



Irene Sieberger **Between fear and hope –
the subtle shift of the familiar**

The sculptures of Katharina Fritsch rank among the most distinctive contributions to contemporary international art. Through her unmistakable combination of formal precision, iconic imagery, and psychological charge, the artist succeeds in transforming seemingly familiar motifs into a new and unsettling reality. In the interplay of formal rigor and conceptual openness, of familiarity and estrangement, *Doktor* unfolds the particular tension that defines Fritsch's work. The sculpture is at once quiet and arresting, lucid and enigmatic, challenging the viewer to confront their own position within the world.

Together with the sculptures of the penitent *Monk* in ominous black and the diabolical *Dealer* in striking red, *Doktor* forms a loose triad of male-coded figures created around the turn of the millennium, all of which have an extensive exhibition history, including their presentation in the major retrospective at the Tate Modern in 2001. Doctor, monk, and dealer emerge as archetypal representatives of science, religion, and commerce, and thus of the fundamental systems of order that structure the modern world. Within this constellation, a multilayered dialogue unfolds around authority, trust, and social control; yet each work also radiates a powerful aura in its own right.

Fritsch's figures are formally reduced and possess a striking clarity of presence. They resist individual characterization and instead appear as condensed embodiments of social roles. *Doktor* is not conceived as the portrait of a specific individual, but rather as the image of a doctor, a projection surface for collective expectations and anxieties. The immaculate surface and monochrome execution intensify this effect, lending the figure an almost untouchable presence that deliberately resists narrative appropriation.

Within this reduction, a subtle yet enduring tension emerges. The doctor appears both authoritative and uncanny. By depicting him as a skeleton, Fritsch shifts his role from healer and bearer of hope to a liminal figure poised between life and death, transforming him into an emblem of existential experience. It is precisely this ambivalence that gives the sculpture its singular intensity and points to the fragile balance between rational knowledge and existential uncertainty.

Doktor (1997/1999) belongs to a central group of works within Fritsch's oeuvre and stands as a key work for understanding her artistic practice. The sculpture is one of only two examples of this motif and ranks among the most significant works by the artist ever to appear at auction.

37 Katharina Fritsch

Essen 1956 – lives in Düsseldorf

“Doktor”. 1997/99

Polyester, acrylic paint. 190 × 56 × 38 cm (74 ¾ × 22 × 15 in.). Catalogue raisonné: The sculpture is registered on the artist's website. One of two casts. [3172]

Provenance

Private Collection North Rhine-Westphalia (acquired in 2001 at Matthew Marks Gallery, New York)

EUR 200,000–300,000

USD 235,000–353,000

Exhibition

Ohne Zögern. Bremen, Neues Museum Weserburg & Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst Bremen, 2001, ill. p. 137 / Et sarligt syn. Holte (Denmark), Gl. Holtegaard Breda-Fonden, 2002 / Rockers Island. Essen, Museum Folkwang, 2007, ill. p. 178 / Lebenslust & Totentanz. Krems, Kunstmeile Krems, 2010, ill. n. p. / Mémoires du futur. Paris, La Maison Rouge, 2011–12, ill. n. p. / Wahlverwandschaften. Deutsche Kunst seit den späten 1960er Jahren. Riga, Latvian National Museum of Art, 2016, ill. p. 23 / NOTHINGTOSEENESS. Void. White. Silence. Berlin, Akademie der Künste, 2021

Literature and illustration

Cf: Exh. cat.: Katharina Fritsch. London, Tate Modern; Dusseldorf, K21 Kunstsammlung im Ständehaus, 2001/2002, ill. n.p. / Katharina Fritsch. Piepenbrock Preis für Skulptur 2008, ill. p. 19 / Exh. cat: Katharina Fritsch. Zurich, Kunsthaus Zürich, 2009, p. 50, ill. p. 51 (each a different cast)



“Mönch” (1999), “Doktor” (1999) und “Händler” (2001). Installation view from the exhibition at Tate Modern, London, 2001

