

1. MANON & MÉLODIE MOUSSET

02.02.18 – 24.03.2018

Opening: 02.02.18 from 18:00

For its last exhibition at Röntgenstrasse, Last Tango has paired artists Manon and Mélodie Mousset. With 35 years between them, their work has a common denominator: the use of their own bodies in identity puzzling ways. Both artists expose themselves heavily in their work, be it through the sensual and at times witty self-narrativizing universe of Manon or through Mousset who explores the unsettling merge between the digital and physical. Triggering our most primitive fears and desires we come to experience similar motifs: gold, MRI scans, mother-daughter relationships and the human in crisis.

MANON

Der Wachsaal

Manon (b. 1946 in Berne, lives and works in Zurich) studied at Kunstgewerbeschule in St. Gallen, and later at Schauspielschule Zürich. Manon has since the 70s held many solo and group exhibitions in museums and galleries, locally and worldwide including Kunstmuseum St. Gallen (2015); Aargauer Kunsthaut (2011); Swiss Institute New York (2008) and Helmhaus Zürich (2008). She is the winner of several prizes including the Prix Meret Oppenheim (in 2008). Her work is amongst others in the following public collections: Bern Kunstmuseum, Aarau Kunsthaut, Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, Fotostiftung Schweiz, and Kunsthaut Zürich. Her work will be featured in the upcoming exhibition at Kunsthaut titled *Fashion Drive. Extreme clothing in the Visual Arts*.

Today considered a pioneering figure in performance art and photography in Switzerland, Manon presents an entirely new large-scale installation titled *Der Wachsaal* in the downstairs space. The title "Der Wachsaal" recalls an observation room of a psychiatric hospital and features up to twelve beds. Reminiscent of the bed, pill and water seen in one of her former works *Das lachsfarbene Boudoir* (1974-2011) this work takes this idea a step further and hints at dark times. The metal, bodiless and motionless beds evoke personal pathos and anguish, as if they were relics of a distressing memory.

In the upper space Manon presents works from the photographic series *Hotel Dolores* (2008-2011). A selection of some nine large-scale photographs from the 170-photograph series, most of them are being shown in Zurich for the first time. The setting for this body of work is that of abandoned spa hotels in the town of Baden. A place with a touch of wonder, this extraordinary location became Manon's dream backdrop. Its early 20th century heyday richness long gone, Manon pushes the voyeuristic potential of the space. Manon enlivens past memories by stylizing the interiors with some of her fetish objects, truly taking hold of the feminine imagination. A sober reverie on time's passing, *Hotel Dolores* evokes ephemeral pleasures and emotions that have come to a standstill.

Manon's still-lives in the adjacent space similarly deal with the topic of fading youthfulness and frivolity, unveiling textural imagery and mixing contemporary together with aged objects. Art historian Jean-Christophe Ammann described Manon as an erotic phantom, zombie, dominatrix, mourner, a sculptor and Pygmalion in one. The still-lives reveal some of these myriad of characters, with fragments coming from the world of burlesque to the scholarly.

MÉLODIE MOUSSET

Intra-aura

Mélodie Mousset (b. 1981 in Abu Dhabi, lives and works in Zurich) studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Rennes, EBAR, France, Ecole Cantonale d'Art de Lausanne, ECAL, Switzerland, the Royal College of Arts, London, and completed her Masters of Fine Arts at the California Institute

Merging personal narratives into her work and full of surrealist fantasy and humour, Mélodie Mousset's practice portrays life expanded by discovery and metamorphosis. Her psychologically probing and viscerally introspective sculptures are an artistic investigation into the fragmented body and the elusive self. Her work is at times a whimsical reflection on how we think about the body with the intention of showing how the biological relates to the contemporary idea of the artificial (such as with virtual reality and MRI).

of the Arts CALARTS in Valencia, California. Her work has been exhibited at institutions and galleries worldwide, including MOCA (Museum Of Contemporary Arts), Los Angeles; Kunsthaus Aargau; MAC (Musée d'Art Contemporain) Lyon; The Metropolitan Art Society, Beirut; Susanne Vielmetter Project, Los Angeles, Barbara Seiler Gallery, Zurich, HeK, Basel and SALTs, Basel.

For various of the works shown at Last Tango, the point of departure was her mother's potentially hereditary schizophrenia which led her to pose the question: Where is this dysfunction in my body? How can I free myself from it? Her first approach to solving such a question resulted in MRI body scans and ultimately 3D print-outs of her internal organs. Her mode of expression found shape as sculptures, with her brain, kidneys, lungs, heart, bladder, spleen, uterus, stomach, liver, pancreas and gallbladder all reproduced in marble (*Organes*, 2015) as they were last seen inside her body and in bronze (*Hanger*, 2015) as a recomposed self-portrait in the form of a clothes rack or as wearable jewellery.

Another endeavour led her to take a two-month long cargo boat trip across the Atlantic to Oaxaca City in Mexico during which she polished her organs. Upon arrival, her trip turned into that of a mind-bending kind wherein she took part in rituals with different shamans. Film footage of this multi-layered and buzzing journey are presented at Last Tango for the first time.

In the exhibition depictions of the body unfold in various other ways such as *Surgeons* (2016) consisting of bronze sculptures of dislocated crawling hands similar in appearance to the spiders of Louise Bourgeois. The spider encompassed several meanings for Bourgeois, who often made reference to it as a simulacrum of her mother.

In her virtual reality experience *HanaHana* (2016) the body takes shape as an endless form. Set in a timeless world the user has no skin and has the power to reproduce hands in an endless chain. The title refers to the Manga character Nico Robin who eats a "Hana-Hana" fruit as a child giving her the superpower to infinitely sprout body parts. Most of us assume that we know what it feels like to own, control, and be inside a body. But is this not an illusion? And how would it feel if "you" were replicated as multiple bodies, human, and non-human? *HanaHana* brings us that bit closer to understanding what it's like to be a bodiless entity.

Kong Chun Hei (b. 1987 in Hong Kong, lives and works in Hong Kong) graduated from the Fine Arts Department of The Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2009. Selected solo exhibitions include Stay away from those rocks, 2017, Gallery EXIT, Hong Kong, Back unsay shades can go, 2016, Asia Now Paris 2016, Gallery Exit, France, Back and Back and Forth// Left and Right, 2014, Artissima 2014, Gallery Exit, Italy. Selected group exhibitions include From Ocean to Horizon, 2017, CFCCA, Manchester, UK, Connect 4, 2016, Simon Lee Gallery, Hong Kong, I submit to the wisdom of the body, 2015, Silverlens Gallery, Philippines, The 2nd CAFAM Future Exhibition, 2015, CAFA Art Museum, Beijing, China, rites, thoughts, notes, sparks, swings, strikes, a hong kong spring, 2012, Para Site, Hong Kong.

SIDE STEP: KONG CHUN HEI

Sidestep

Twelve holes. Twelve neat flaws. Well tuned. Well unified.
Anywhere. Everywhere. Peeling. Over and over again. Peeling.
A slight resistance. Hidden in brightness. Ever so slightly surfacing in darkness.

– Kong Chun Hei

For the last Side Step project, Last Tango has invited Hong Kong based artist Kong Chun Hei.

Known for his simulations of everyday objects, for *Sidestep* Kong has thought of a site-specific intervention. Existing holes and flaws in the room are manipulated with the aim to encourage a close and scrutinous viewing. Kong seeks to reveal image-making's sometimes ambiguous relationship with reality.

Working within the field of drawing, Kong tends to reflect on the appropriation, consumption and regulation of our immediate surrounding. His practice rejects the conventional perspective on reality and via monochromatic drawings of everyday objects he prompts us to rethink our habitual assumptions about perceived reality.

The drawing *Stripes* (2017) is a realistic rendition of tape. With a focus on the surface both formally and conceptually, the drawing depicts a tight surface. Rolls of tape are tightly stretched around a rectangular object. Because of the tension, it seems like the tape is about to crack. This cheeky gimmick, the ability to illustrate the breaking of a material is what creates a possible sense of suspicion. While the drawing, be it so meticulously attentive to each and every detail of the wrapped tape, makes us believe it is real, the attention to its breaking directs the focus to the illusion itself.

Better known as hyperreality, a word coined by postmodern theorist Jean Baudrillard, this inability to distinguish between reality and its simulation is what Kong's practice tends to pivot around. With the use of trompe-l'œil in the aim of prompting the viewer to a relearning of the depicted subject, his drawings and multimedia installations create what seems to be a believable surrounding while also highlighting how visual mediations are the result of an intellectual and contingent imposition.

Mistakers (2018) are stickers of photographed holes. Holes in the walls of the exhibition space, either big or small are usually covered up before every new install time. As per Kong's request traces of the previous exhibition's de-install were left visible, the rough and unpolished surface blend with these *Mistakers*. Scattered like the dots of chickenpox, *Mistakers* cover the walls in a surreal-like manner. By imposing an artificial appearance are the mistakers enough to provide a sign of the real? The video work *Peeling* (2018) is loop of an arm peeling off a sticker from a surface. Compulsive as it looks, the repetitive gesture alludes to the modern obsession of finding meaning again and again.

In *Cross* (2018) the windows of Side Step are covered in a transparent and yet reflective foil with crosses scratched into the surface. The scratched foil allows for both the exterior and the reflection of the interior to co-exist. Because of this inside-outside binary the viewer is presented with a "mirror of being and appearances, of the real and its concept".

In an age when uncertainty is "the only thing certain", Kong hijacks our convenient illusions of a truthful representation of reality and incites a radical and alternative re-education of seeing.

Quote: Baudrillard, Jean. *Selected Writings*. ed. Mark Poster (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 1988), pp.166-184.

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