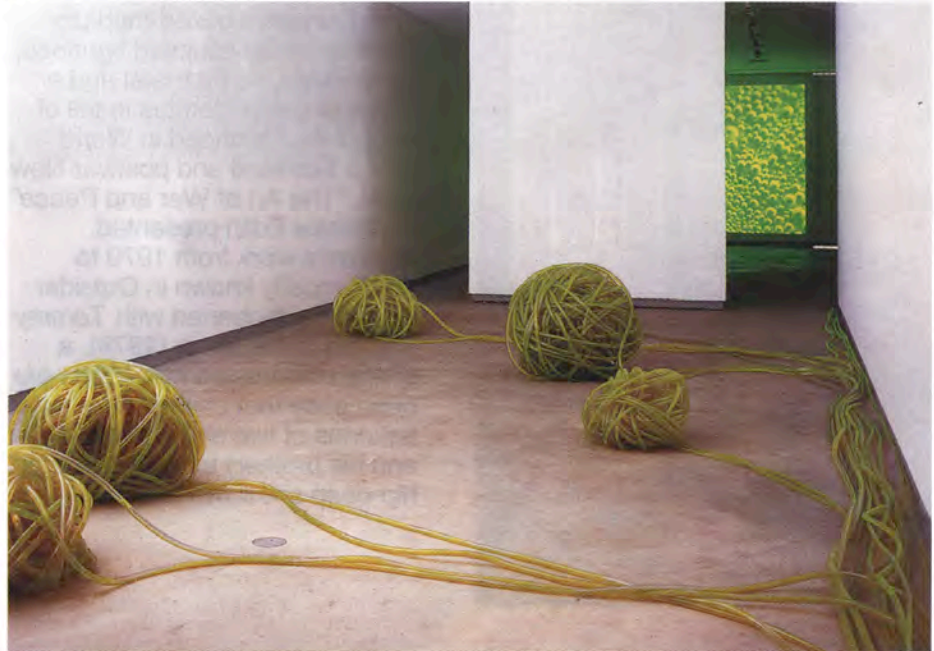


Claudia Schmacke at Plane Space

Through several attention-grabbing appearances in New York group exhibitions during the past couple of years, German artist Claudia Schmacke has received increasing recognition for her sculptures in which water courses through transparent plastic tubing. Even when fairly large, Schmacke's works have the notational quality of drawings, and although they matter-of-factly disclose their composition and processes, they're also evocative on many levels, juxtaposing agitation and repose, desire and restriction. While Schmacke has exhibited widely in Europe, this was her first one-person show in New York, and it clarified how visually lively and conceptually nuanced her unorthodox medium really is.

Just to the right of the entrance, several small pumps kept up a constant hum, suggesting both a construction site in mid-renovation and some sort of scientific experiment. Attached to the pumps, multiple tubes on the floor next to the wall led into the space, where they intermittently veered off to form seven roundish tangles. Schmacke's combination of

View of Claudia Schmacke's *Shift #1-#7* (foreground) and *14 Short Pieces* (in rear), 2003, vinyl hose, water, pump, DVD projection; at Plane Space.



tubes on the floor and in clusters was visually rich, but what really activated the work was the water (in this case dyed greenish yellow) that rhythmically pulsed through the tubes, in and around the clusters and out into the far reaches of the gallery's second room, where there were more tubes and three more tangled balls. Schmacke is one of the more elemental sculptors around, one whose essential materials, air and water, are, in fact, the essential materials of life. Still, as one watched all that water and air on its journey, it took on complex metaphorical significance, suggesting the circulatory system of the body and the phloem of plants, but also data moving through informational networks and, more implicitly, gradations of experience, ranging from frantic to serene. With water inching through some sections and spurting through others, this big, sprawling piece left room for

hundreds of ever-changing micro-moments that together were frankly riveting.

Schmacke excels at working with the specific qualities of the space in which she exhibits. Her willfully casual allocation of tubing connected the very public front room of Plane Space with the more private and sequestered room in the back. Moreover, this connecting system, with all its tangents, curves and surprises, seemed an amalgamation of organic growth, industrial activity and science-fiction oddity.

Additionally, Schmacke showed 14 short videos of simple physical activity, such as water swirling down a drain, bubbles formed during boiling and in whirlpools. Things occurring in the sink or at the stove suggest world-shaping forces and cosmic events, and they deftly augmented the circulation of water in the tubes. This was a quirky, impressive exhibition by an artist who is really hitting her stride.

—Gregory Volk