

SCHWARZ CONTEMPORARY

Hannah Gieseler, *spiritus sylvestre*
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The Short Life of a Champagne Bubble: A Conversation with Hannah Gieseler

Hannah, your works often take up the play between models and reality, where there are shifts in scale and often a second, more careful look is required to identify things. Where does your interest in engaging with models come from?

Models offer the opportunity of showing something that isn't necessarily easily visible in reality, and at the same time they can be used to simplify complex situations, and a kind of abstraction takes place. Proportions and scales can be shifted, which creates a change in perspective. Things that surround us in our everyday lives and to which we don't pay any special attention gain the status of something special through such extreme shifts in proportions. What you get is a kind of alienation of the gaze, if you will. The initial object is also taken from its usual context and can possibly not be traced back to it. That is to say, the model does not always allow us to infer something about the reality of the initial object. I'm really interested in this play with reality and abstraction.

You speak about an "initial object" and its context - how do you develop your works?

The process usually begins with a concrete image or object. Taking this as a starting point, I familiarise myself with the subject. My research takes time; slowly, a concrete idea emerges, which needs refinement. It's a phase of making decisions and of selection. Perhaps you can compare it with the work of a sculptor who has an image in mind and then starts to mill the stone. My material that needs to be given shape is the information I've collected. You might call the exhibition or individual works the result of this process, the abstract essence of my research. In the case of *spiritus sylvestre*, a picture of a champagne pyramid was a crucial moment. I then assembled an archive of pictures from the Internet. This, on the one hand, led to the idea of building a pyramid myself, and on the other hand to my fascination with champagne bubbles.

What interests you about the pyramid and the champagne bubble?

Two things. The pyramid is for me a very aesthetic object, its shape appeals to me. In my works, I keep returning to geometric shapes, and that is also true for this exhibition: the pyramid, the circle, the sphere. Secondly, I'm interested in the expectations that are linked to this object. A champagne pyramid is after all not an everyday occurrence, it's an attraction, the highlight of a special occasion, which is associated with all sorts of expectations and a great deal of anticipation. Its shape corresponds to these expectations: both culminate in something, both taper - and then at a certain point the whole thing is diminished glass by glass. This is what happens, say, on New Year's Eve. In the exhibition, the pyramid - with all the expectations associated with it - is not dismantled. It stays in its shape.

Hence the title of the exhibition?

Yes and no. Of course the association is intentional, but actually the title alludes to the original term for carbon dioxide. In the 17th century, the chemist Jan Baptista van Helmont called the substance released when charcoal is burned “spiritus sylvestre”, what can be translated as “wild spirit”.

But back to the pyramid. Just as with the champagne bubble mobile, balance and fragility play a big role in the pyramid. From one second to the next, both can lose their balance and collapse. What interests me about the champagne bubble is that it's actually a small, ephemeral object. Champagne is something glamorous, extravagant, but the bubble itself is actually ... a tragic object. It is ephemeral, rises to the top, grows a little on its way, and then explodes. You can't grasp a bubble, it disappears shortly after its formation.

Hannah, you turn the characteristics of the champagne bubble into their opposite. Basically, you expand its size to the point of absurdity. And you freeze its movement, as it were. So are the pyramid and the bubbles metaphors?

No, I wouldn't say that. I just found it interesting to work with the energy that is released on a special day. I wanted to give a form to a moment that's full of expectations (which may or may not be fulfilled).

In the works on paper, I approached the bubble from a different side. I see these works more as a cross-section through a substance that reveals the gaps.

What role does the relationship between movement and standstill play? The whole life of the bubble is stopped, as it were.

For me, there is something quite poetic about this stopping, also about the fact that they circulate in the space and no longer follow their usual direction, because in the glass the bubbles rise to the top. Here, we are back at the first question. Working with a model enables me to make the ephemeral tiny champagne bubble enormous and durable.

The exhibition reminds me almost of an experimental set-up, where the champagne bubble is closely examined. What role does the space play in the conception of your works?

The works were conceived for this exhibition and for this space. Of course that doesn't mean that they won't work in different spaces, but there is a certain dramaturgy to this exhibition. First you go past the works on paper, the abstraction of the bubbles, then you enter the champagne bubble milieu, the familiar proportions between humans and champagne bubble change, and at the end you see the pyramid, the culmination of it all.

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