

PRESS RELEASE

MIRON SCHMÜCKLE

FLESH FOR FANTASY

1 DECEMBER 2023 TO 14 APRIL 2024

Collection of Contemporary Art

Press preview: Friday, 1 December 2023, 9.30 am

Frankfurt am Main, 7 November 2023. The Romanian-German artist Miron Schmückle (b. in Sibiu/Hermannstadt in 1966) is among the singular protagonists of contemporary art. Growing up in Romania under Ceaușescu, already as a child he dreamt himself away to other worlds—worlds that, on the far side of the Iron Curtain, seemed forever inaccessible. From an early age, he took a keen interest in art history on the one hand and the flora and fauna of faraway places on the other. Together they led to a uniquely coherent oeuvre. From 1 December 2023 to 14 April 2024, the Städel Museum is presenting a solo exhibition featuring 28 works by Miron Schmückle, including newly executed works never before on view to the public.

Associated with the idea of the jungle or primeval forest from the outset, Schmückle's visual cosmos oscillates between fine-painterly hyperrealism and undisguised escapism, between the precise observation of nature and an exuberant imagination. The virtually botanical approach of his depictions belies the fact that his complex creations originate not in nature but in fantasy. Based on his understanding and observations of nature with its widely differing colours, forms, and surface textures, they bear a relation to florilegia and exhibit similarities to Renaissance and Baroque plant and still-life painting of the kind once collected in cabinets of art and curiosities.

With the series *Cosmic Attractors* (2023) carried out especially for the exhibition *Flesh for Fantasy*, the artist invites the visitors to partake of the spatial and temporal complexity of his floral figments of the imagination, which in his conception are three-dimensional. By arranging different large-scale views and visual manifestations of one and the same plant composition in space, he creates an installation in which viewers can literally witness the plants' growth.

Philipp Demandt, the director of the Städel Museum and curator of the exhibition: "With plant and growth drawings both hyperrealistic and fantastical, the artist Miron Schmückle has carved out a place for himself in an art-historical tradition revolving around the precise observation and reproduction of nature. Works by Maria Sybilla

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Merian, Georg Flegel, and others, but also the *Little Garden of Paradise* from the Städel Museum collection, are outstanding examples of artistic imagery bearing an affinity to the delicate drawings of Miron Schmückle. His plant-animal hybrids amalgamate fragrance and poison, beauty and transience, anatomy and sexuality in an oeuvre as timeless as it is anachronistic, and occupy a realm between truth and invention, life and death.”

Miron Schmückle begins to work on his labyrinthine plant compositions by making detailed studies of individual elements such as leaves, roots, blossoms, branches, and tendrils, which he then goes about assembling to create harmonious structures. The connections resemble winding paths that, crossing over and under one another, prompt the viewer to trace them across the entire surface, taking in individual details as well as the composition as a whole.

Schmückle conceives of vegetal forms as three-dimensional objects with a front and a back. The heart of the Städel Museum show is the plant composition of the four-part work series *Cosmic Attractors* (2023) situated on the central axis of the exhibition space and engaging in dialogue with its architectural elements. In the middle of the space, facing the entrance, is the key work in the series, *Cosmic Attractors I, recto*. On its back is *Cosmic Attractors I, verso*, the view of the composition from behind. By depicting various phases of growth, Schmückle adds a temporal dimension to the spatial one: *Cosmic Attractors II* on the mirror wall opposite (John Armleder, *Mosaic Mirror Wall Piece*, 1991–2012) displays a mirror image of the aerial entity in a more advanced stage of development. And when turning around, one discovers the fourth work between the two entrance doors: *Cosmic Attractors – Nachstudie*. The mirror image of *Cosmic Attractors I, recto*, it now depicts the vegetal figure at the beginning of its growth and is accordingly smaller than the other parts of the series.

The title *Cosmic Attractors* is a borrowing from the ideas of the philosopher Emanuele Coccia (b. 1976), who describes the blossom not as the plant’s sexual organ, but as the boudoir in which the act of insemination takes place. The creative force of the blossom in nature reveals itself in the metamorphoses it undergoes to lure the world’s attention with an unparalleled extravaganza of colour and form. The concept of the universe turns up in Schmückle’s works with its ever-renewing energy that culminates in a cosmic moment and intensifies all the more in the knowledge of the fantasy underlying the drawings. His plant compositions have no rank order in which a top, bottom, or centre might be detected. The diptych *Se sustinet ipsa II* (2013) is a telling manifestation of this freedom from hierarchy: no matter how the two works are placed in relation to one another, the branch arrangement keeps them connected.

When Schmückle undertakes large-scale formats, his standards of precision pose a special challenge. He spends weeks carrying out preliminary drawings in pencil on sheets of sketch paper. Then he produces a composition sketch on a scale of 1:1, which he transfers to the cardboard panel. The final stage of process, which consists of filling in the preliminary drawings with colour, takes several weeks or months. The work *Flesh for Fantasy* that gave the exhibition its name is a case in point. At approximately 2 x 3 metres, it is the largest work in the Städel Museum presentation; its production took more than six months.

Miron Schmückle's works are hybrids from the technical viewpoint as well: he employs ink and pencil, but the technique he developed over a period of many years ultimately derives from oil painting. He combines and layers mediums possessing different physical properties, for instance water-soluble watercolours and gouaches with pigments made water-resistant through blending with, for example, tempera binders. His practice also includes the use of coloured inks that form thin, lacquer-like layers as they dry. By all these many intricate means, the artist allows some hues to merge and others to overlap, thus bringing about more complex light refractions and lending the muted colours greater depth. His pastose application of watercolours—a method untypical for the medium—ensures the transparency of the colour saturation despite the layering.

Miron Schmückle (born in Sibiu/Hermannstadt in 1966) grew up in a German-Romanian home in Romania during the Ceaușescu dictatorship. In 1988 he fled to Germany by way of Hungary, and from 1991 to 1996 he studied with Professor Johannes Gebhardt in the ceramics class and with Professor Renate Anger in the experimental painting class at the Muthesius-Kunsthochschule (Muthesius University of Fine Arts and Design) in Kiel. In 1994 Miron Schmückle studied with Marina Abramović in the performance class at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste (University of Fine Arts) Hamburg as a guest student. He subsequently carried out a teaching assignment at the Saint Petersburg theatre academy (Interstudio – Zarskoje Selo). He has lived and worked in Berlin since 2008. In 2016 he earned his doctorate at the Institut für Kunstwissenschaften of the Muthesius-Kunsthochschule in Kiel with a study of Joris Hoefnagel's (1542–1600) miniatures. Miron Schmückle's works have been on view in numerous solo and group exhibitions in Germany and abroad; the venues include the Kunsthalle München, the Kunstmuseum Bayreuth, the Brukenthal National Museum in Hermannstadt, the Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, the Sprengel Museum Hannover, and the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin. Examples of his art are also found in several public and private art collections.

STÄDEL INVITES MIRON SCHMÜCKLE

Live event with the artist, music, & drinks

On Friday, 1 December 2023, the Städel Museum director and curator of the exhibition Philipp Demandt will converse with Miron Schmückle about his exhibition *Flesh for Fantasy*. Short guided tours will offer visitors the opportunity to discover the Städel collection and suspenseful affinities with works by the artist. Drinks and a DJ set will round out the evening.

Tickets cost 5 euros and are available in the online shop at shop.staedelmuseum.de, remaining tickets, if available, at the box office. Doors open at 6.30 pm; the event begins at 7.00 pm.

The STÄDEL INVITES event series takes place in partnership with BMW on the occasion of exhibitions by selected contemporary artists.

Miron Schmückle. Flesh for Fantasy

Exhibition dates: 1 Dezember 2023 to 14 April 2024

Curator: Dr Philipp Demandt (Director, Städel Museum)

Location: Städel Museum, Schaumainkai 63, 60596 Frankfurt am Main

Information: staedelmuseum.de/en

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Opening hours: Tue, Wed, Fri, Sat, Sun + holidays 10.00 am – 6.00 pm, Thu 10.00 am – 9.00 pm

Special opening hours: For the latest information on special opening hours, go to staedelmuseum.de/en

Tickets and admission: Tickets are available online at shop.staedelmuseum.de/en. Admission: €18, reduced €16; groups of at least 10 persons who would normally be charged the full admission fee: €16 per person; admission free for children under 12. Groups are required to book in advance by contacting +49(0)69-605098-200 or info@staedelmuseum.de

Catalogue: A catalogue in German, English, and Romanian, edited by Miron Schmückle and Philipp Demandt and published by Verlag Hatje Cantz, will accompany the exhibition. With a foreword by Philipp Demandt, an essay by Carl Friedrich Schröer, and an interview with Miron Schmückle by Simon Elson. 148 pages, 64 illustrations, €60

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