

PRESS RELEASE

Jean-Marie Appriou, Amy Feldman, Louisa Gagliardi, Kris Lemsalu, Conny Maier, Sofia Mitsola, Tobias Pils

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Maag Areal, Zahnradstr. 21, CH-8005 Zurich

The body is the oldest subject in art. Until the early 20th century, it was wrapped in certain ideas and conventions of representation that followed the themes of art: religion, mythology, everyday life, landscape, and portraiture. Time and again, the body was the projection surface of emotions such as pain, lust, passion, vulnerability, or willpower, predominantly defined and staged by male artists. It was not until the Surrealists that the door was opened to a psychologically more complex world, in which the body could completely shed the garb of reality—neither always clearly assigned a gender nor explicitly staged for the male or female gaze. From that moment on, the body became a symbol: of dreams, of the unconscious, of fantasies, and the psyche of modern man. Often maltreated by fears, it increasingly functions as the scene of a spectacle of the tortured soul. Abstracted, deformed, or mechanized, it is present in all genres. Female artists, in particular, prefer to thematize the body in the new media of photography, video, and performance.

In recent years, however, the body has reappeared in painting and sculpture to a greater extent—and now signals a new artistic self-understanding that negotiates questions of gender, identity, and assignment in a completely new way. The artists Jean-Marie Appriou, Amy Feldman, Louisa Gagliardi, Kris Lemsalu, Conny Maier, Sofia Mitsola, and Tobias Pils embody a new, permeable generation that considers representation in new, often haunting, and visually demanding ways. There is often a startling fragility behind it. It captivates the gaze and opens up the view of the body—its freedom, fantasies, and fluidity.

Jean-Marie Appriou's (born 1986 in Brest, FR) work is a menagerie of mythical creatures: hybrids of animal, human, and vegetable, demigods and the undead, suspended between past and future, morbid and mystical, mannered and melancholic, like figures from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The body is the central organ in this system of references, which combines the Middle Ages, Art Nouveau, and science fiction to create fantasy worlds in which nothing is constant. The ocean, where Appriou grew up, is the all-pervading metaphor for his work: it stands for death and rebirth, for danger and mystery, for poetry and artistic inspiration.

Amy Feldman's (born 1981 in New Windsor, NY, US) large scale gray-on-gray abstractions pose a salient conversation between physical gesture and the formal language of abstraction. While a subdued palette imbues her paintings with a neutral objective mode, the artist deploys signs and symbols that hint at the body and its charge. Feldman's paintings resemble human organs, pulsating in space, working in sync to deliver only the essential through acute simplification of form. Her graphic cartoon-esque approach and distilled heroic gesture work in tangent, displaying complex humor to earnest intent.

Louisa Gagliardi (born 1989 in Sion, CH) is completely committed to the figure. Her scenes have something dark and cloudy about them, appearing like dream frequencies—people are often only seen spliced in, from behind, as legs or heads, as if they were mere ghosts or fragments of memories. With colors shimmering like the applied gel or nail polish, the images appear digital, overdrawn, and surreal without betraying the artist's hand. The mood is cold and smooth yet fragile, like a broken display.

Kris Lemsalu (born 1985 in Tallinn, EE) builds sculptures out of porcelain and ceramics, often peppered with textiles, plastic, and other materials. They appear grotesque, theatrical, in short: nightmarish and present themselves quite offensively, dominating the space and creeping under the skin. Lemsalu presents her new work, *Motherpeace*: ceramic vulvas on an iron bed frame from which hang coats belonging to the artist's mother and grandmother, porcelain hands reaching out: a sculpture as two portraits.

Conny Maier (born in Berlin, DE) reduces her figures to the essential, almost bursting the pictorial space. Their roundish proportions are not right—hands too large, bodies serpentine, faces often disappearing behind hair and headgear. Maier's figures often appear tormented, angry and groping, overwhelmed by the world, by their role in it, by their very limbs. Domestic objects such as vases and bowls appear, serving as empty allegories of the figures' bodies.

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Sofia Mitsola (born 1992 in Thessaloniki, GR) paints primarily female, invented characters and the atmospheres they inhabit using vibrant colors and a monumental scale. The female body is a recurring motif that allows her to play with ideas of confrontation, power, and control. Her protagonists' coquettish gazes are always directed at the viewer—inviting, controlling, and consuming them. Appearing as individuals or in groups, her subjects are composed using radiant opaque colors and translucent layers that mimic water, an element that symbolizes transformation and catharsis.

Tobias Pils (born 1971 in Linz, AT) works exclusively in shades of grey. At first, one thinks his figures lean on the visual language of modernism—cubism and surrealism resonate, only to be catapulted into the present with a comic-like twist. The artist's versatility becomes clear: bodies become non-representational, abstractions transform into eyes, noses, and mouths, lines become landscapes. His canvases never rest—the bodies burst with nervousness and energy, like living psychograms.

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