

Heidi Bucher. *Metamorphoses II*
Museum Susch
16 July – 4 December 2022



Heidi Bucher skinning *Herrenzimmer*, 1978. Credit: The Estate of Heidi Bucher. Photo: Hans Peter Siffert

"You have to remember that this room must fly. It must get away, far away from reality."
Heidi Bucher, interview with artist's son Indigo Bucher, 1978.

Running from 16 July to 4 December, *Metamorphoses II* at Muzeum Susch mixes newly rediscovered and restored filmic material of Swiss artist Heidi Bucher's (1926, Winterthur – 1993, Brunnen) practice together with sculptural installations and works on paper. Dedicated to revising a matrilineal art historical canon, Muzeum Susch opens a dialogue to consider Bucher's practice through the lens of performance for the first time in her native country.

The exhibition presents over 70 key works across the artist's practice from her early wearable and danceable *Bodyshells* created in the early 1970s in the United States to her characteristic works with latex from her time in Switzerland and late works made on Lanzerote. Bucher is best known for her skinnings, sculptural works created by layering latex and gauze onto largescale surfaces which were then arduously pulled off. Her performative use of the material culminated in a play with the presence and absence of the body. Furthermore organic and structured, these symbolically charged membranes entertain a close relationship with the skin.

Bucher began creating her main body of work in 1973, when she was already approaching fifty, after her return from the United States and her separation from Carl Bucher. In an effort to come to terms with female oppression, she created a world of images in the form of embalmed and soft objects, including major works on view in the exhibition such as *Bed* (1975) or *Anna with Herself* (1978). Made of found objects, on which latex and mother-of-pearl pigments have been applied, these works reference the culture of domesticity while offering a way to subvert repression.

In her manifesto *Parquet Dragonfly*, Bucher described her artistic work as a 'process of metamorphosis', in which the stripping away of social conditioning would be accompanied by a softening and mobilisation of objects – symbols of fixed and unchanging conditions. The theme of the metamorphosis culminates in *Dragonfly (Costume)*, a work from 1976 made of wall skinnings rubbed with mother-of-pearl pigments and arranged in the shape of a dragonfly. She would often wrap herself in her freshly completed skinnings during performances.

Bucher's interest gradually shifted towards the interplay between the identity-forming function of architecture and the human body. She first turned to objects and places from her own family history, such as her parental home in Winterthur-Wülflingen (1978) and the 'Ahnenhaus', her ancestral home, by means of latex floor skinnings (1980–82). By detaching the architecture from its originally static context, it is itself exhibited, with a focus on its charged meaning. Later, the conflict between the private and the public was to become her guiding theme as she turned her attention to various social institutions such as a prison or a psychiatric clinic in the 1980s. All the key works created in the private psychiatric clinic Bellevue in Kreuzlingen on Lake Constance in 1988 will be brought together for the first time at Muzeum Susch, as well as a selection of photographs and objects from her intervention in a penitentiary in Le Landeron, a small town near Neuchâtel.

During the last decade of her career, the island of Lanzarote became an inspiring retreat for Heidi Bucher. There, she focused on nature and ecological aspects. The element of water, considered both the end and the beginning of a new life, became central to her work, eventually becoming a metaphor for her own untimely death.

Set in dialogue with the architecture of Muzeum Susch, Bucher's characteristic skinning's reflect on her ongoing preoccupation with the interaction between psychology and space, specifically the gender, social, and political norms historically associated with it. With the radical body and space transformations, Bucher's work sheds light on previously unknown artistic processes that aim at alternative visions of society characterised by healing.

The exhibition is guest curated by Dr. Jana Baumann, Senior Curator at Haus der Kunst, Munich. Original concept: Jana Baumann with Krzysztof Kosciuczuk. In addition to the exhibition *Heidi Bucher. Metamorphoses II* at Muzeum Susch, Kunstmuseum Bern is showing the exhibition *Heidi Bucher. Metamorphoses I* from 8.4 until 7.8.2022. *Heidi Bucher. Metamorphoses* is an exhibition by Haus der Kunst in cooperation with Kunstmuseum Bern and Muzeum Susch.

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Notes to editors

For media request, please contact Sutton:

Charlotte Wittesaele | E: charlottew@suttoncomms.com | T: +44 (0) 207 183 3577

Listing details:

Exhibition dates: 16 July – 4 December 2022
Address: Muzeum Susch, Surpunt 78, CH-7542 Susch, Switzerland
Tickets: Regular 25 CHF/ reduced 20 CHF *
Website: www.muzeumsusch.ch
Instagram: [@muzeumsusch](https://www.instagram.com/muzeumsusch)

Exhibition Catalogue

Edited by Jana Baumann, with contributions by Jana Baumann, Kathleen Bühler, Carina Bukuts, Chus Martínez und Jenni Sorkin. Pages: 278. Price: 49 €. 2021. Available in German and English.

Biography of Heidi Bucher

- 1926 Heidi Bucher, neé Adelheid Hildegard Müller, is born on 23 February 1926 in Winterthur, Switzerland, the daughter of a construction engineer.
- 1941–1944 Trains as a dressmaker under Marguerite Strössler in Winterthur
- 1944–1947 Studies fashion and textiles under Johannes Itten at the Zurich School of Arts and Crafts. She attends courses given by Max Bill and Elsie Giauque and produces fashion textile studies and painted colour studies.
- 1946–1956 Spends time in Paris, Hamburg and the south of France, and as an au pair in London. She creates textile and silk collages, including some with mother-of-pearl embellishments. These geometric-abstract works were exhibited for the first time in 1956 at the Galerie d'art moderne Marie-Suzanne Feigel in Basel. During this time, she also produced self-portraits and nude drawings of her lovers.
- 1956–1958 Spends time in New York. Collaboration and exhibition of her silk collages at the World House Galleries (987 Madison Avenue), which also exhibits works by artists such as Jean Dubuffet and Paul Klee, whom Bucher holds in high esteem. She becomes friends with other artists, including the photographer Hans Namuth and the painter Karel Appel.
- 1960–1969 Takes up residence in Zurich and marries Carl Bucher (1935–2015). They have two sons: Indigo (b. 1961) and Mayo (b. 1963). The Buchers are active in the art and cultural circles around Max Bill, Willy Rotzler, Bruno Bischofberger, and Fritz and Erika Billeter.
- 1970/71 With a grant from the Conseil des arts du Canada, the family moves to Montreal and Toronto. In 1971, an exhibition with works by Carl and Heidi Bucher is held at the Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal. That same year, the family moves to the United States and initially stays in New York. In artistic collaboration, Heidi Bucher translates futuristic sculptural designs by Carl Bucher into wearable body costumes, the Landings to Wear. As part of the ACTS exhibition series at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, the Landings to Wear are activated in outdoor spaces in New York.
- 1972/73 The Buchers move to California – first to Los Angeles, then to Santa Barbara. Heidi Bucher becomes close friends with Ed Kienholz. In a studio in Hollywood Hills, she produces the work groups of Bodywrappings and Bodyshells, wearable body sculptures made of foam with a mother-of-pearl-coloured PVC coating, which are activated performatively on Venice Beach, among other places, by her and her family and Mary Kahlenberg, curator at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). This is followed by the solo exhibition Body Shells and Shadows at the LACMA. For Etude Bodyshell (1972), Bucher uses the material latex for the first time, applying it with her fingers to a textile coated with mother-of-pearl pigments.
- 1973–1978 Returns to Switzerland and divorces Carl Bucher. In Zurich, Bucher moves into her own studio, a former butcher's shop in Weinbergstrasse, which she calls Borg (from the German word "Ge-borg-enheit": safety, security). She begins her main body of work with the embalmings and soft objects, using found textiles that had belonged to her family, as in La Mamma (1977), Anna Mannheimer with Target (1975) and The Bed (1975). In 1976, she creates her first architectural skinning, The Door to Borg, from the entrance door of her studio. An applied latex coating is

peeled off after the drying process. Finally, she applies shiny mother-of-pearl pigment to the semi-transparent “skins”. These latex works are exhibited publicly for the first time in 1977 at the Galerie Maeght in Zurich.

- 1978–1982 This is followed by skinnings in her parents’ house in Winterthur-Wülflingen, including the Gentlemen’s Study. From 1980 onwards, in a process that lasted two years, she skinned her cross-generational ancestral home, the Obermühle in Winterthur, where her grandparents had lived. All floors of all storeys, as well as individual rooms, walls and doors, are skinned. Skin Rooms from the ancestral home are then installed outdoors or used for performances. In 1982, for example, she initiates the procession Offyougolittlefly, in which a room skin is carried from her newly occupied studio, the “Schleife”, through the Stadtpark Winterthur to the Stadthaus built by Gottfried Semper in 1869 – and finally to the Kunstmuseum Winterthur for a presentation.
- 1983 On the occasion of the first triennial exhibition La femme et l’art in Le Landeron, Bucher creates The Hatching Act of the Parquet Dragonfly in the former prison with the participation of five women. Subsequently, the skinned latex impressions of the walls are taken out of the building and carried in a procession to the town hall by all the women involved, as well as Bucher herself. This is followed by the performance Unmasking in the town hall council chamber, in which the performers strip the latex suits from their bodies like moulting larvae.
- 1983–1993 Heidi Bucher lives and works in Winterthur and increasingly also in Teguisse, Lanzarote. She produces architectural latex works and soft objects (windows and doors) with reference to the typical local architecture of Lanzarote. Groups of works such as The Waters (1984–86) and White Glue Houses (1988) are created. Ecological, natural-cosmological, and transcendental questions become the focus of her interest.
- 1987 Heidi Bucher chooses the ruinous Grand Hôtel Brissago on Lake Maggiore, which became a refuge for European intellectuals during the Second World War, as the site of another skinning action: Grande Albergo Brissago (Entrance Portal).
- 1988 Several skinnings are made in the abandoned private clinic Bellevue Sanatorium run by the Binswanger family in Kreuzlingen, Thurgau. Anna O., the first test subject for Sigmund Freud’s studies of hysteria, and the art historian Aby Warburg were treated here at the turn of the twentieth century. Among the key works created are The Parlour Office of Doctor Binswanger and Small Glass Portal.
- 1993 Heidi Bucher dies of cancer on 11 December in Brunnen, Switzerland, at the age of sixty-seven. In the year of her death, she was still planning a spiritual-cultural centre as a “meeting place” in Teguisse. Before her death, Bucher creates her archive, which remains in the family to this day and is administered, along with her artistic estate, by her sons, Indigo and Mayo, together with her granddaughter, Letizia Bucher.
- 1994 She is posthumously awarded the Culture Prize of the City of Winterthur.
- 2004–2018 The first survey of her work, Heidi Bucher. Mother of Pearl, is held at the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich (2004). Solo exhibitions follow at, among other places, the Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris (2013), the Swiss Institute, New York (2014) and the Parasol Unit Foundation for Contemporary Art, London (2018). Works by Heidi Bucher are also shown at the 57th Venice Biennale (2017).

About Muzeum Susch

Being simultaneously a site of contemplation, research and intervention, MUZEUM SUSCH opened in January 2019 as a space for debate and research. Founded and created by Grażyna Kulczyk, the Polish entrepreneur and long-term supporter of contemporary art, it is specifically (but not exclusively) informed by a deep understanding of woman artists and seeks an emotional connection to art as a matrilineage of the sometimes omitted, overlooked or misread. The museum is housed in an extraordinary campus located on the site of a 12th-century former monastery and brewery in Susch, a remote town on the ancient pilgrim route to Santiago de Compostela in the Engadin valley of the Swiss Alps. The multi-faceted project comprises over 1,500 m² of gallery spaces which show site-specific and permanent artworks, and a regular program of curated, temporary exhibitions.

About Dr. Jana Baumann

Jana Baumann (b. 1984) is senior curator at the Haus der Kunst in Munich, editor, and author. In Munich, she has been responsible for, among others, the first comprehensive international exhibitions and monographs of Miriam Cahn (*I as Human*, 2019) and Heidi Bucher (*Metamorphoses*, 2021), as well as the retrospective Franz Erhard Walther. *Shifting Perspectives* (2020). She also initiated new productions at Haus der Kunst, including *Holy Quarter* by Monira Al Qadiri (2019) and *Kreb Core Cargo* by Jo Penca (2021). Her curatorial work is dedicated to diverse emancipatory body and image politics. She traces a transformative artistic practice that eludes traditional media categories and goes hand in hand with a subversion of normative gender roles and social power structures. Previously, she was an associate curator in the Department of Contemporary Art at the Städel Museum in Frankfurt am Main from 2014 to 2018.

About Grażyna Kulczyk

Grażyna Kulczyk is an entrepreneur and art collector, whose endeavors have made her Poland's most successful businesswoman. In 2004, after many years of running activities in art and philanthropy sectors, Ms. Kulczyk set up her flagship venture: Art Stations Foundation CH, housed in the Sary Browar (Old Brewery) complex in Poznań (Poland), which has received numerous Polish and international awards. In 2017 she started the construction of the Muzeum Susch in Switzerland, which opened its doors in 2019, quickly becoming one of the most important museum institutions in Switzerland dedicated to international modern and contemporary art. Art Stations Foundation CH also houses a Residency Program and the Instituto Susch dedicated to global feminist Research, Conference and Publication programmes.

Ms. Kulczyk's areas of interest and art commissions combine a number of themes as development of new technology and start-ups working to change the world. She is particularly engaged in supporting entrepreneurship among women as well as the equal presence of women in STEM. Since 2012, Ms. Kulczyk supports Tate as a member of the International Council and Russia and the Eastern Europe Acquisitions Committee. She joined the board of the Modern Women's Fund Committee of the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 2015, and has been a board member of Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw for almost 10 years. Ms. Kulczyk has been recognized as one of the 200 Top Collectors in the world by Art News magazine.