Foreword

The Center for Advanced Studies at LMU is a forum for interdisciplinary exchange. In order to foster dialogue between faculties, we have established a special format: the so-called CAS Research Focuses. These are groups consisting of LMU scholars who, in cooperation with international fellows, meet regularly at CAS over a two-year period to conduct joint research on a particular topic from their various academic perspectives. It is often "concepts" that serve as the starting point for these groups: empathy, bureaucracy, stress, standards, crisis, resilience, to name but a few of the current topic. Once a shared focus has been agreed upon, the foundational work with the concept as such begins: What does it actually mean, entail or consist of? Does it mean different things in different disciplines? To what extent has it evolved over time and with what kind of connotations?

With Olaf Probst, we have managed to engage an artist who can be described, in the best sense of the term, as a "conceptual artist," given that his work centers not simply on ideas, but rather on "concepts." This description encompasses, on the one hand, his designs, sketches, plans, and installations, but primarily pertains to his work with intellectual content, categories, and terms. When addressing these concepts, Olaf Probst takes the opposite approach to that of science: he does not attempt to analyze and thereby neutralize them, but rather plays with them. He multiplies them, creating space for them to become charged with meaning, yielding widely varying reactions from viewers.

This interplay is already evident in the title of the exhibition, "KATASTROPHÄE IX + hi s stoeryies." Are we surrounded by forms of catastrophes here, or rather by proud trophies of them? Are they supposed to tell stories or meant to generate hysteria? Olaf Probst offers us the opportunity to view things differently than we are accustomed to by turning their concept on its head. Colorful mushroom clouds transform into friendly housemates, complete with their own gallery of ancestors, making themselves comfortable on the terrace or the sofa and being introduced to us by name, such as "Dat Uschi."

Olaf Probst's art makes the power of concepts abundantly clear. While they are intended to serve as heuristics, they in fact carry heavy baggage, despite considerable scientific reflection, that seems almost impossible to deconstruct. Olaf Probst does not work on the deconstruction of concepts, but rather constructs them anew. In doing so, he uses language more as an instrument than a medium. Form, color, literature, film and music are also used as instruments in similar fashion.

With his art, Olaf Probst enriches the work of CAS in a truly special way, for he plays with various forms and methods of observing and describing the world, inviting us to step into his playground and view the world more or less through his eyes. In this way, his work reflects the multifaceted relationship between art and reality, while simultaneously reminding us that science is also merely an instrument for describing the world. The extent to which science has sometimes proceeded in an artificial manner is a thought that accompanies us throughout Olaf Probst’s exhibition.