

Press Release

‘Körperlich’

Hauser & Wirth Basel

30 August – 2 November 2024



‘Purity and danger are intertwined, as danger arises when boundaries are violated.’ – Mary Douglas

To coincide with Kunsttage Basel, Hauser & Wirth opens its second exhibition at its new Basel location which will be a group showing of works by women artists, including Louise Bourgeois, Maria Lassnig, Meret Oppenheim, Alina Szapocznikow, Irène Zurkinden, Lee Lozano, Hannah Villiger and Carol Rama. The exhibition is titled ‘Körperlich’, meaning ‘bodily’ in English. The artists included are each concerned with the body, exploring its role in the construction and expression of identity. Although the emphasis is on the physiognomy of the body and its organs, the feelings portrayed within the works on view are those that emanate from deep inside: love, desire, fear, anger, hysteria—visceral emotions which reveal themselves through bodily expression. The works on display range from portraiture, depicting images of the nude body and representations of corporeal parts, to semi-abstract images that suggest bodily forms. Through their work, these artists pose questions about bodily integrity, about control of the body, asking ultimately who has power and autonomy over our bodies, especially those that are gendered as female.

In some of the works, figures are blurred and fragmented, evoking difficult histories, personal and political conflict or violence. Whereas in Carol Rama’s ‘La guerra è astratta’ (1970) or Alina Szapocznikow’s sculpture of a disembodied mouth indicate the disowned physical self in the face of oppression, Hannah Villiger’s photographic work ‘Skulptural (Sculptural)’ (1986), a simple polaroid of an ear, might reference the last sense to be lost in the dying body, the ultimate fading of our conscious bodily existence.

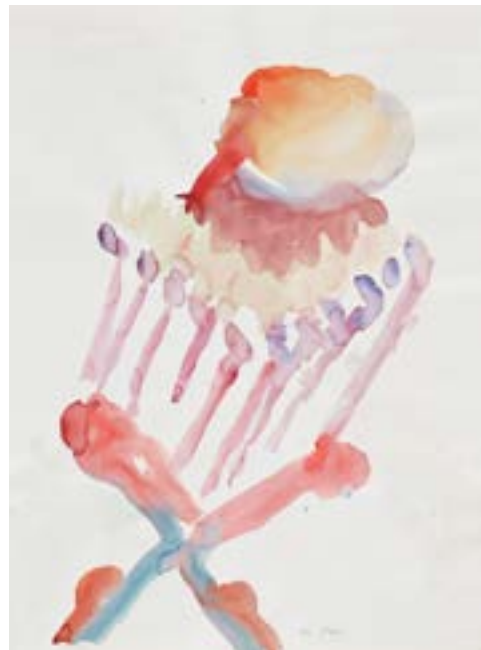
While the work of the artists on view sometimes seek to celebrate the body and play on notions of beauty and gender according to the traditional portrayal of the body in art, they nevertheless problematise these depictions and explore layers of complexity to this tradition such as in the painting ‘Nue’(1934) by Irène Zurkinden, who also explores a variety of bodily movements in her expressive drawings. The artists presented challenge the tradition of the nude, expressing it often as a fractured, disintegrating and unstable body, as it appears in the watercolour works of Lassnig and the painting by Lozano.

Depictions of male bodies and forms also appear, for instance in three drawings by Meret Oppenheim showing delicate featured young men, or in her painting ‘Männlicher Kopf in der Diagonale (Man’s Head at a Diagonal)’ (1977), rendered in a soft palette of pastels, which foregrounds androgynous representations and the question of the conventional boundaries of gender.

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The artists included could be said to engage with the legacies of a Freudian understanding of the unconscious as it is expressed through a desiring body, but their work also anticipates feminist critiques of this concept, for example, through Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection – a reminder of the material realities of the (female) body. Elements of organicism and abjection are explored in relation to the body in the hanging sculpture by Louise Bourgeois and Rama's mixed media canvas from 1969, where the emphasis is on materiality. In works by Meret Oppenheim, aspects of nature are displayed, incorporating flowers or animal bodies in states of strange or surreal metamorphosis, as seen in 'Tisch mit Vogelfüßen' (1939 (executed 1983)).

Together, the artists in this exhibition grasp, investigate and express the complexities of the construction of self that comes from our bodies.



About Hauser & Wirth Basel

Hauser & Wirth's new space at Luftgässlein 4 in Basel's historic central cultural district occupies a former silk ribbon factory built in the 1880s and comprises a ground floor exhibition space and showroom. The gallery is under the direction of Carlo Knöll, who joined Hauser & Wirth as Senior Director in September 2023. 'Vilhelm Hammershøi. Silence' was the first in a series of historic exhibitions at Hauser & Wirth Basel being developed by Knöll.

Since its earliest days, Hauser & Wirth has mounted historically significant exhibitions. The gallery's inaugural exhibition in 1992 took place in the first-floor apartment of an Art Deco villa in the heart of Zurich; it united mobiles and gouaches by Alexander Calder with sculptures and paintings by Joan Miró. Since then, Hauser & Wirth has continued to forge an ambitious and academically rigorous program of historic exhibitions, providing a natural home for a number of major 20th-century artist estates and encouraging a continued and engaging discourse around their oeuvres.

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Luftgässlein 4, 4051 Basel

**Opening Hours during
Kunststage Basel**
30 Aug – 1 Sep 2024
9 am – 7 pm

Opening Hours:
Tues – Fri, 2 pm – 6 pm
Sat, 11 am – 4 pm

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Lee Lozano
No title
1962-1963
Oil on canvas
91.3 x 96.7 cm / 36 x 38 1/8 in
© The Estate of Lee Lozano
Courtesy Hauser & Wirth
Photo: Jon Etter

Alina Szapocznikow
Sans titre (Untitled)
1964-1965
Plaster
13 x 7.7 x 3.5 cm / 5 1/8 x 3 x 1 3/8 in
© 2024, ProLitteris, Zurich
Courtesy The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow / Galerie
Loevenbruck, Paris / Hauser & Wirth
Photo: Fabrice Gousset

Carol Rama
Perdonami le congiunzioni (Organismi ancora ben definiti e vulnerabili)
Forgive Me the Conjunctions (Still Well-defined and Vulnerable Organisms)
1969
Spray paint, glue and taxidermist's eyes on canvas
100 x 100 cm / 39 3/8 x 39 3/8 in
© Archivio Carol Rama, Turin

Maria Lassnig
Untitled
1987
Watercolour on paper
76 x 56.2 cm / 29 7/8 x 22 1/8 in
© Maria Lassnig Foundation / 2024, ProLitteris, Zurich
Courtesy the Foundation and Hauser & Wirth
Photo: Roland Krauss