



***BJÖRN SCHÜLKE***  
***COSMOS***

January 21–March 11, 2023  
bitforms gallery SF

# bitforms gallery

**Björn Schülke, *Cosmos***

January 21–March 11, 2023

**Opening reception:** Saturday, January 21, 5-7 PM

**Gallery hours:** Tuesday–Saturday: 11 AM–6 PM

Björn Schülke's practice asserts an expert balance between action and reaction, surveillance and performance, anticipation and surprise. His sculptures, masterfully crafted in fiberglass, carbon fiber, wood, and brass incorporate elements of sound, movement, and smell through kinetic moments. Using a visual language inspired by elements of surveillance, science fiction, and aerospace engineering, Schülke's work is as striking in its form as in its execution. *Cosmos* presents a range of large-scale and intimate sculptural works created from 2008–2023 that are imbued with playful ardor, akin to a Dadaist attitude of irreverence. The artist references his works as absurdist apparatuses, devices that act but do not serve a function.

*Cosmos* reveals several works with unexpected acoustic elements. *Supersonic #3* is a sound sculpture that emits low frequency sounds from within a fiberglass shell. Within a form reminiscent of a Zeppelin, a theremin produces sound based on the viewer's position in relation to the piece. This early electronic musical instrument uniquely creates sound without physical contact. Though immobile, the sound emitted from the sculpture suggests celestial motion. *String Rover* consists of a fantastical stringed instrument located in the center of a kinetic, interactive sculpture that combines surveillance technology, solar energy, and sound. Awakened by the presence of a spectator, it starts to behave according to its own hidden logic. *Aerophone #5* is also motion-activated and its kinetic process results in the activation of an organ pipe that Schülke engineered using motors, air, and wood. *Aerophone #5* surprises the viewer with its audible reactions and refined tone.

While viewer interaction drives the behavior of some works, not all pieces are triggered by gesture. Observation, on behalf of both the spectator as well as the artwork, is a characteristic within much of Schülke's practice. At times predictable, other times erratic, each piece has a personality of its own. *Mirror Machine* is a series of solar-powered works equipped with mirrors, magnets, and motors. Over time, each work draws energy from light sources, charging up its solar battery. Once full, solar energy is converted into active responses that delight, disrupt, and disorient the viewers' expectation. *Rollercoaster* acts as a hallmark of Schülke's modernist yet humorous style. The sculpture utilizes energy from a solar panel to drive a magnet and ball around a winding track. The machine itself is a farcical object, replete with curiosity. *Space One* is Schülke's first olfactory sculpture that is motion activated to inflate and, at sudden moments, emit a scent specifically engineered by Scent Communication for NASA that smells of space. The scent is modeled after the experience of astronauts and an analysis of space molecules from NASA. Visitors may experience this smell by spending time with the artwork—first the motion sensors will activate, leading the scent to flow from granules, through tubing, into the open air.

Schülke considers complex cycles of communication and movement that are fueled by infrared surveillance, motion sensors, solar panels, sound, and air propulsion. *Space Observer* is a large-scale public sculpture commissioned for California's San Jose airport in 2010. Surrealistic in both form and function, the permanent sculpture stands on 8-foot tripod legs supporting a propeller-powered rotating body. The legs of the sculpture rise from the floor, allowing pedestrian traffic underfoot. Within this exhibition, Schülke presents a model of the celebrated sculpture, sharing insight into his process of drafting and modeling. The completed sculpture's upper body rotates, propelled by its extended wings. Thin kinetic camera arms collect live video that is displayed on embedded monitors within the sculpture's body. Triggered by motion sensors and custom electronics, the work's movement is dependent upon the presence of its traveling audience.

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## **Björn Schülke**

b. 1967, Cologne, Germany

Lives and works in Cologne, Germany

Björn Schülke is a sculptor who playfully transforms live spatial energy into active responses. Slow deliberate movements in his sculptures consider mass and weight of form, while their striking physical presence is anchored in the formal vocabulary of modern abstraction. His constructions delight, disrupt, and disorient the viewers' expectation— staging an unpredictable behavioral exchange between the audience and the machine.

Portraying an animist worldview, Schülke's work is characterized by its lively interior consciousness. Revealed through a complex cycle of communication and movement, each object possesses irrational character traits or distinctive emotional features. Using solar panels, infrared surveillance and air propulsion to trigger movement or sound, the immediate surroundings of Schülke's sculptures become sites of observation and intervention. His 'creatures' are suspicious, vulnerable subjects that are awakened by motion sensors as the viewer approaches. Psychically charged, these automated works seem fantastical, inheriting an odd performative humor from Valie Export, one of Schülke's mentors at the Academy of Media Art, Cologne. Evoking the tools of modern observation and precision, his work suggests artificial intelligence as well as absurdity.

Collected privately throughout Europe, the US and Australia, Schülke's work has also been acquired by Bank of America, The Progressive Collection, the Borusan Collection at Perili Köşk Museum; 21C Museum and Hotel, Sharjah Art Museum; Sculpture Museum Glaskasten, the Neiman Marcus Collection, Jülich Research Centre and the City of San Jose. Selected exhibitions of Schülke's work include the Telfair Museum of Arts, Savannah; Museum Villa Rot, Burgrieden; KulturBahnhof, Kassel; Circulo de Bellas Artes, Madrid; Verbeke Foundation, Stekene; bitforms gallery, New York; Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlin and the Biennale of Electronic Arts, Perth.

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Björn Schülke  
Janaruy 21–March 11, 2023



Björn Schülke  
*Supersonic #3*, 2008  
Fiberglass, plywood, steel, motion sensors, theremin,  
woofer, tweeter, amplifier, paint  
22 x 46 x 15 in / 56 x 117 x 38 cm

\$24,000

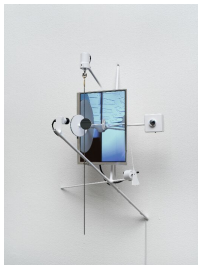


Björn Schülke  
*String Rover*, 2011  
Fiberglass, aluminum, wood, circuits, rubber wheels,  
solar cells, motors, motion sensors, paint  
82.68 x 41.34 in / 210 x 105 cm

\$48,000



Björn Schülke  
*Space Observer*, 2010  
model for San Jose airport  
wood, brass, wire, plastic figurines, paint  
height: 15" / 38 cm  
diameter: 18" / 46 cm



Björn Schülke  
*Vision Machine #8*, 2016  
Brass, steel, wood, mirrors, paint, camera, display,  
sensor, electronics  
15.75 x 11.8 x 14.2 in / 40 x 30 x 36 cm  
Edition of 3, 1AP

\$13,500



Björn Schülke  
*Sentinel #1*, 2018  
Carbon fiber, aluminum, wood, cameras, tft display,  
monitors, motion sensors, custom circuits  
35.43 x 98.43 x 15.75 in / 90 x 250 x 40 cm

\$55,000





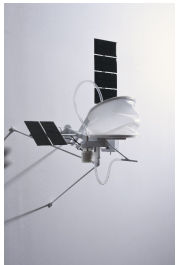
Björn Schülke  
*Aerophone #5*, 2017  
Wood, aluminum, cord, concrete, motor,  
sensor, electronic  
39.4 x 11.8 x 29.5 in / 100 x 30 x 75 cm

\$13,500



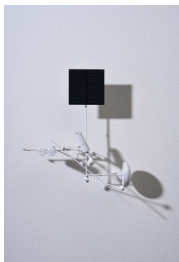
Björn Schülke  
*Light Magnetic Machine #3*, 2022  
Solar panel, motor, electronic, magnets, brass,  
steel, paint  
14.1 x 7.1 x 3.2 in / 36 x 18 x 8 cm

\$4,500



Björn Schülke  
*Space One*, 2022  
Wood, brass, steel, silicon, paint, glass, tubes, scent  
granules, solar panels, motor, sensor, electronic  
25.6 x 15.8 x 17.8 in / 65 x 40 x 45 cm

\$15,000



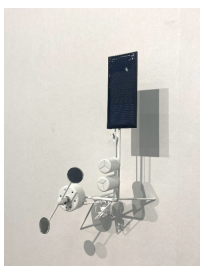
Björn Schülke  
*Solar Magnetic Bell*, 2022  
Brass, steel, magnet, paint, solar panel, electronic,  
motor, LED  
11.8 x 9.5 x 3.9 in / 30 x 24 x 10 cm

\$4,500



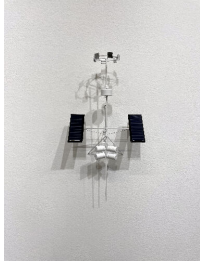
Björn Schülke  
*Rollercoaster*, 2022  
Brass, steel, magnet, wood, paint, mirror, solar panel,  
electronics, motors, LED  
27.6 x 21.2 x 5.9 in / 70 x 54 x 15 cm

\$10,000



Björn Schülke  
*Mirror Machine #37*, 2022  
Solar panel, motor, electronics, brass, paint, mirrors  
7.9 x 3.5 x 2.8 in / 20 x 9 x 7 cm

\$2,500



Björn Schülke  
*Mirror Machine #38*, 2023  
Brass, mirrors, paint, motor, electronic, solar module  
11 x 6 x 5.3 in / 27.9 x 15.2 x 13.5 cm

\$3,500



Björn Schülke  
*Mirror Glitter Machine*, 2023  
Brass, mirrors, aluminum, motors, electronic solar cell  
13 x 4.5 x 3.5 in / 33 x 11.4 x 8.9 cm

\$4,000



Björn Schülke  
*Mirror Machine #39*, 2023  
Brass, mirror, paint, motor, solar cell, electronic  
12 x 3.5 x 4 in / 30.5 x 8.9 x 10.2 cm

\$3,000

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Björn Schülke

*Supersonic #3*, 2008

Fiberglass, plywood, steel, motion sensors, theremin, woofer, tweeter, amplifier, paint

22 x 46 x 15 in / 56 x 117 x 38 cm

\$24,000

**Video Documentation:** <https://vimeo.com/787002374>

*Supersonic #3* is a sound sculpture that emits low frequency sounds from its fiberglass shell. Reminiscent of a Zeppelin, a theremin housed within produces sound based on the viewer's position in relation to the piece. This early electronic musical instrument uniquely forms sound without physical contact. Though immobile, the sound emitted from the sculpture suggests celestial motion.

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Björn Schülke

*String Rover*, 2011

Fiberglass, aluminum, wood, circuits, rubber wheels, solar cells, motors, motion sensors, paint

82.68 x 41.34 in / 210 x 105 cm

\$48,000

**Video Documentation:** <https://www.vimeo.com/787000787>

Combining surveillance technology, solar energy and sound, the *String Rover* is a kinetic, interactive sculpture. Building an experience around a fantastical stringed instrument on wheels, it spins and is awakened by the presence of a spectator, behaving mysteriously in accordance to hidden internal logic.

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Björn Schülke  
*Space Observer*, 2010  
model for San Jose airport  
wood, brass, wire, plastic figurines, paint  
height: 15" / 38 cm  
diameter: 18" / 46 cm  
Not for Sale

Surrealistic in both form and function, the sculpture stands on three 8' tripod legs supporting a propeller-powered rotating body. The legs of the sculpture rise from the floor, allowing pedestrian traffic underfoot. The sculpture's upper body rotates, propelled by its extended wings. Thin kinetic camera arms extending from the *Space Observer* body collect live video that is displayed on embedded monitors within the sculpture body. Triggered by motion sensors and custom electronics, movement in the *Space Observer* is dependent upon presence of its traveling audience.

The sculpture works with an industrial aesthetic; it appears as a futuristic commercial product, with references to clinical research equipment and plays with the concept of a cabinet of curiosities. Clear visual links to aeronautic devices of discovery are also made through use of streamlined form, which is especially evident in the sculpture's propeller wing and fin. Equipped with two embedded small cameras, the sculpture explores its surroundings on the mezzanine level, and symbolically welcomes both the arriving and departing travelers.



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Björn Schülke

*Vision Machine #8*, 2016

Brass, steel, wood, mirrors, paint, camera, display, sensor, electronics

15.75 x 11.8 x 14.2 in / 40 x 30 x 36 cm

Edition of 3, 1AP

\$13,500

**Video documentation:** <https://vimeo.com/787002552>

*Vision Machine #8* is among a series of work that recollects the technological inventions in *Raumpatrouille Orion*, or *Space Patrol Orion*, the first German science fiction television series aired in 1966. It was created using materials and methods more typical to industrial design than sculpture; it is a pseudo-scientific tool made with outright precision, yet entirely futile in function. As *Vision Machine #8* collects energy from the surrounding environment, its propellers unexpectedly spin, lending it an anthropomorphic, whimsical quality despite its machine-like, dystopian aesthetic.



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Björn Schülke

*Sentinel #1*, 2018

Carbon fiber, aluminum, wood, cameras, tft display, monitors, motion sensors, custom circuits

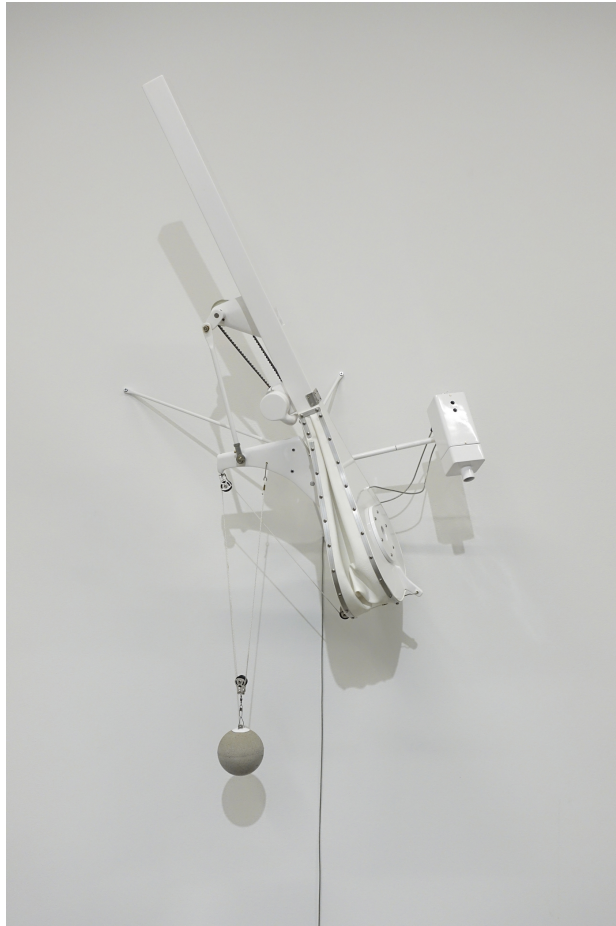
35.43 x 98.43 x 15.75 in / 90 x 250 x 40 cm

\$55,000

**Video Documentation:** <https://vimeo.com/786993340>

Björn Schülke's sculptures move through complex cycles of communication and movement using infrared surveillance, motion sensors, solar panels, sound and air propulsion. *Sentinel #1* blends both utopian and dystopian machinic visions. The work observes visitors moving through the gallery space as they react in a variety of ways — watching, changing, and shifting.

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Björn Schülke  
*Aerophone #5*, 2017  
Wood, aluminum, cord, concrete, motor, sensor, electronic  
39.4 x 11.8 x 29.5 in / 100 x 30 x 75 cm  
\$13,500

**Video Documentation:** <https://vimeo.com/784027564>

Björn Schülke playfully transforms spatial energy into active, auditory responses. The striking physical presence of his work is anchored in the formal vocabulary of modern abstraction and scientific measurement, while its behavior evokes curiosity. *Aerophone #5* is motion activated. Its kinetic process results in the activation of an organ pipe, a procedure Schülke engineers through motors, air, and wood. *Aerophone #5* surprises the viewer with its audible reactions and refined tone.

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Björn Schülke

*Light Magnetic Machine #3*, 2022

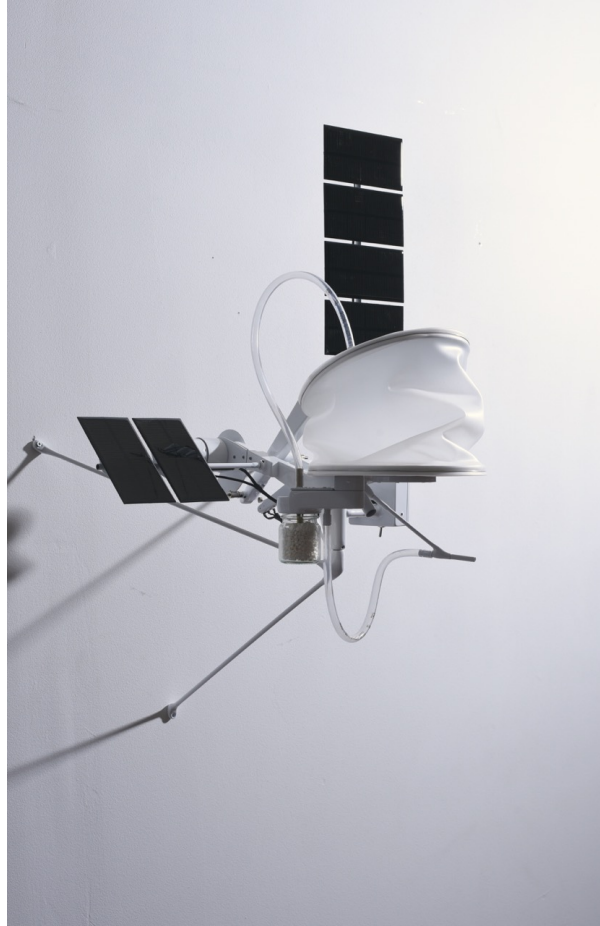
Solar panel, motor, electronic, magnets, brass, steel, paint

14.1 x 7.1 x 3.2 in / 36 x 18 x 8 cm

\$4,500

Björn Schülke playfully transforms live spatial energy into active responses. The striking physical presence of his work is anchored in the formal vocabulary of modern abstraction and scientific measurement, while its behavior evokes irrationality. In *Light Magnetic Machine #3*, motors and sensors are used to delight, disrupt, and disorient the viewers' expectation— staging an unpredictable behavioral exchange between the audience and the machine.

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Björn Schülke  
*Space One*, 2022

Wood, brass, steel, silicon, paint, glass, tubes, scent granules, solar panels, motor, sensor, electronic  
25.6 x 15.8 x 17.8 in / 65 x 40 x 45 cm  
\$15,000

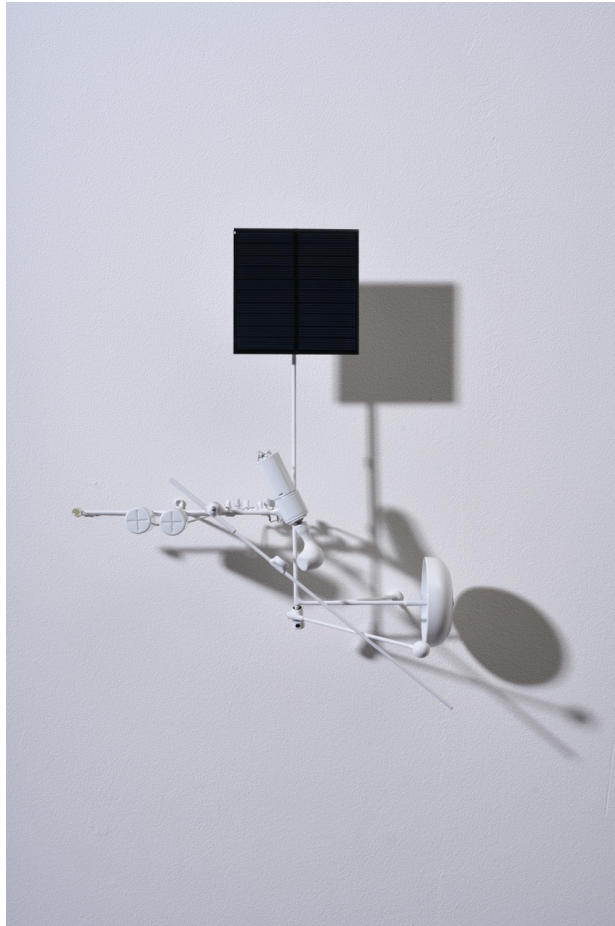
**Video Documentation:** <https://vimeo.com/784027383>

*Space One* is Schülke's first olfactory sculpture. Within his practice, the artist has expertly honed a sleek, modernist style that lends itself to outer space's satellites and future technologies. This scent machine is motion activated to inflate and, at sudden moments, emit a scent specifically engineered by Scent Communication for NASA that smells of space. The scent is modeled after the experience of astronauts and an analysis of space molecules from NASA. Visitors may experience this smell by spending time with the artwork—first the motion sensors will activate, leading the scent to flow from granules, through tubing, into the open air.

"We can't smell space, because space is a vacuum. But space is filled with gases and dust particles that—if we could concentrate them and bring them to Earth where we could smell them—the experience might be something like this: Riding on a comet, you are a streak of bright light in engulfing, endless darkness. The scent is sharp, like smelling salts. But there is also the steady, tempering smell of soot under the surface, vibrating at a lower frequency. Finishing on a high note, you might catch a trace of cyanide, which smells like sweet, toasted almonds, fading away like the tail of the comet." - Scent Communication, 2022)



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Björn Schülke  
*Solar Magnetic Bell*, 2022  
Brass, steel, magnet, paint, solar panel, electronic, motor, LED  
11.8 x 9.5 x 3.9 in / 30 x 24 x 10 cm  
\$4,500

*Solar Magnetic Bell* presents a subtle, yet kinetic experience that culminates in a moment of surprise and tension—the ringing of a bell. Through a series of actions triggered by motors powered by solar energy, Schülke's sculpture acts through phases of quiet suspicion and resounding accomplishment.

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Björn Schülke

*Rollercoaster*, 2022

Brass, steel, magnet, wood, paint, mirror, solar panel, electronics, motors, LED

27.6 x 21.2 x 5.9 in / 70 x 54 x 15 cm

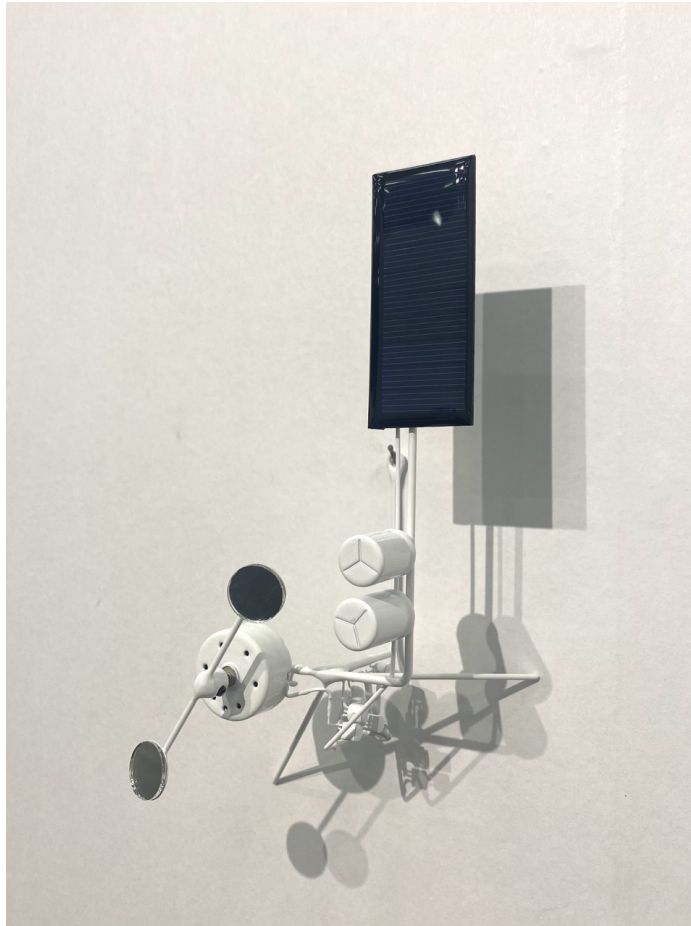
\$10,000

**Video Documentation:** <https://vimeo.com/784027363>

*Rollercoaster* is a playful, kinetic work that acts as a hallmark of Schülke's functional yet humorous style. The sculpture utilizes energy from a solar panel to drive a magnet and ball around a winding track. The machine itself is an absurd object, replete with surprise and curiosity.



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Björn Schülke

*Mirror Machine #37*, 2022

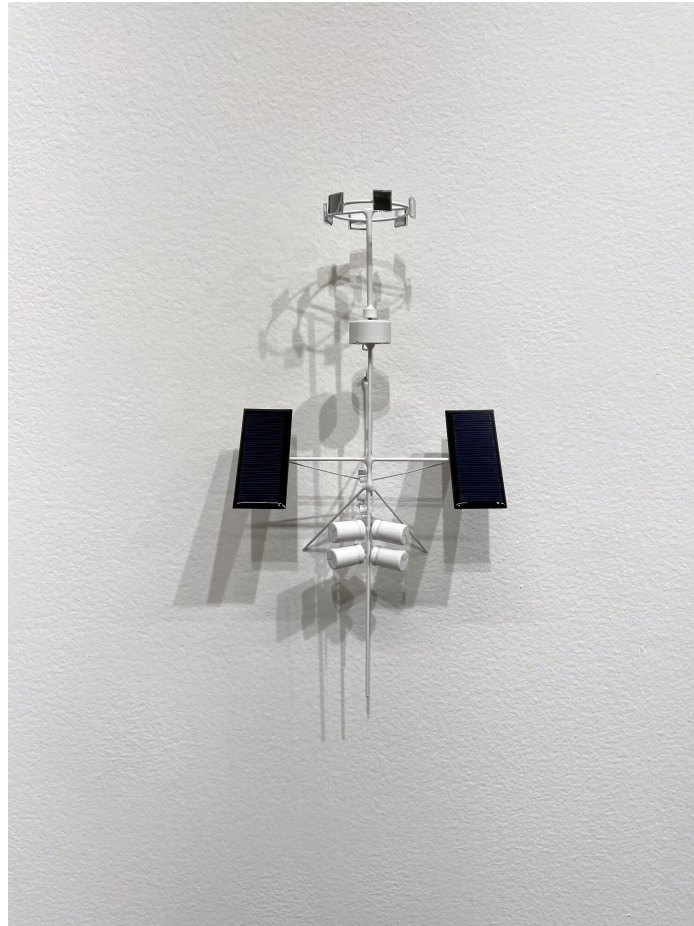
Solar panel, motor, electronics, brass, paint, mirrors

7.9 x 3.5 x 2.8 in / 20 x 9 x 7 cm

\$2,500

Björn Schülke playfully transforms live spatial energy into active responses. The striking physical presence of his work is anchored in the formal vocabulary of modern abstraction and scientific measurement, while its behavior evokes irrationality. Schülke's *Mirror Machines* use solar energy, motors, magnets, and mirrors to delight, disrupt, and disorient the viewers' expectation— staging an unpredictable behavioral exchange between the audience and the machine.

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Björn Schülke

*Mirror Machine #38*, 2023

Brass, mirrors, paint, motor, electronic, solar module

11 x 6 x 5.3 in / 27.9 x 15.2 x 13.5 cm

\$3,500

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Björn Schülke

*Mirror Glitter Machine*, 2023

Brass, mirrors, aluminum, motors, electronic solar cell

13 x 4.5 x 3.5 in / 33 x 11.4 x 8.9 cm

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Björn Schülke

*Mirror Machine #39*, 2023

Brass, mirror, paint, motor, solar cell, electronic

12 x 3.5 x 4 in / 30.5 x 8.9 x 10.2 cm

\$3,000

Björn Schülke playfully transforms live spatial energy into active responses. The striking physical presence of his work is anchored in the formal vocabulary of modern abstraction and scientific measurement, while its behavior evokes irrationality. Schülke's *Mirror Machines* use solar energy, motors, magnets, and mirrors to delight, disrupt, and disorient the viewers' expectation— staging an unpredictable behavioral exchange between the audience and the machine.



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*Cosmos*  
Installation view  
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