

Media Release \*ALTEFABRIK Rapperswil-Jona, in July 2019

## Spot On. Toilet Tales

24 August to 13 October 2019, Opening: Friday, 23 August, 7 pm

Media preview on request

With works by Anna Artaker, Johana Blanc, Julia Bodamer, Florian Bühler, Lily Cursed, Daniel Eatock, Lotte Meret Effinger, Fischli / Weiss, Bethan Huws, Julia Kälin, Isabelle Krieg, Sarah Lucas, Quintessa Matranga, Sonja Duò-Meyer, Mickry 3, Noha Mokhtar & Gregor Huber, Victorine Müller, Marlies Pekarek, Steven Pippin, Jaanus Samma, Jan Sebesta, Andreas Slominski, Sereina Steinemann, Vanessa Thill, Julie Verhoeven, Addie Wagenknecht.

The toilet is a quiet place in more ways than one – not least because using the toilet is a taboo subject. This was not always the case; in the 17th century Louis XIV “did his business” in the presence of visitors. As a multilayered cultural form whose image has changed along with society, the toilet is rich with psychological references. Through artworks and archival materials, the exhibition *Spot On. Toilet Tales* gets to the bottom of the toilet. Alte Fabrik is the ideal place for this endeavour: built a century ago in 1917/1918 on behalf of Albert Emil Gebert, it was the cornerstone for what would become the Geberit AG, a company operating globally in the field of sanitary technology and bathroom ceramics. Thus we find ourselves at the source, where we can ponder the toilet, sewerage technology and the relationship of humans to their excretions. In the exhibition *Spot On*, the toilet is approached as a juncture between the interior and the exterior. It brings what is inside human beings – their biology and psyche – into contact with the outside, their environment, the visible architecture. The toilet is located at a constructional juncture as well, connected via a sewerage system to a building’s hidden inner workings, to things that are underground and invisible. Psychology, medicine, sociology, architecture, design and technology all come together in the toilet.

*Spot On* gets to the bottom of the toilet through works by numerous artists, an intervention by Jérôme Nager, Timéa Schmidt and Roberto Zancan / Architecture d’intérieur HEAD-Genève, and archival materials.

Information on the accompanying programme: [www.alte-fabrik.ch](http://www.alte-fabrik.ch) and the flyer



Julie Verhoeven, *Now wash your hands*, 2016, video still, Courtesy the artist

In the exhibition *Spot On*, the toilet is a marker and a metaphor for the juncture between the interior and exterior, the visible and the invisible. What was once an unseen part of the human being becomes an object of disgust as excrement in the toilet bowl and then promptly disappears into sewage pipes and the sewerage system. The exhibition explores these invisibilities and visibilities around the toilet on a social and psychological level. *Spot On* examines the design of private and public toilets, toilet-related product advertising, behaviour and activities in and on the toilet, gazes and lines of sight at this taboo location, hygiene and hygiene concepts, how using the toilet became a taboo, gender issues, as well as sewerage systems and their similarities to human digestion.

Standing symbolically for the leitmotifs **INTERIOR VS. EXTERIOR** and **VISIBLE VS. INVISIBLE** are the works *Toilet Paper* (2019, see flyer) by Daniel Eatock; *Cap* (2016), a crocheted toilet paper cover by Andreas Slominski; and *The Old In Out* (1998) by Sarah Lucas. In Lucas's work, the toilet, a potentially revolting object, is elevated to an exquisite crystalline, urine-coloured cast resin sculpture. *The Old In Out* reminds us on some levels of the most famous toilet in art history, the readymade **FOUNTAIN** from 1917. The urinal, a gendered and tabooed object, was not admitted to the unjuried exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists which took place that year. Today it is being discussed whether the readymade was indeed submitted by Marcel Duchamp, or even more likely by a woman, the Dada artist Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. *Spot On* joins the discussion by inviting ten female artists to pay homage to the *Fountain* by Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven – in response to the numerous homages that refer to Duchamp's *Fountain*.

Alte Fabrik is almost as old as *Fountain*: this year, the first production facility of what is today the globally operating company **GEBERIT AG** celebrates its 101st anniversary – an occasion that gave rise to this exhibition. In this building mainly lead-lined cisterns with brass and lead inner fittings were produced, which ensured reliable flushing. Parallel to the development of the toilet system, in the course of modernization the toilet became an object of anxiety. Even as toilets themselves objectively became cleaner, going to the toilet was increasingly viewed as a source of embarrassment. Using the toilet can also be used to question modernization theories as theories of progress: toilets with flushing water actually existed as early as 3000 BC; during the Roman Empire they were even equipped with underfloor heating and marble seats. In the Middle Ages, on the other hand, human waste was disposed of in the alleys.

Evidently, toilets change along with society. So it is not surprising that Alexander Kira's extensive study *The Bathroom* (1966) on the **DESIGN** of toilets and bathrooms was published at a time of social upheaval. Kira argued that the design of western toilets did not meet the anatomical needs of humans and called for them to be revolutionized – without success, as the design has remained generally the same to this day. Six years later, a group of Fluxus artists also considered alternative toilet designs (*Fluxtoilets*, 1972). A collage of product advertisements by Geberit AG, starting from around 1920, shows which arguments were used over the last century to market toilets and toilet technology to men and (more rarely) women.

*Où sont les toilettes s'il vous plaît?* (Where are the toilets, please?) (2018), asks a neon sign by Bethan Huws. The public toilet and toilet-based **BEHAVIOUR** is the subject of works by Julie Verhoeven, Jaanus Samma, Florian Bühler, Johana Blanc and Steven Pippin. Public toilets raise issues on hygiene, gender relations and design. In her video *Now wash your hands* (2016), Julie Verhoeven confronts various toilet taboos – menstruation, sex, excretions, drugs and smells – with a great deal of humour and a contemporary visual language. With the help of the figure of the toilet attendant, she addresses notions of gender, hygiene, disgust and the individual in confrontation with others. The readymade *Divider* (2017) by Jaanus Samma complements this diverse palette of works and focuses on the gaze in the sphere of the urinal and associated uncertainties.

Last but not least, with two works we dare to compare the inside of the body and the inside of architecture. Jan Sebesta's work *slepenec* (2019) invites us to carry one of four yellow pipe segments around with us. By reaching into the pipe, one can activate a loudspeaker that emits digestive noises. In this work, the parallels between infrastructure and the body become both visible and tangible. *Kanalvideo* (Canal Video) (1992) by Fischli / Weiss takes viewers on a hypnotic journey through the bowels of the city of Zurich.

The exhibition is supported by Geberit AG.

Contact Curator

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Opening hours

Wednesday 12–6 pm, Saturday and Sunday 11 am–5 pm and on request

Images

Available for download at <https://www.alte-fabrik.ch/archiv/materialien-medienschaffende/>



Jan Sebesta, *slepenec*, 2019  
Drain pipes, lacquer, bead chain,  
integrated loudspeaker, movement  
detector, battery, audio file: 15", 44 x 60  
x 11 cm



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Firma Geberit, Geberit PE, 1977  
Advertisement in *Bauen + Wohnen*, Jg. 31 (1977),  
Heft 9  
ETH Zürich, [www.e-periodica.ch](http://www.e-periodica.ch)