

JOCHEN SCHMITH. CONVERSATION PIECE

28.09. – 09.11.2017

Carola Wagenplast and Peter Steckroth, who received the Lichtwark Award 2017, work as an artist collective under the pseudonym Jochen Schmith. Their artistic practice is characterised by a critical approach to institutions and luxury. In their conceptual works, they regularly question the role of the artist and the “art” business.

The starting point for Jochen Schmith’s first solo exhibition at the Drawing Room is a response to the public gallery space, which is part of a private apartment on the fourth floor of an upper middle class residential apartment building, containing a small art collection. With subtle, context-specific interventions, Jochen Schmith succeeds in overturning the usual arrangement and function of the whole ensemble, triggering a wealth of questions in the viewer: What is private, what is public? Which works are on sale here? Which of the exhibited works were created by Jochen Schmith themselves?

Against the background of the conversation piece genre, which became popular in England in the 18th century and showed a group of middle class family members or friends in their

private setting, Jochen Schmith employs subtle, site-specific interventions to show the relationship between private and public space in the Drawing Room, between art and commercialisation, between a unique copy in art and mass production in fashion.

The collective “drapes” six works by different artists from the apartment collection across an eight-metre-long, midnight blue central wall of the exhibition space – completely wallpapered with the current invitation card of the Drawing Room – which looks like an embossed leather wall covering from a 19th century middle class parlour yet at the same time has the appearance of a logo wall, of the kind used for fashion and film events for sponsor advertising. Conversely, Jochen Schmith assertively hangs the collective’s own works in the



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resulting “empty spaces” of the collection – splashes of colour embroidered onto precious, midnight blue cashmere, which could be read as exemplary emblems of the (middle-class) idea of creativity and artistry or more precisely like logos of the collective itself. The starting point for these embroideries, designed by the group themselves and commissioned to a specialist, are the so-called “artist trousers” or “painter’s pants” of big luxury fashion companies such as Prada and Ralph Lauren.

With this work, Jochen Schmith refers to the appropriation of the artist image by the fashion industry and hence critically calls into question the “global-art chic” of international fashion labels (Prada, LVMH, Trussardi), who for some years now have also become important protagonists in the operating system of contemporary art by setting up big art foundations and museums. This work series is exemplary for the conceptual working approach of Jochen Schmith, in which financial issues and questions concerning the art business and its mechanisms are interwoven, broaching the topic of their mutual correlations and the fact that they are drawing closer and closer together: What is art, what is craftsmanship or fashion? When does art become fashionable? Does today’s art need fashion and event glamour? With such provocative questions, Jochen Schmith consistently explores the boundaries between fine art, applied art and fashion, between the artistic idea and its appropriation by the consumer world, redefining them, yet at the same time criticizing the fact that art has been made into an event.



One distinguishing feature of the collective’s way of working is, in addition to confusing the viewer, the superimposition of several layers of meaning and display formats. Hence, in the exhibition at the Drawing Room, Jochen Schmith plays, for example, with the removal of the boundary between exhibition space and living space, between the alternating role of artist and curator, gallery owner and collector, and the question of artistry and authorship. Analogue to this, with the exhibition title *Conversation Piece*, the artists also offer multiple ways of reading the work: The title not only makes reference to the genre of the middle-class conversation pieces of the 18th and 19th century, in which the informal self-representation of the lifestyle of polite society was presented against a private backdrop in a painterly way, but also referred to the film of the same name from 1974, by Luchino Visconti.



The film is about a retired American art history professor and collector of “conversation pieces”, whose reclusive, luxurious life in a Roman palazzo is delicately disturbed yet enriched long-term on a human level by the arrival of a vulgar Italian marchesa and her friends, who lodge themselves into the upper rooms of his palazzo. An analogy to aging art

historians who bring the whole palette of young and colourful life into their silent houses with alternating artists and presentations?

At a time in which many contacts only occur digitally and virtually, *Conversation Piece* could, on a third level, also be perceived as a challenge: Back to the human being and the mutual “face-to-face” exchange.

The artist collective **Jochen Schmith** worked as a trio from 2000 and has worked as a duo since 2016. Carola Wagenplast and Peter Steckroth studied at the University of Fine Arts in Hamburg and graduated with a distinction. The collective has realized numerous international exhibitions, including London, Brussels, Berlin, Munich, Amsterdam, Maastricht, Vienna, Oslo, Montevideo, Hong Kong and Beijing. In August 2017, they were awarded the Lichtwark Prize by the Free and Hanseatic city of Hamburg.

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Opening: Wednesday, 27. September 2017 from 7pm – 11pm. The artist collective will be present

A talk will be given by Gürsoy Dogtas (art historian and critic, Munich).

Exhibition duration: 28. September – 9. November 2017

The exhibition has been realized in cooperation with Tilman Mueller-Stöfen.

For more information and images, please contact: contact@drawingroom-hamburg.de

Opening hours: Tuesday to Thursday 12pm – 7pm and by appointment

Illustrations: Jochen Schmith, untitled, 2017, embroidery on cashmere pure new wool, 180 x 130 cm / Jochen

Schmith, untitled, 2017, embroidery on cashmere pure new wool, 55 x 40 cm, edition: 5 copies plus 1 A.P.

Photo: Fred Dott, Hamburg / Courtesy: Jochen Schmith, Drawing Room, Hamburg and VI, VII, Oslo