

## Walter Schmögner: Sculptures and Objects

9 November 2018 – 10 February 2019

To mark the occasion of Walter Schmögner's seventy-fifth birthday, the Albertina presents a hitherto unknown aspect of the versatile Austrian artist's production in its exhibition *Sculptures and Objects*. Recognized as a successful illustrator of children's books and caricaturist of a cranky petty bourgeoisie in the 1960s, Walter Schmögner has been regarded as one of the exceptional figures in Austrian art history as a draftsman like Alfred Kubin, Fritz von Herzmanovsky-Orlando, or Walter Pichler since the 1970s. Like the latter, Schmögner has developed a three-dimensional work in parallel with his graphic universe—a work pivoted on the relationship between the smallest and the largest like the rest of his oeuvre. Walter Schmögner uncovers the macrocosm within the microcosm. Man, insect, dog, cat—how similar everything animal is to the artist! "I want to show that everything has a soul!" (Walter Schmögner)

From 1999 to 2011, Walter Schmögner came to create objects made from pumpkins, pig bladders, osiers, rice paper, and hemp twines, including representational sculptures in which he identifies with a grotesque dog skeleton, for instance: "I, crouching, thinking." These objects and sculptures derive from drawing in terms of both their content and form. Schmögner's hard pencil still makes itself felt in their sharp outlines as does the caricaturist's tragicomic self-irony.

Whereas Schmögner paints spontaneously and does not use any preparatory drawings, he determines the shape, form, and color of his sculptures and objects as well as the material he will use beforehand. The artist distils man's animal essence, as it were, exploring the continuing transformation of matter: a metamorphosis that results in ever-new forms and figures. This is also the subject of Schmögner's other vitrine objects. Slowly spoiling potatoes and eggplants, pears, cucumbers, and carrots moldering away: drying up completely in the end, these objects turn into symbols of this permanent change of the build of all things and creatures.

Schmögner watches the rotting fruit and vegetables throughout years. The process of decay lends the objects a new structure and form. The decomposition of matter is presented as aesthetically perfect. Insects or parts of insects like a dragonfly wing turn into synonyms of man, of his fragility and need of protection. The titles of Schmögner's works trigger contradictory associations, putting our usual perception to the test: What is beautiful, what is ugly? What is perfect, what is imperfect? Which state of the world is the true one?

Man as an insect raised onto a pedestal and conserved in a glass box only resembles a caricature at first sight, only seems to be a sculptural humoresque. For even a dried-up pear turns into an object of aesthetic contemplation and meditative scrutiny in an emphatic sense when put under a glass cover: the museum-like presentation transforms inconspicuous waste into an artefact that makes us smile—or frightens us, confronting us with our own vanity.