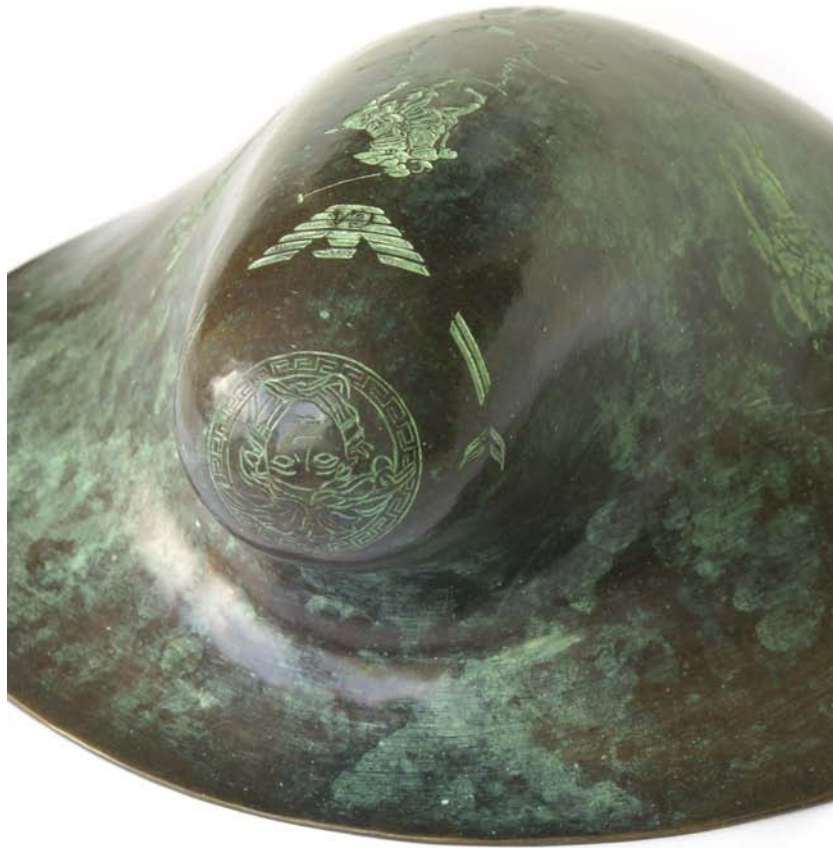
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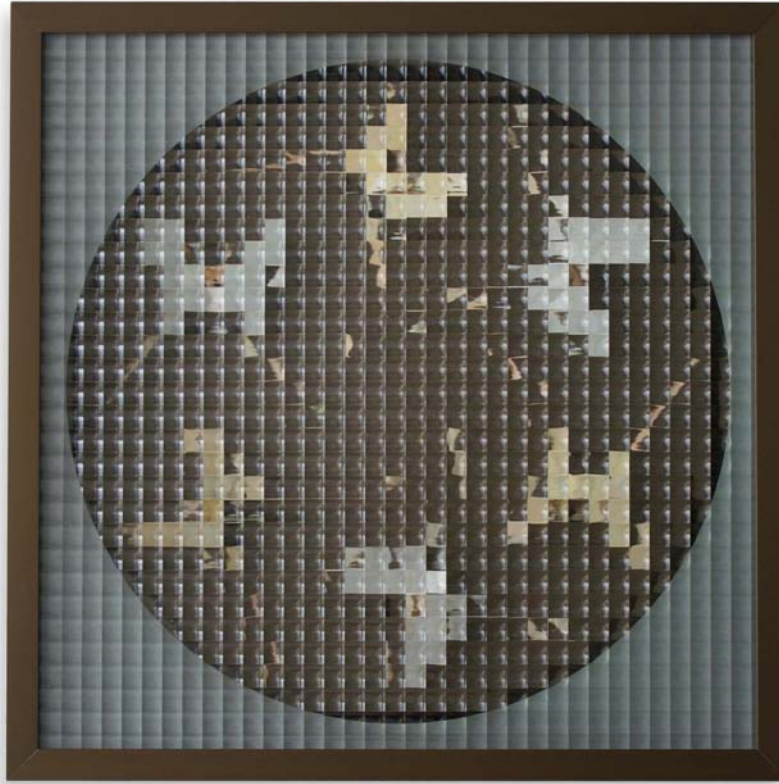
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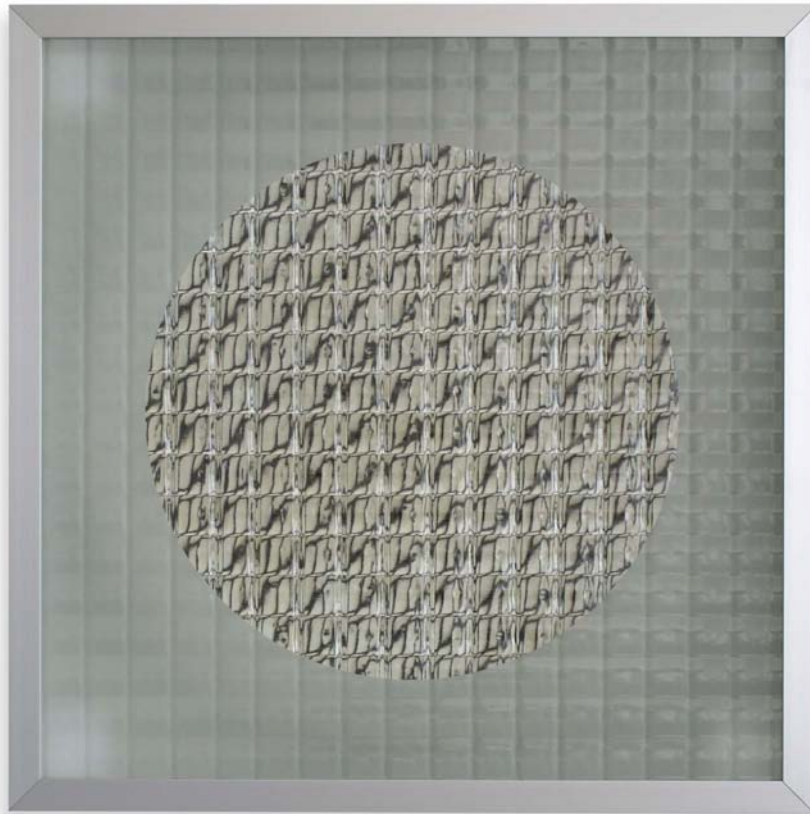
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**yolo (you only live once)**  
animated sculpture  
mirror, motor, wood, aluminum, steel  
approx. ø 50 cm, depth 23 cm  
2014



**it's like that, but different**  
animated sculpture / pixel-box  
butterflies (actias dubernardi, china, south gangsu, wenxia shangdonshan, 2600 m, 16.10.2011),  
wood, sandblasted glass, aluminum, steel, magnets, motor  
approx. 48 x 48 x 21 cm  
2014



**don't forget to be awesome**  
animated sculpture / vertigo-box  
wood, sandblasted glass, aluminum, magnets, motor  
approx. 48 x 48 x 18 cm  
**2014**



**today is tomorrow's yesterday**

animated sculpture / drop-box

wood, sandblasted glass, aluminum, steel, magnets, motor

approx. 48 x 48 x 21 cm

2014



**am i a hostage of my comfort zone?**

objects no. II und IV

insects, insect boxes, insect pins, acrylic glas, sandblasted glas, vinyl lettering  
approx. 51 x 42 x 8 cm (each box)

2011



**am i a hostage of my comfort zone?**

object no. II

insect, insect box, insect pins, acrylic glas, sandblasted glas, vinyl lettering

approx. 51 x 42 x 8 cm

2011



**am i a hostage of my comfort zone?**

object no. IV

insect, insect box, insect pins, acrylic glas, sandblasted glas, vinyl lettering

approx. 51 x 42 x 8 cm

2011





**ready for everything**  
wall-sculpture  
thermoformed plexiglas® reflections gold, brass, felt  
approx. 52 x 42 x 1 cm  
2014

## **cv tom schmelzer**

lives and works in munich and berlin

### **education**

munich art school  
medical school oxford/toronto  
philosophy, lmu munich

### **grants, prizes, scholarships**

german national academic foundation  
dr. arthur pfungst-foundation  
semifinalist search for art  
city of ebersberg art award  
silverfish art award

### **exhibitions**

haus der kunst, munich  
german historic museum, berlin  
german museum, munich  
foreign office, berlin

like the spice gallery, new york  
riviera gallery, new york  
dechiara/stewart, new york  
jozsa gallery, brussels  
white trash contemporary, hamburg  
feinkunst krüger, hamburg  
art claims impulse, berlin  
hunchentoot gallery, berlin  
galerie jaspers, munich

various galleries and art institutions

### **gallery representations**

berlin – [www.art-claims-impulse.com](http://www.art-claims-impulse.com)  
hamburg – [www.whitetrashcontemporary.com](http://www.whitetrashcontemporary.com)  
munich – [www.galerie-jaspers.de](http://www.galerie-jaspers.de)  
new york – [www.step1art.com](http://www.step1art.com)

### **art fairs**

scope, miami (repeatedly)  
bridge, new york  
india art fair, new delhi  
preview, berlin  
tease, cologne

### **collections**

collection debbie august, new york, usa  
collection galila barzilai-hollander, brussels, belgium  
collection edward cella, california, usa  
collection luc freché, bruxelles, belgium  
collection jean-marie gille, bruxelles, belgium  
pabst collection, munich, germany  
collection egon fruhstorfer, zwiesel, germany

[www.tomschmelzer.com](http://www.tomschmelzer.com)

Klaus Speidel

**Conceptual art and *Moralism* in 2007:  
On continuity in Tom Schmelzer's work**

*“Les fables ne sont pas ce qu’elles semblent être ;  
Le plus simple animal nous y tient lieu de maître.  
Une morale nue apporte de l’ennui :  
Le conte fait passer le précepte avec lui.  
En ces sortes de feinte il faut instruire et plaire,  
Et conter pour conter me semble peu d’affaire.”  
(Jean de La Fontaine, Le pâtre et le lion) (1)*

A short look at his work may deceive us into believing that Tom Schmelzer's work falls into different groups or series, which are in themselves coherent but have little to do with one another. It seems difficult to speak of a personal style. However, a closer look reveals that there are not only recurrent subjects holding together Schmelzer's work, but, more interestingly, procedures and methodological devices, as well as an approach to art with theoretical foundations in the XVII century.

There is a tension between Schmelzer's declaration that we do not have to like his works and the fact that he creates works that have an extraordinary aesthetic appeal. In a recent interview, he affirms that he is a "concept artist" and underlines that his works "must", quite simply, "make a point" (2). But when we look at them, it is clear that we are *beautifully* far away from the aesthetic neutrality of traditional conceptual art (3). The tension between his statements and the *sexiness* of his creations does not necessarily lead to a contradiction incapable of solution. By showing why it does not, we will make his position in conceptual art clearer. I believe that his formal choice shows the artist's preoccupation with a question that conceptual artists are not always worried about: How can conceptual art reach a public today?

Many conceptual art works of the sixties and seventies, even by such great artists as Sol Lewitt or Douglas Huebler, Victor Burgin or Joseph Kosuth, do not speak much to our generation. We respect what they did to free us of the domination of aesthetic form, but their works neither make our heads buzz, nor make our hearts beat faster anymore (4). From a conceptual point of view, the pinnacle of the first kind of conceptual art had been reached very fast.

Once several artists explicitly renounced to give form to the works which they described, the rejection of the aesthetic aspect of art had reached its peak. However, the quest for aesthetic neutrality went on long after artists like Weiner and Huebler had declared execution to be unnecessary for a work's existence. Artistically spoken, much of what came after that, following their path, remained unsatisfactory. Today, a witty statement in coloured neon on a gallery wall – even if it is not about itself – is not convincing art any more, conceptual or otherwise. Most artworks in neon are no better than the statements in shining letters that ornate our museum walls: they have no connection with the reality that starts behind the wall, if by chance that wall should be more of a boundary than those that divide art movements in a museum.

(1) Of fables judge not by their face; / They give the simplest brute a teacher's place. / Bare precepts were inert and tedious things / The story gives them life and wings. / But story for the story's sake / Were sorry business for the wise" (The Shepherd and the Lion, translation: Elizur Wright)

(2) Cf. Victoria Mayer, "High Concept Kitsch" (Interview), New York Arts Magazine, July/August 2007 (<http://www.nyartsmagazine.com>)

(3) The formal simplicity of a work like *hot spot*, a thermometer that "constantly shows 20 degrees more than there are" (all his works are shown and described on [www.tomschmelzer.com](http://www.tomschmelzer.com)), is rather exceptional.

(4) This is one of the clear results of the numerous discussions I had this year with young artists at the Villa Arson, (the artschool in Nice, France) while preparing an exhibition and a publication on concepts in art and philosophy (*L'exposition des idées*. See [www.klausspeidel.de](http://www.klausspeidel.de) for details).

And this is where Schmelzer's work is interestingly different: it is entirely grounded in our culture. Most of what we see in his exhibitions is familiar. The host of cards that greet us from another wall are pretty much like the ones we sometimes send or receive (5). Jesus looks like he always did since we first came across him as a little kid in the south of Germany. The beetle cases seem to come right from the museum of natural history and the porcelain might almost be my grandma's. Mimicking objects that are tied to them, all these works are comfortably linked to social practices that exist outside the gallery. In most cases, the reference outside the artworld is much more obvious than the place the works want to occupy in it. But that is exactly what makes them valuable. Inside the artworld, Stephen Kaltenbach and Marcel Broodthaers are the spiritual fathers of such an approach. The reason why, for example, Kaltenbach's *Art Works* (1969) still works is that it is deeply rooted in a part of our memorial culture. And Schmelzer's *god less america* (2006), a piece as simple as it is brilliant, is great because it is rooted in daily culture, i.e. it is somehow unfussy. Don't things fall down all the time? It re-enacts a common event and is therefore more than a statement. A comparison will make this clearer: A more radical conceptual artist – call him C.A. – wanting “to express the same thought” would have typed the sentence, and then cross out the obsolete letter. It might seem like this was conceptually the same. But it is not. Being little more than an apercu, the elimination of the letter b could maybe be seen as an act that manifests the artists wit, but it also shows his lack of a host of other qualities. The brass letters are not “just a nice form given to a thought that is also presentable in itself”, as Karl Kraus once said. Schmelzer does not only state something on a gallery wall, he evokes a patriotic practice. Therefore *god less america* is no “statement”, but an installation. We not only read a sentence, we see a sentence with a specific context of occurrence. The context is that of an official building or the home of a fervent nationalist in America, the places where this type of inscription may indeed be found in this form. It is virtually in such a place that the letter fell down. Obviously Schmelzer's installation is more ambivalent and – if I dare say – poetic than the apercu of our an-aesthetic hardliner C.A.

And though it is static, T.S.'s work is profoundly theatrical. The “b” on the floor suggests a past event, i.e. something that happened. It reminds us of stories and movies where something that hangs on the wall quite significantly falls down, predicting a mischief to come or commenting on current events in the story. In a Monty Python movie, the fall of the “b” might indeed manifest God's reaction to a depicted episode. More gravely, we might also think of the earthquake following Jesus' death. These are the kind of familiar associations that Schmelzer's work mimics and exploits. Contrasting C.A.'s apercu, Schmelzer's work is a deep, poetic and dynamic installation that assumes that form is content. All this makes it a better work, conceptually and otherwise.

This leads us back to the tension noticed initially: I am indeed convinced that “to make a point” today, conceptual art must accept that our eyes and ears are more than necessary gateways for concepts. And more than that: it has to understand perception as something which may be conceptually enriching. This does not imply that it loses its specificity – as long as conceptual richness remains its main concern. Tom Schmelzer's work perfectly exemplifies this. And in not despising the senses, he does not despise the viewer.

In this sense, it is not a coincidence that Schmelzer chose the form of the greeting-card for one of his series. Schmelzer explicitly and consciously addresses a public, and sometimes he is even a bit didactic. Interestingly, the dislikeable facts he often communicates are never the first thing you see. Many of his works have a “breaking point”, a moment where something that was hidden becomes visible. You have to discover their “message”. And this changes the impression the information makes.

Often, it is the viewer himself who reveals the hidden message. When you pull the string of certain cards of his Biedermeier series (2007), the card literally transforms. But the picture you see keeps a mental imprint of your first perception of it. This effect is particularly startling with the card all figured out, nil understood: first a cross stands in front of the virgin and the text tells you that “more than 80%

(5) Given their presentation, they could of course be part of the collections of a “Heimatmuseum”, a museum of local history, and might provoke nostalgic feelings.

of US-Americans are professing Christians". But by pulling the string, you replace the cross by a huge penis, and the virginal form is profaned: the card informs you that the U.S. have the biggest porn market in the world.

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And Tom Schmelzer is not afraid of being moralistic when he reminds us that "global farming could feed 12 billion" (cold turkey). As he says himself, he tries to bring back some of its due prominence to "a terrible piece of information that we have heard so often that it does not affect us any more when we read it in the newspapers". And he does so in such an accomplished way that we cannot blame him. The visual impact of a skeleton that seems to come direct from the middle-ages, interrupting the feast of thanksgiving, is indeed stronger than a little notice in a Greenpeace magazine – apart from the fact that the public is not the same. Even parts of the card where no mechanical change takes place are transfigured once we are aware of its hidden message. But as other cards show, the strip is not even necessary for a radical change in the way we see a picture. Cards without mechanical transformation may change just as radically in our perception. If you look long or closely enough at some of the cards, they "pull a trigger in your head" and you discover very different aspects of the picture. The tanatologic society is one of the card-pictures which have the potential to be completely transformed before our eyes, modifying also the meaning of the subtitle "Here I bring my master's will for today if he only had time, he'd be here with a hurry", which becomes an ironical comment on the absence of the world's leaders wherever they send their "bloodhounds" for some unpleasant job.

That Schmelzer is interested in the mechanisms of our perception is most explicit in the work *el maximo cheater* (2006), a picture that has been generated by reassembling the different continents as depicted on a map of the world. If you look at the picture for 30 seconds and then close your eyes, the portrait of G.W. Bush appears as an afterimage.

Schmelzer is a very classical artist in spirit: like the French moralists in the XVII. century he wants to "please and instruct" (Horace). He applies a variety of surprising processes to catch our attention, touch and inform us. Preparing "aha-effects" and discoveries, he masterly uses the time we need to grasp his work. Being confronted with a message right away is very different from thinking one has already understood what is being expressed and then learning the contrary is true. The seductive beauty of his works is like a trap for the spectator's attention – which the artist then redirects. It is because he starts by charming us that he can hope to touch us.

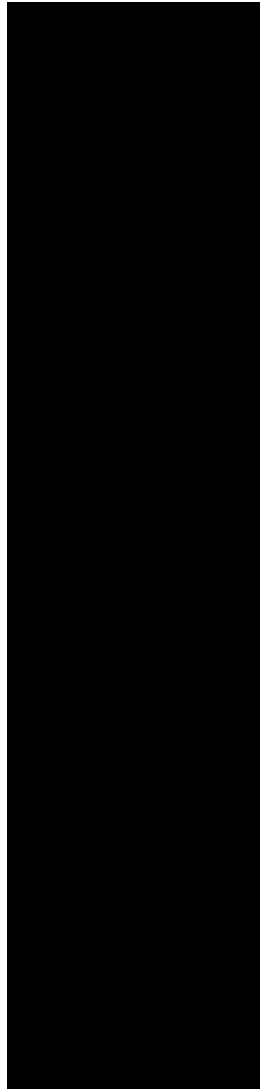
One of his best works, however, is not didactic, though it is instructive. There is no second thought to which the first perception directs us. One of his three ideal idylls, called the big failure – on the river (2000-2006) is a profound reflection about the reality of what seems real to us. Much could be said about its relation to traditional painting and popular culture alike, but I will content myself with a few final remarks. With its baroque frame and the sheep, the work evokes the tradition of bucolic idylls. Looking at the idyll and listening to the sweet sounds of nature that gurgle through the headphones of the ipod, we float effortlessly into a world that has long been tempting for urban beings, a place to lie in the grass and listen to the sounds of the frogs. But then, suddenly, someone turns the button of what appears to be a radio. After the characteristic sounds of a radio being tuned, the sounds of nature disappear and give way to those from the station "Radio Paradiso" which plays some cheesy pop song, or – as it says in its own trailer – "music to make you feel comfortable and relax". After a while, the button is being turned again, and the sound of nature comes back. Now, this work of course has its breaking point, but the return of the first state is an important element. Our feelings of comfort in the supposedly natural environment are being faintly mocked by the association of our idyll with the bad taste of Radio Paradiso. Suddenly, the sounds of nature are being identified with those feelings which some people may have when they hear cheesy pop-music. When the installation sudden-

ly points to its own artificiality – which we effortlessly forgot while we were enjoying the comfort of the small illusion – everything risks to fall apart. But before we quite understand what is going on, the first state is back.

Strangely, this ostensibly artificial installation succeeds in questioning the possibility of a retreat into nature understood as something authentic. Schmelzer does much more than trick us here. He renews an old philosophical question in a particularly appealing way, and reminds us that everything might be as fake as it is in his own universe. Authenticity, it seems, is not something absolute. And, as his work shows us, the quality of good fakes may be higher than that of the real things they imitate. They may have a higher moral standing.

Paris, September 2007





**SCHOEN  
ES NICHT  
DAS MASS**