

# CHRONOLOGICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION ON MARINA SCHULZE

BY KARIN SEINSOTH

Translation by Suzanne Eldrege

Marina Schulze grew up on a farm, an environment that gave her both an economic and ecological interest, as well as an appreciation for nature, flora, and fauna. After finishing school, she first trained as a display designer and already had the idea of studying art later. Her earliest independent works were created while she was studying fine arts at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Ottersberg (1996–1998). There are intensely colored petals, details of tulips and gladioli, in oil paint on waste paper (1998–1999).

The subjects are captured extremely enlarged, and the shift in proportions changes the view of everything. Early on, she made use of photographic templates, the surfaces and materiality of her motifs appear even less defined, she concentrates more on the effects of the image. Already at this point she discovered relatively large formats for herself<sup>1</sup>, and the question of the relationship to the viewer arose. In terms of their size, the pictures are in a certain way equal to the viewer, they surround him, almost seem to give him the opportunity to enter the picture.

The artist deliberately uses thin paper from the roll, which on one hand allows her greater flexibility while working, but on the other hand is also more fragile than normal paper. “I was interested in achieving a perfect picture, which can then also fade away.”<sup>2</sup> The concept of transience, the fleetingness of pictures and moments, and ultimately painting itself later became a central element in her site-specific spatial images from 2007 onwards. During her studies in Ottersberg, she also created a series that she calls Tausend Selbstportraits (A Thousand Self-Portraits). Every day she drew or painted her face on a DIN A4 sheet of paper with pencil and oil paint; she tried to record daily changes and expressive differences in a kind of pictorial diary. The series shows a conceptual way of understanding painting and marks the beginnings of her interest in the subjects of body and skin. Four hundred fifty of these sheets will constitute her intermediate diploma.

In 1999 Schulze began studying painting at the University of the Arts in Bremen. Her fascination with the large-format and illusionistic, often referred to as photo-realistic, painting by Karin Kneffel initially attracted her to go there. In the first semester she first learned with Katharina Grosse, then later with Kneffel. At this point, Grosse and Kneffel were already firmly established names in both the German and international art scenes. Both artists encouraged Schulze and gave insights into their own working methods. She was able to refine her multi-layered painting technique and was encouraged to explore the effects of the large formats further.

Handoberfläche (Hand Surface), 1999, is the first picture in which Schulze concentrates on the subject of skin, sometimes in combination with other motifs, above or next to one another. The combination of images in this phase culminates in Fries (Frieze) from 2001. It is a central work of impressive size, 88 x 600 cm, with which she wins the NordWestKunst award of the Kunsthalle Wilhelmshaven in the same year, and this also enables her to receive a grant from the government-funded sponsorship program Cusanuswerk Bonn. “The furry-soft snout of a pony appears next to mold, the rosette-like leaves of a pineapple, a peeled blood orange and the blistering of a dissolving effervescent tablet.”<sup>3</sup> These completely different things seem to have grown together into a surreal and enigmatic organism—it is difficult to decipher where one surface ends and the next begins.

At this time, other large-format details of plants, such as the surfaces of savoy cabbage and the top view of marsh sheaf leaves, emerged. Netzwerk (Network), also from 2001, is one of the first works to show the combination of stocking and skin, including the imprints that the network leaves on the skin.

Between 2002 and 2003 she created a series of female nudes, both large-format paintings in oil on paper and smaller studies. They mostly show the body from above, concentrated on the back, perhaps because this has a relatively large continuous skin area and thus offers the best opportunity for a precise analysis of the surface. The artist observes the skin with its redness, wrinkles, moles, bumps and discoloration caused by the sun. But the structure beneath also becomes visible—veins and bones cast their shadows. The most monumental picture in this series is the four-part Untitled (RA IV) from 2003, whose dimensions reach an impressive 530 x 330 cm. She begins to concentrate more and more on individual parts of the body, arms, legs and calves. In 2004

she completed her Master of Fine Arts degree as a student of Karin Kneffel. Arm XI (2003–2004), at 430 x 915 cm, is the largest work ever realized, consisting of seven sheets of paper. Together with the three-part paper work

Beine III (Legs III) (430 x 340 cm), it represents Schulze's master's thesis. Both are designed in site-specific formats for the rooms of the Bremen University of the Arts.

Up until this point in time, Schulze preferred to use oil on paper. But in 2004, she began using more and more canvases. *Untitled (R III)* and *Untitled (Legs IV)*, both oil on canvas from 2004, are the first examples of this. There are certainly practical reasons for this change. Paper is sensitive, any damage is quickly visible, it is, especially with large formats, more awkward to handle and more difficult to hang. But there are also material considerations behind it: "Combining vulnerable surfaces with the medium of paper seemed to me to make things doubly fragile."<sup>4</sup> On the canvas she begins to increasingly use more fluid, but faster drying, acrylic paint in combination with oil, which allows even more complex color layers. Paper remains the preferred medium for her painting studies.

The monumental, abstract and extremely leg detail with stocking *Untitled (BA III)* (oil and acrylic on canvas, three parts, 190 x 630 cm) was created during her living and working grant at the Künstlerstätte Stuhr-Heiligenrode in 2004–2005. That piece was the work with which she completed her "Meisterschüler" degree.

In 2005, in collaboration with Sibylle Springer, she realized an art-in-building project for the MARUM Institute for Marine Environmental Sciences at the University of Bremen. "A sequence of images that runs vertically through three floors of the building thematizes the four elements (water, air, earth, fire). The depiction of water and air by Sibylle Springer is located on the ground floor, while all four elements are related by both painters on the middle floor. On the upper floor, Schulze depicts earth and fire."<sup>5</sup> The depiction is not to be understood literally; in fact, it is air bubbles under a layer of cocoa powder, which in turn floats on the surface of a liquid. The earthy color, dusty consistency, and the seemingly moving bubbles create a connection with bubbling volcanic lava. In 2003, the artist traveled to Iceland to study at the University of the Arts for several months. There she developed a great interest in the geological features of this island, one of the most volcanically and seismically active spots on earth, which lies on the boundary between two tectonic plates and is constantly in motion.

During a three-month residency in Berlin in early 2006, Schulze began to concentrate her work on the calf motif. In the same year she did a one-month study visit to the guest studio Point B in New York, which gave her the opportunity to take a closer look at the city's art scene.

The DAAD travel grant for graduates enabled the artist to study again in Iceland in 2007. Among other things, this is where the idea for the spatial images emerged. She sees a dam that is currently being built and which will forever change the landscape and mountain behind it. "So I thought about how this landscape could still be preserved,"<sup>6</sup> says Schulze. She plays with the idea of painting the landscape in its original state on the dam and keeping it this way. In Iceland, in an exhibition hall, she then created the first spatial image: *Painted Pillar*, 2007, acrylic on a column, 450 Å~ 80 cm. She paints one of the columns in the exhibition hall so that, from a certain angle, it disappears completely.

It is also Iceland, with its waterfalls, glaciers and extreme landscapes, that is the source of inspiration for the series of water surfaces (WO, from 2007) and the later cloud images (WOL, from 2011). At this time, Schulze began to paint details of mushrooms, a subject that runs like a red thread through her work to this day: mushroom lamellas and capillaries through which the light shines; bottom views of mushroom stalks meeting lamellae; the cap skin of mushrooms, sometimes with signs of decay. The artist shows an almost botanical interest in these organisms. "I find it fascinating to find out which mushroom you have in front of you in the forest. Often mushrooms are depicted in books in order to identify them. But you can never be absolutely sure."<sup>7</sup>

Around 2009 the artist turned back to parts of the body, a hairy two by three meter navel, the detail of a tattoo on an unrecognizable area of skin, a wrinkled corner of the mouth, facial details (forehead, eye) and hair. The highlight is a canvas in two pieces, four meters wide in total: *Untitled (H II)* from 2010–2011. She sees an artistic turning point at this moment, "at this time I started with my light paintings."<sup>8</sup>

Schulze is fascinated by the accidentally-discovered effect that the light of a projection creates on human skin. She begins to project light patterns, grids, and then images onto faces (from 2012) and later onto naked bodies (from 2017), photograph them, and then transfer them onto canvas. The skin is, so to speak, covered with an immaterial layer, a "dress of light."<sup>9</sup> Again, it is light that plays a central role. The painted picture is made up of different levels, it combines several pictures in one completely new way, an approach that we can observe in Schulze's earlier works. One could say that the bodies function as a kind of canvas within the canvas. And again the artistic defamiliarization effect sets in—the viewer is insecure and curious.

In her latest work series, which is being shown to the public for the first time here in the exhibition in the Syker Vorwerk, Schulze devotes herself to detailed shots of randomly collected material and paint residues (from 2019). She depicts paint flecks with paint, examines the encrustations and structures that arise completely by chance during the artistic work, and develops their very own beauty upon closer inspection. Paint flecks arouse associations with tree bark or become a lonely, rugged ice landscape.

In the context of the exhibition shallow depth, a site-specific spatial image is created, Untitled (NW I), which belongs to a new series with the working title ReUse. Using a technique similar to screen printing, Schulze rolls transparent acrylic paint mixed with paste over a large-meshed net (approx. 5 Å~ 10 m) attached to the wall. The negative imprint of the net forms a white pattern that reminds us of her fishnet pantyhose paintings or facial details with light grids, but is actually completely non-representational. In the coloring of its complex layers, the mural leads us to the skin or cloud images. Unlike in earlier spatial images, the focus here is not on the perspective-illusionistic view and the analysis of the space. The artist develops a new approach, painting without a template. This leaves the final painterly result open, and the development process to chance. Untitled (NW I) on the one hand marks the beginning of a new phase, while at the same time is a kind of synthesis of her long-term artistic research. We are eager to see what happens.

1 For example, the work Untitled (tulip tree), oil on waste paper, is 248 Å~ 173 cm in size.

2 The artist in conversation with the author, November 2020.

3 Elke Bippus, "Die Schönheit von Oberflächen," in Marina Schulze: Nordwest Kunst 2001, Kunsthalle Wilhelmshaven, 2002, p. 9.

4 The artist in conversation with the author, November 2020.

5 Barbara Claassen-Schmal, "Liquid Skin: außer Kontrolle geratene Kontrolle," in Marina Schulze, Leporello, Bremen, 2005.

6 Esther Nöggerath, "Ein Blick, der unter die Haut geht," in Weser Kurier, September 21, 2017.

7 The artist in conversation with the author, November 2020.

8 Ika Langkowski, "Irritierende Strukturen," in Serie: Mein Kunst-Stück, Kreiszeitung, March 1, 2019.

9 The title Dress of Light (Keid aus Licht) comes from the German photographer Heinrich Heidersberger and can be seen in Marina Schulze's photographic gaze, or the infinite complexity of simple things, in this publication, p. 14