

The exhibition “*on/*” by the Austrian artist **Judith Fegerl** has symbiotically merged with and switched on Kunstraum Dornbirn. Electricity flows. For Fegerl's works, however, the electricity comes not from the socket as usual but from a solar power plant on the south side of the exhibition space that was specially designed and installed for the exhibition – a reference steeped in history, since the former assembly hall of the Rüscher Works built in 1893 constructed turbines for the first hydroelectric power plants.

The rededication of the raw industrial architecture from a production facility to a room for the presentation and communication of visual art resulted in more than a unique exhibition space that makes the creation of site-specific art particularly appealing. Fegerl is fundamentally interested in what is addressed here in a rudimentary way and otherwise given little attention: How does the art and exhibition industry work? What infrastructure is in place and does this infrastructure meet the minimum requirements? How fragile, vulnerable and efficient is it? How does the climate, the position of the sun or darkness affect the exhibited works and their perceptibility?

Fegerl works with the entire building, interweaving its past and present, intervening in its substance and including significant functional elements. Her work critically examines institutions' efforts to attain sustainability and the possibilities of keeping in touch with the times through infrastructural changes. This approach treats not only the individual institution but also the overarching cultural-political system.

Thus placing a 40 m<sup>2</sup> photovoltaic system in the Dornbirn Municipal Gardens, that is, in public space, seems only logical. In this way, Fegerl makes visible normally invisible processes of energy generation in the exhibition context and integrates them as formal, aesthetic and conceptual factors in the artistic concept.

Inside the exhibition space, an open door provides a view of the back of the solar installation. The inverter, battery storage and distribution box are prominently mounted, staging the power lines running loosely along the floor between the objects in the exhibition and their appropriate energy supply. There are five slightly inclined steel stelae with a diameter of about 30 centimetres and a height of three metres. Each stela is divided into two unequal sections that are connected by a copper-coloured element. This element is a very strong electromagnet that holds the two steel elements together. The position and orientation of the stelae are based on the five historic slewing cranes, to which the stelae are loosely connected by a steel cable.

For the first time, Fegerl combines objects from the “*moment*” series, which has been ongoing since 2016, with a solar system. Here her artistic work comes full circle in

demonstrating the existential dependency of work and energy in a targeted and almost techno-poetic way. The stelae hold together only until the power supply is interrupted. If that happens, the individual components simply fall apart (still secured by the steel cable on the slewing cranes). The instability of the construction is dramatized by the inclination of the massive steel tubes and generates a perceptible tension. An essential part of the work, the tension bespeaks the dependence and availability of energy.

The title "moment" integrates the situational experience on several levels: the temporary connection of the steel elements and the contrast of massive materiality with fragile arrangements. Directly broached seems to be the comprehensive concept of contemporaneity – and this connects inherent processes of the art system and challenges to it with social reality, such as localising the production and exhibition situation in the here and now referring to socio-political and socio-cultural structures.

The series of stelae is complemented by a wall sculpture that bridges the gap to the outside space. The modular composition "last light" shows various surfaces and materials of solar panels that are subject to repeated optimisations in the course of technical development and as such to a predetermined expiry date. In the oversized collage, this becomes visible in the respective formal design of the modules whose production times range from the 70s to today. The transformation of the panels into an artistic artefact consummates the alienation from their actual function. The panels still produce electricity, but the energy is no longer used; it remains as an invisible, circulating potential within the structures. The visual force of the work arises from the different textures and architectures of the modules and their combination.

Displayed on the rear walls of the assembly hall is a picture from Fegerl's series "solar series of electric shocks" (with the subtitle "long hours"). In this series, Fegerl continues her preoccupation with energy as a material and imaging factor in both form and media. The 160 x 97 cm stainless steel panels, whose dimensions are reminiscent of standard solar panels, are electroplated with copper; this galvanic process is controlled and fed by solar energy from the photovoltaic system in Fegerl's studio. The artist leaves the composition of the work to the weather and light conditions, which shape the canvas as if in a painterly process. The exhibited work was created in January 2023.

The alternative state that the respect-inspiring stelae of "moment" only hint at is achieved in a thoroughly meditative dynamics by the work "profound understanding". An electric hoist mounted on the hall's transverse crane lowers an electromagnet onto

a pile of iron granulates. The magnet is activated and slowly pulled up again, separating a mass of granules attracted by electromagnetic forces from the rest of the pile. If the power supply is interrupted after a while, the form caused by magnetic energy collapses and falls back onto the pile on the floor. What is otherwise invisible and formless - electromagnetism - becomes a form-creating force in Fegerl's artistic practice and sculpture a dynamic reflection of energy and time, activation and passivity, giving and taking.

With the delicate wall object "capture", Fegerl once again shows the conditions of production required by her work with electricity. At the invitation of the AIT Austrian Institute of Technology, she was able to carry out experiments in its High Energy Laboratory and direct huge surges of electricity to smash into a bed of sand. The intense surge and great heat generated cause the sand to melt and solidify into organic-looking shapes. The fragile forms were then cast in synthetic resin for stabilisation and "short-circuited" with a steel clamp.

The Dornbirn exhibition displays the multimedia spectrum of Fegerl's artistic work in a finely attuned spatial setting. The exploration of the possibilities of electrical energy as sculptural and imaging material provokes a reflection on the availability and handling of resources. Fegerl's fascination with time-based, transformative processes of forces and materials opens up an experimental space. The linking of an aesthetic of the functional with the autonomy of art makes a contribution to the current debates on exhibition practices and their responsibilities and possibilities, but it is also a commentary on a general social attitude in our increasingly complex present: "You can't see it, you can't hear it, and to a certain extent you can't feel it either. Nevertheless, electrical energy is the basis of our modern, technologized life: progress and development, utility and luxury, but also conflicts over distribution, provision and, above all, environmental issues – energy is highly political stuff." (Judith Fegerl)

Judith Fegerl was born in 1977 in Vienna, where she lives and works today. She graduated from the Visual Media Design and Digital Art programme at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, studying with Karel Dudšek, Thomas Fürstner and Peter Weibel (diploma 2004). At the same time she also studied Art and New Media at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna with Peter Kogler and Birgit Jürgenssen (diploma 2006). In 2019, Fegerl received the Media Art Prize of the City of Vienna, and she was recently awarded the Dagmar Chobot Sculpture Prize 2022.

Kunstraum Dornbirn was founded in 1987 as a non-profit association with the aim of presenting and communicating contemporary art. Since 2003, the exhibitions have found ideal conditions for the showing of large-scale installations in the historic assembly hall of the former Rüscher-Werke, a machine factory in Dornbirn's Municipal Gardens (Stadtgarten). The quality of the architecture in its original, raw state offers space for the presentation of current trends in international art. We show established, internationally renowned artists and newer positions in about four exhibitions every year.

The exhibition history of Kunstraum Dornbirn is marked by international artists such as Monka Sosnowska and Robert Kuśmirowski (2022), Tony Oursler (2021), Atelier Van Lishout and Claudia Comte (both 2020), Hans Op de Beek (2017), Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg (2016), Berlinde de Bruyckere (2015), Not Vital and Tue Greenford (both 2012), Jan Kopp (2010) and Mark Dion (2008), and Austrian artists such as Peter Sandbichler (2021), Bernd Oppl (2019), Thomas Feuerstein (2018) and Roman Signer (2008).

### Location and infrastructure

Vorarlberg is located in the four-country region around Lake Constance, with fast routes to and a lively exchange with Germany, Switzerland and Liechtenstein as well as other parts of Austria. The region is not only scenically attractive for tourism but can also boast the further appeal of the most diverse institutions' dense and high-quality cultural activities in the performing and visual arts.

The large brick assembly hall was built on the grounds of the Rüscher-Werke in 1893. In 1999/2000, the area was redesigned as municipal gardens in an international landscape planning competition. The re-design preserved important buildings of the Rüscher-Werke such as the assembly hall and created an urban recreational and cultural site. With a length of 30 metres and a width of 14 metres, the hall measures a total area of 420 m<sup>2</sup>.

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