

Karl Karner *Wasserspiele*

Exhibition Duration
May 22 - June 20, 2026

Opening Hours
Tue - Fr 11 am - 6 pm
Sat 11 -am - 4 pm



Karl Karner, sÜCc, 2026, aluminium, height: 600cm; Photo: Courtesy of Karl Karner

Galerie Kandlhofer is pleased to present the new solo exhibition *Wasserspiele* by the artist Karl Karner opening on Thursday, 21 May 2026. The exhibition will be on view from 22 May to 20 June 2026 at Galerie Kandlhofer, Brucknerstraße 4, 1040 Vienna.

Karl Karner's upcoming exhibition, *WASSERSPIELE* (water feature), marks a significant and timely development in his practice, bringing into focus his longstanding engagement with ecology, materiality, and the complex relationship between humans and the natural world. Rooted in his sustained research on environmental precarity, particularly the urgent need for water and the impact of human activity on land, this exhibition emphasizes the pressing situation of what is truly at stake with water and asks what we are willing to do for it?

Karner's connection to these concerns is not merely conceptual but comes directly from his lived experience. Since his twenties, he has been actively engaged in re-naturalization projects, including the *Tümpel-Projekt*, an initiative in

which all proceeds from his work supported the acquisition of protected land for the Nature Conservation Association Styria. This direct involvement grounds his artistic approach, positioning his work as both a reflection on and an extension of ecological responsibility.

In *WASSERSPIELE*, Karner brings the outside into the exhibition space, constructing an ambiguous, carefully staged environment. Using tar paper typically employed for waterproofing roofs, he creates a sealed floor within which pools of water form quiet, reflective surfaces that recall ponds or sites of stillness. Within and around this artificially constructed landscape, sculptures emerge to activate a tension between imitation and autonomy. Nature is referenced but not replicated. Instead, Karner is actively engaged with the impossibility of fully capturing or controlling it.

This focus on imitation and control is central to the exhibition. Key conceptual threads—the fear of water (*wasserangst*) and the unlearning of habitual relationships to nature—unfold through his new body of work. Fluid gestures are captured, expanded, and then cast into aluminum or bronze, transforming the ephemeral gesture into frozen monuments. Two contrasting sculptural surfaces, one smooth and one visibly hand-worked create a tension between control and surrender, process and final product.

Karner's sculptures draw from a variety of organic forms like mushrooms, bark, branches, and magnolia cones yet they coalesce into hybrid, often grotesque, magical growths that resist clear classification. These works remain dynamic and responsive. They interact with their surroundings and shift in meaning depending on their environmental conditions and placement. Whether indoors or outdoors, they operate less as fixed objects and more like participants in an unfolding dialogue between material, space, and viewer interaction.

Participation is essential in Karner's installations. They invite viewers into a shared field of encounter, where distinctions between observer and observed begin to dissolve. Space itself is reimagined as a platform for exchange and unpredictability.

Wasserspiele marks a pivotal moment in Karner's career. Moving fluidly between performance, drawing, and sculpture, he is entering new territory, forging a compelling bridge between his sculptural practice and constructing land art interventions and environments. His work resonates within a broader lineage of artists engaging landscape and material, from land artists working with water to contemporary sculptors such as Urs Fischer, Roxy Paine, and Ursula von Rydingsvard, while maintaining a distinctly personal vocabulary rooted in gesture, process, and place.

This exhibition is deep reflection on water as both substance and symbol: an essential source of life, a site of potential danger, a marker of privilege, and an increasingly endangered resource. Karner does not attempt to pin down these meanings. Instead, he's created a situation allowing materials, forces, and viewers to interact in ways that exceed his control. In doing so, he proposes a mode of collaboration and co-creation and invites us to reconsider how we inhabit and shape the world around us.

– Text by DJ Hellermann

About the artist:

Karl Karner (b.1973 in Feldbach, Austria) lives and works in Feldbach, Austria. Karner studied at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna under Professor Heimo Zobernig.

In his work Karl Karner opens up a broad discussion about objects, materiality, and space. Participatory impulses run through his work - viewers themselves become actors in the installations, and nature is given an essential role to develop freely in the environments the sculptures create. The unconventional, amorphous formal language of his sculptures is based on concrete models from the animal and plant world, such as mushrooms, branches, tree bark, or vineyard snails, which the artist combines into grotesque sculptural growths using casts.

His works are constantly changing structures that communicate with their surroundings - whether placed indoors or outdoors. They react to weather events and integrate them into their expression. This organic dynamic makes each installation unique and allows the sculptures to grow in dialog with the landscape. His sculptures rethink spaces - not as territories of control, but as platforms for encounters and freedom.

Recent Exhibitions:

Forthcoming: Wasserspiele, Galerie Kandlhofer, Wien, AT; 2026: zweintopf wühlen durch das Depot des Galeristen Eugen Lendl und zeigen ihre Fundstücke in der Galerie Zimmermann Kratochwill, Graz, AT; States of Becoming. Sammlung Cserni: Kunst aus Österreich, Kunsthau Nexus, Saalfelden, AT; Blau, Galerie Sommer, Graz, AT. 2025: De Sculptura, Albertina Klosterneuburg, AT; Sculpture and Nature, Schlossgut Schwante, Schwante, DE; Cool. Sammlung Erwin Hauser, Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz, AT; Prequel Paris, presented by Parallel, Paris, FR; Shelf Life, Nectar Projects, Wien, AT; Doppelter Boden, Kunstraum Super, Wien, AT; Shored Against My Ruins, curated by 2025, Galerie Kandlhofer, Wien, AT; Bank Austria Skulpturenpark, created by André Heller, Wien, AT; Passion, Künstlerhaus, Wien, AT; Art Brussels, Monumental Sculpture Section, Brussels, BE. 2024: Fichtengrau, Galerie Kandlhofer, Wien, AT; Karl Karner Skulpturen, Tiefkühlhaus, Jennersdorf, AT; Wunderwald, Kugelmühle, Feldbach, AT; The Beat goes on, Kunsthalle Feldbach, AT; ein Original von ... (VIII), Galerie Gölles, Fürstenfeld, AT.

Karl Karner | Wasserspiele

Opening Reception: Thursday, May 21 | 6 - 8 pm

Exhibition Duration: May 22 - June 20 2026

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We kindly ask you to report and are available for further questions at mh@kandlhofer.com or +43 1 5031167

Additionally, we would love to invite you to the exhibition opening on May 21, 2026 starting at 6:00 pm at the gallery.

All photo material on the exhibition, such as work images, will be added shortly and can be accessed [here](#).

Yours Faithfully,

Galerie Kandlhofer