

# LIVIE FINE ART

PRESS TEXT | MARCH 2021

## EMBODIMENTS

RALPH BÜRGIN | SOFÍA DURRIEU | ROMAN GYSIN

APRIL 8 – MAY 31, 2022

OPENING | THURSDAY, APRIL 7, 2022, 6-8PM

The exhibition *Embodiments* enables a discourse between three significant positions in contemporary art in Switzerland. In their respective media, Ralph Bürgin (\*1980, lives in Basel), Sofía Durrieu (\*1980, lives in Basel and Buenos Aires), and Roman Gysin (\*1984, lives in Zurich) all deal with concepts of corporeality. The title of this exhibition is inspired by the embodiment theory in cognitive science, wherein according to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, there is no hard separation between bodily conduct and intelligent conduct; rather, there is a unity of behavior that expresses the intentionality and hence the meaning of this conduct. In habits, the body adapts to the intended meaning, thus giving itself a form of embodied consciousness.<sup>1</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, then, strictly speaking, we do not have bodies, rather "we are our body," which is to say, "we are in the world through our body, and insofar as we perceive the world with our body."<sup>2</sup>

The artists approach this parallelism of bodily and mental intention in different ways: Roman Gysin's wall-based objects first appear industrial or mechanical but are given a bodily presence by being "dressed" and "disguised" in shiny satin fabric or adorned with ribbons or jewelry-like objects. In Sofía Durrieu's "sculptures with instructions for action", the visitor's body becomes part of the sculpture, as the artist's instructions bring their bodies into predetermined poses. Here the body is not seen as a category in contrast to spirit and mind, but as the field of manifestation of these aspects. The titles of the works, such as *Relaxable*, *Repentetris* or *John Wayne (to be brave)*, imply that these postures often also result in an intended mood or attitude. The body of Ralph Bürgin's large nude (*grey nude*, 2021) stretches across three joined canvases. The body adapts - in a free and agile manner as it navigates this unusual picture plane. Bürgin's paintings of nudes, heads in profile, and fires, express physicality in a different way. His figures and bodies manifest feelings of adaptability, mental as well as physical agility, and a sense of powerlessness in the face of global political and natural events.

**Ralph Bürgin's** paintings reflect upon the representation of the human body, the human condition in general and with the coexistence of man and nature. For this exhibition Ralph Bürgin shows new works: a monumental male nude, executed in shades of gray, it traverses a three-part constellation of large-format canvases. Seemingly to conform to the formal specifications of the canvases, the body adapts to the picture plane - his head, shown in profile, expanded to almost completely fill one of the canvases, while the reclining, seemingly flexible and agile body follows with ease past the step created by the other two canvases. The oversized head in its meditative stillness contrasts with the soft, malleable body of the figure. Yet this does not feel like a contrast, but rather a finely balanced, perhaps fragile harmony.

Bürgin juxtaposes the monumental presence of *grey nude*, 2021 with a new series of focused small-format paintings. Here groups of heads repeatedly appear in profile, embedded, or rather bunched up in stage-like landscapes that include trees, fire, and other natural elements. The groups seem to be silent, passive observers of unstoppable events, like theatergoers, powerless and apathetic witnesses, while exuding a sense of apparent safety within the group. Current world political and climatic events inevitably come to mind. Bürgin's chosen media of painting and sculpture stand in contrast to this contemporary content. His works are informed by art historical sources from the Middle Ages to classical modernism, ranging from Giotto, Morandi, Henry Moore or Cézanne, as only a selection of his numerous references.

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia Moya, *Habit and embodiment in Merleau-Ponty*, Front. Hum. Neurosci., July 25, 2014 | <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2014.00542>

<sup>2</sup> Taylor Carman, *The Body in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty*, in Philosophical Topics, Fall 1999, Vol. 27, No. 2, 'The Intersection of Analytic and Continental Philosophy', pp. 205-226, p. 224 | <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43154321>

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The works of **Sofia Durrieu** examine the human body and the inherent tension between body and environment. She is interested in exploring behavior and everyday routines, their interruption, and the resulting changes in perception. The artist works with everyday materials, perceptual systems, habits, and automatisms. She studies how identity is recognized and experienced in these systems and how perception changes through interaction.

Over time, her sculptural work has evolved into a performative practice, which developed through the activation instructions for her sculptures. In many of her works, she invites visitors to engage with her sculptures and thus become part of the work. For herself, this also results in astute observations of different reactions and perceptions - the activation of the sculptures by the visitors leads to what curator and professor Chus Martinez calls "*the most empathically form of information-gathering*."<sup>3</sup>

The sculptural works *Relaxable* and *Repentetris* invite the viewers to place their bodies in postures meant to represent a particularly relaxed or penitential position. As in many of the artist's works, the formal rigor of the sculptures, dictated by geometry or material, is countered by the lighthearted title of the work. This is also the case with *John Wayne (to be brave)*, a construction of metal rods and leather straps mounted on the wall like a trophy. The artist invites us to adopt the "brave" stance of the Western hero John Wayne, which is known from various films and whose connotations one is cognizant of.

As the artist says of her participatory sculptures, "*To a certain extent, engagement requires surrendering to meaninglessness - ridiculousness (?) - surrendering to a certain debacle. It is precisely through this that the possibility arises to experience form and structure not as something fixed - and then revisited - but in their dynamic, simultaneous, contradictory, buried, multifaceted, mutating, and poetic nature.*"<sup>4</sup>

**Roman Gysin's** diverse sculptural practice combines influences of minimal art with an acute interest in ornamentation and embellishment. His work continues the movement of object-queerization and sexualization that found its beginnings in the 1980s through artists such as Tom Burr, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and Monica Bonvicini.<sup>5</sup> Herein, Gysin's interest lies not in the luxury of ornamentation, but rather in the everyday or simple adornment of our bodies and objects surrounding us. Repeatedly, bands of satin or rings and buckles made of simple and often "cheaply" gilded materials are used.

Satin plays an elementary role in the work of Roman Gysin. His group of works of *satin pictures* undergoes continuous development, and for *Embodiments* the artist presents a new form of these works. Satin is an inspiring textile for the artist, as it has its origins as an expression of luxury, a status it carried well into the 20th century, but then became increasingly democratized through the replacement of silk with synthetic fiber, giving it a kitsch connotation. Roman Gysin wraps wooden logs with this shimmering fabric, which he arranges in variations and permutations. Through this fabric, which is often worn close to the skin, these works take on their own physicality and seem both attractive and repellent at the same time.

At first glance, the other exhibited works made of found branches, either in their natural state or primed in gray, appear contrary to the delicacy of the satin pictures. Here Gysin arranges elements such as rings and ribbons, which the viewer places in a familiar space proximate to the human body. These works radiate an almost poetic connection with the origins of Roman Gysin's artistic practice, which began with an apprenticeship as a carpenter and continues to find new facets in his enduring fascination and need for adornment and decoration. This wooden origin opens possibilities for him to continuously create works that generate profound observations on fetishisms and fascinations.

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<sup>3</sup> Chus Martinez on Sofia Durrieu's work, Instagram post August 14, 2020

<sup>4</sup> Artist Statement Sofia Durrieu, 2019

<sup>5</sup> Sylvain Menétrey, *The Distinction of the Packaging*, in Cahier d'Artistes Roman Gysin, Pro Helvetia, 2021

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**Ralph Bürgin** (\*1980 Basel, lives in Basel, Switzerland) studied at the Academy of Art and Design in Zurich and Basel, where he graduated in 2018 with a Master in Fine Arts. The painter and sculptor lives in Basel and works in his studio in France (Alsace). Recent solo exhibitions include *Watching a Peaceful River* at Galerie Barbara Seiler, Zurich, Switzerland, 2020, *La place* at Centre culturel suisse, Paris, France, 2019; and *Pieces and Shadows* at Kunstverein Diessenhofen, Switzerland, 2017.

Ralph Bürgin's work has been included in numerous group exhibitions, including 2021 at Wilde Gallery, Geneva, Switzerland; 2018 at Kunsthaus Baselland, MuttENZ, Switzerland; 2016 at Ping/Pong, Basel/Miami, Los Angeles, USA; 2014 in "Kunstkredit Basel-Stadt, Werkbeiträge 2013" at Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland.

In 2019, a publication was dedicated to the artist as part of the *Cahier d'Artistes* series published by the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia, with a text by Felicity Lunn. The artist has also realized several projects in public spaces, including *Gasträume 2020* in Zurich, curated by Christoph Doswald, and a sculpture project initiated by Kunstkredit Basel-Stadt in collaboration with the Department of Construction and Transport, which was presented at the Heuwaage in Basel in 2022.

Selected works from our exhibition will be on view as part of the exhibition *UN(CERTAIN) GROUND | Current Painting in Switzerland*, at Kunsthaus Pasquart in Biel in the summer of 2022.

**Sofía Durrieu** (\*1980 Buenos Aires, Argentina, lives in Basel, Switzerland and Buenos Aires, Argentina) spent her early years in France and where she trained to become a ballet dancer. She studied Fine Arts at Prilidiano Pueyrredón, Philosophy at the University of Buenos Aires, and Graphic Design at the Faculty of Design of Buenos Aires. Later she became interested in ceramics, sculpture, yoga and performance. In 2018 she moved to Basel, Switzerland to join the Master in Fine Arts program at FHNW HGK Institut Kunst, directed by Chus Martínez, graduating in 2020.

Recent solo exhibitions of the artist were *Magenmund* at Palazzina, Basel, *Amenities* at Reaktor, Zurich, *Control Remoto* at Pasto Galería, Buenos Aires, and *Puppet-me (or example of a five-legged walking stick)* at Ruth Benzacar Gallery, Buenos Aires.

Her work has been included in several group exhibitions in Switzerland, France and Argentina, among them at Kunsthaus Baselland, Basel, CEAAC Strasbourg, Federico Klemm Foundation, Buenos Aires. In February 2022 her work was part of the Performance Biennial in Parque Memorial in Buenos Aires. Sofía Durrieu's work is featured in several important private collections in the Americas. Recently she has been awarded an Atelier Mondial residency in Tokas, Tokyo, and has been nominated for the Werkbeitrag Kunstkredit Basel Stadt 2021, as well as for the 2022 Swiss Art Awards. In Argentina, Sofía Durrieu is represented by Ruth Benzacar Gallery in Buenos Aires.

**Roman Gysin** (\* 1984 in Möhlin, Switzerland, lives in Zurich) completed his studies at the Zurich University of the Arts and at the University of Fine Arts Hamburg, following an apprenticeship as a carpenter. Solo exhibitions of the artist included *Really Rustic* at Galerie Christian Lethert, Cologne, Germany, 2021; *Deep Decor* at Toxi Space, Zurich 2021; and *Authentica* at Feldeggstrasse 77, Zurich 2017.

His work has been shown in numerous group exhibitions in Switzerland and internationally, most recently at Le Commun in Geneva, 2021; Last Tango in Zurich, 2020; Topic in Geneva; and Villa Schöningen in Potsdam, Germany. Furthermore, the artist's work has been included in exhibitions at the Torrance Art Museum in Los Angeles, USA 2018, Kunsthaus Hamburg as part of the Hiscox Art Prize 2015, Galerie Samy Abraham in Paris 2012, and COCO in Vienna 2010 and 2011.

In 2021, a publication was dedicated to the artist as part of the *Cahier d'Artistes* series published by the Swiss cultural foundation Pro Helvetia, with a text by Sylvain Menétrey. In 2017, Roman Gysin was awarded Studio Award (Paris) by the City of Zurich and nominated for the Swiss Art Awards. In addition to numerous private collections, works by the artist are in the collection of the Canton of Zurich, among others. In Germany, Roman Gysin is represented by Galerie Christian Lethert, Cologne.

Opening Hours: Tuesday – Friday | 11am – 6pm, Saturday | 12 – 5pm, and by appointment

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