

## MID-WAY

**An installation by Hans Schabus and Caroline Mesquita for Montafon**

**Curated by Roland Haas**

**Text by Pieter Vermoortel**

When Hans Schabus was asked by Kunstforum Montafon to invite another artist to work with on an exhibition at the gallery, he responded by taking out a compass and a map. He placed the pin into Schruns stretched the compass all the way to Vienna (his own home) and drew a circle to arrive in Marseille, where Caroline Mesquita lives. As such Kunstforum Montafon, located in the border region between Austria and Switzerland, transformed into the center, the place where both artists decided to meet midway. It also allows Caroline Mesquita and Hans Schabus to meet on equal terms. To see the structural elements that they encounter when working towards each other as the playground for the creation of new habitats and explore alternative modes of inhabiting spaces together.

Interested in the structural elements that transform the region and inform its economic and political understanding, Hans Schabus took the infamous Arlberg tunnel and its construction method as a metaphor. The 'New Austrian Tunneling Method' employs the inherent geological strength available in the surrounding rock mass to stabilize the tunnel wherever possible, rather than reinforcing the entire tunnel. As such the tunnel – and its construction – is dependent on the material it travels through. So, it is with the wooden (re)constructed section of the tunnel the artist recreated in the gallery. With the view onto the Litz river, the tunnel is subjected to a functional shift from a place of transit, economy, and connection to a place of reflection, a shelter if you wish. Apart from the physical aspects also the socio-political and economic constitution of Montafon form its materiality. What does the economic access mean politically, how do the waterpower stations in the region relate to the tourist industry? And what happens when you tunnel your way from one conversation to another?

Caroline Mesquita decentralizes the conversation yet again by bringing onto the scene another set of protagonists. Four oversized bird figures, constructed out of brass sheets, sit and stand spread across the theater. They constitute a colorful group of animals coming together, taking a rest from their respective migratory routes. The flock takes shelter along the river, together with us. These birds feel displaced in this harsh natural environment which is covered in snow and seem to stem from a different era. Their material and colors remind us vaguely of items worshiped in past civilizations or of mythological figures. This space that is characterized by transit suddenly lost its prescribed function. In its dysfunctionality, we together learn to navigate the ruins of this old world. Their motivation for being in Montafon seems rather unclear. As they inhabit the space with us, and due to their ambiguous status, the birds inquire about our own position and relationship to this environment. Are you a citizen, a tourist, what is your relation to the direction of the river, the ever faster melting snow and the future and past image of this site?

In Midway, the hierarchy is reset, neither the artists or the viewers are at the center but take actively part in the construction of the site. Humans and non-humans can exist together, future and past can be molded and remolded. By structurally 'digging up' the tunnel and turning it into a stage, inhabited by migrating birds, the songs of the world are sung from the position of Montafon.

Hans Schabus was born 1970 in Watschig / Austria and lives in Vienna. His works are directly related to spatial thinking and experience and understanding of socio-political infrastructures and its impact on the lived environment. From 1991 to 1996 he studied sculpture with Bruno Gironcoli at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Since 2012 he has been teaching at the University of Applied Arts where he heads the Department of Sculpture and Space. Hans Schabus has been showing his work in a national and international context since 1992.

Caroline Mesquita (b. 1989, Brest) lives and works between Marseille and Le Drennec. Caroline Mesquita is a sculptor and video artist, mainly working with metal. Raw material provides the spark that animates her narrative engagement with notions of science fiction, religion, embodiment, transformation, sensuality, and sociability. Mesquita won the 19th Fondation d'entreprise Ricard Prize in 2017. Selected solo exhibitions include Blaffer Art Museum, Houston; PIVO, Sao Paolo; Galeria Municipal do Porto, Porto; Kunsthalle Lissabon; Lisbon; Centre Pompidou, Paris; SALTS, Birsfelden; 221a, Vancouver; Fondation d'entreprise Ricard, Paris.

Pieterneel Vermoortel (\*1981) is a curator, writer, editor based in Vienna. She has been passionate about decentering curatorial practice and stretching the possibilities of how cultural production can be made public, experienced, discussed, or written about. As the artistic director of Netwerk Aalst, Belgium she experimented together with artists and citizens on 'how to live together'. At FormContent, London she worked on a nomadic project, It's Moving from I to It, taking the pulse of conversations on art writing, authorship, subject-object relation. Pieterneel Vermoortel has been teaching at Goldsmiths College and Curatorial Studies KASK.