

Pierre-André Lienhard Schwander's Moons



Schwander's Monde, Foto: Michael Fontana

Modelling, reprinting and casting are the basic procedures of traditional sculpture. Marcus Schwander has made these processes into a fundamental, thematic constellation of his artistic work, whereby his main focus clearly lies on reprinting. When he takes up the means of his own creative genre, the issue for him is not the continuation of a tradition as such, but much more the exploration of the everyday world as a supplier of sculptural gestures and models. Rip-offs via carbon copies, fingerprints and masticated chewing gum are among the techniques that he happened on and perpetuates in his works. In 1999 he cast the first oversized chewing gum in plaster. In the meantime, this and their kindred have almost become a trademark of his creative output. Made of concrete, plastic or bronze, they are returned to everyday environments in an installative context. Beyond the sculptural appeal of form and material, Schwander is interested in the absurd, which emanates from the situation or the proportional scale.

In any case, chewing gum marks the landscape on the surface of his Moons. But here they appear in a reduced form, or in their original size and substance next to sand and gravel. For the moon globes, Schwander took casting into the realm of modeling. The plaster casts, roughly compiled through the agency of chance, give the moon surfaces the desired look of a relief. But it is especially this way of working that contributes to the poetic charisma of the installatively and site-specifically assembled moon constellations.

Four years ago, the first moon hung as a single orb in the *Tony Wüthrich Gallery*. Then a mobile of 4 spheres followed. In 2006 *Schwander's Moons* multiplied into a first installation of large orbs at the Villa Merkel in Esslingen. Schwander subsequently enlivened a showcase in public space with small spheres, hung low and aligned close together. In 2009 he took up the motif again, thereby illustrating how his modularly oriented work complexes grow next to and into one another.

The new versions now combine sizes as well as proportions and turn an attic into an expansive planetarium (*Kunst Raum Riehen*) or form a constellation compressed into a cluster (*Art Basel*).

Artists have always and ever been interested in the moon. Across the centuries, owing to its illumination, it was the perfect projection screen for religious symbols, humanist allegories, romantic temperaments, dream worlds, dark downsides, nightly fantasies, the nearby far, up to and including representations of progress, science and science fiction. Since its conquest by man forty years ago, the earth's satellite has lost some of its appeal but, despite – or just because of – everything, it still offers itself as a model crystallizing mass for the human imagination. In addition, the distance man has traveled to the moon today has given us a more commonplace measurement of the distance to remote planets than the more abstract light years.

Schwander's Moons are however in the plural and don't deal with individual, historically-determined picture worlds associated with the moon. Rather they use the landscape that has been marked by sedimentated thinking as well as by geological scars as a metaphorical but still ongoing supplier of reprints. Of far greater import must yet be the fact that the moon



cannot be thought of as independent of the earth. Every moon is a planet that orbits around the gravitational field of a main planet. Should we envision Schwander's Monde as satellites circling around the art-

ist? Should we therefore declare the artist to be a main planet and his works in general satellites? The idea is tempting but, at the same time, also clearly too reductive.

Part of the basic processes of traditional sculpture is not only craftsmanship, but also the designing of and in models. Markus Schwander takes modeling or moulding at its word and in his works thematizes creative thinking in models. While earlier works conjure up a reference literally (i.e., by titles), the more recent works – including the chewing-gum motifs (or chewing as a modeling gesture of sculptural expression – manifest a much more multi-layered but also more explicit engagement with the model. Schwander has since worked – that is, parallel – in enlargements and reductions. Whether standing oversized in a room or attached to the surface of objects in their original size, the chewing gum proves to produce not only sculptures or three-dimensional gestures, but provides a proportional scale for the viewer – as trees, cars or figures



Modell (Offroad), 2000

do in an architectural scale model – thus declaring the designed environment to be a landscape.

From his first mountain landscape in the year 2000, and its green coating borrowed from the model-train market, via installations with gravel and benches up to a more abstract plaster mountain from 2006, different solutions have come about that are meant to keep the landscape images produced clear of any all too direct model-like effect of the landscape images

produced. Yet Schwander had to become engaged with the spatial, and therefore also with the conceptual, finiteness of his landscape models. During his experimentation with spheres – the artist called one silver ball *Aluplanet* – came the realization that the spatial boundaries of a round model are dissolved or shift to those of a world on its own. With his choice of moon globes and their dependence on other planets, Schwander adds a new level to his occupation with models and enriches his work with a new conceptual model. Namely, the reference to the principle of gravity is also understood as a model for correlations within a creative process. Models, as we know, do not stand alone in space; they relate to a reality that they compact to a modified standard or provide the template for a realization.

But the question as to the relatedness of Schwander's moon models does not wait around for an answer, at least not for an unequivocal one. The fact that

several spherical moons are hung together consciously opens the door to other interpretations in suspension here. Even if *Schwander's Monde* refers in its title to



Schwander's Monde, ART, Basel, Foto: Serge Hasenbühler



White Shit, 2006, Foto: Dominique Uldry

their creator, the viewer can still not make out any main planet in the encountered constellations. The moons present themselves as dependent on each other, yet stand as a moon system on its own, until the viewer brings himself into play, metaphorically lights up the moons and sets them mentally in motion.

Translated by Jeanne Haunschild