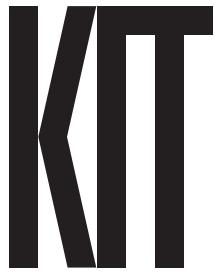


off the beaten rack

with Lisa Biedlingmaier, Paloma Proudfoot,
Isa Schieche, Camilla Steinum and Theresa Weber



25/06 *to* 18/09/2022

In the exhibition *off the beaten track*, the five artists Lisa Biedlingmaier, Paloma Proudfoot, Isa Schieche, Camilla Steinum, and Theresa Weber fill the exhibition space with works of sensual approachability: materials such as ceramics, wood, macramé ropes, and clothing have a lifelike quality that we can experience with our own bodies. The objects often appear vulnerable and intimate. At the same time, they cover the body, protect it, augment it with prostheses, tools, and jewelry, or even simply leave an imprint. They are vessels for and extensions of the body, just as the exhibition space is a vessel for the body moving through it. They all require a kind of tentative interplay between body, space, and artwork.

At the beginning of the conceptualization was an interest in rituals of dressing, extending and covering the body. It now poses the question which possibilities of transformation, (self-) representation, and perception are inherent in these very rituals. “Off-the-rack” clothing is manufactured and sold in standard sizes as a mass-produced good and is thus not tailored to individual bodies and people.¹

The expression “off the beaten track” describes places where few people venture to go. The gap between the two expressions could not be bigger. In the title of the exhibition, they combine to form a loose reference to the ubiquitous engagement with one’s own body—whether in the visual arts or on social media.

The five artists deal with the body as more than just a “clothing rack” and treat it as a medium for different questions: How are memory, love, and death anchored in the body? How can feelings be expressed and activated through the body, also against the background of capitalist and consumer-oriented systems?

To what extent can different cultural practices and the identities associated with them be expressed through bodily adornments and extensions such as fake nails and hairpieces? The balance between health and illness is also addressed, as is the body’s need for personal safety and protection. Answers to these questions are found here and there. Yet they often merely serve as a starting point for an informal examination of the extension and expansion of the body toward other people, into the subconscious, or out into the public sphere.

¹ Cambridge Dictionary:

“off-the-rack,”

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/de/worterbuch/englisch/off-the-rack>.

Lisa Biedlingmaier (*1975) has been working with macramé since 2017: The knotting technique symbolizes a world of ideas in which experiences and feelings are woven into beliefs, morality, and personality, which we then express with the body and its gestures. Each knot is meant to contain an experience or point to blockages in the body and mind. The macramé works are similar in size to the human body and are augmented with materials such as resin, porcelain, metal, and leather. In them, the artist addresses the relationship between conscious perception and the subconscious, body, mind, and spirituality. She explores different forms of coexistence and love.

Biedlingmaier describes *MEMFEURN* (1) as a “bouquet of different [erotic] preferences that can be found in the same body”: shiny purple strings hanging like a dress from limp aluminum shoulders allude to lingerie. Beneath them, cream-colored cords that recall bourgeois interiors are visible. The artist creates a body that – besides the physical one – also refers to mental emotional bodies. These are formed piece by piece, like a pattern is formed knot by knot. The syllable “MEM” refers to the spiritual practice Método Amaranta, which the artist has been working with for a considerable time: It focuses on energy points and blockages in the body and tries to release them with the help of “code words” such as “MEM” (which stands for flow or flux).

The artist transforms the tapered end of KIT into an underwater world in which blue-green light illuminates Plexiglas objects from the series *mem – on being light and liquid* (7) and the work *Liebe* (Love). Some of them are macramé-instructions, others are tributes to artists like Sophie Taeuber-Arp or Ulrika Jäger. Thus, a community of works is brought into being, creating artistic proximity and respect. The sound installation is meant to add an acoustic and energetic charge to the space: the body becomes the receiver of these penetrating impulses. The video work *MANA* (7) takes us into the turquoise landscapes of Mexican cenotes,² where delicate aquatic plants, algae, and macramé figures sway in the water. Love, compassion, and community are common themes: Biedlingmaier is part of the school of hydrofeminism, which sees water as an element that transcends nations, species, and bodies. In other words, water flows through human bodies, oceans, plants, and animals, connecting them in a community.

² Cenotes are sinkholes filled with fresh water which are connected to cave systems.

In her artistic practice, **Paloma Proudfoot** (*1992) makes use of a wide range of media and methods, including sculpture, costume design, and performance. Most of the works on view are made of ceramics. The comparison to vessels is a natural one, and so the depicted body could be seen as a container for widely divergent systems of interpretation. However, the objective is to emphasize the open boundaries between bodies. In order to achieve this effect, Proudfoot uses cutting patterns as a guide, cutting out thin layers of clay and joining them together like a tailor would do with fabric.

In the entrance area (**2**), an ornate bust covered with fine clay hairs hangs next to impressions of body parts such as an abdomen, buttocks, and thighs. All the prints stem from the artist's friends and represent body images that often shape the self-confidence of young women. As ceramics, they lack individual characteristics and thus a certain humanity. *I am sick to death of this particular self, I want another* is the title of several works that highlight the mutability of bodies and identities: Just as skin particles are shed and renewed throughout life, the way we express ourselves, our character, and gender can change with clothing and posture. The filigree needle sculptures *On a Scale of One to Ten* (**4**) are closely intertwined with Proudfoot's interest in clothing and tailoring, as well as with the physical sensation of pain. Proudfoot attempts to use these needles to create a way to express pain in a complex way. Their curved shape is reminiscent of upholstery needles or surgical tools; they are objects that can repair and heal but can also create community. For centuries, women in particular have used sewing as a means of communication—especially when they had no other form of expression.

One such double meaning with morbid overtones also appears in the relief *The Three Living and the Three Dead* (**9**). It is the result of research on the "Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead," which likely originated in the 13th century. In the story, three noblemen are out hunting when they encounter three living dead in different states of decay. These admonish the hunters to be aware of the transience of life. Proudfoot reinterprets the medieval motif; absolute opposites of life and death are dissolved. She breathes life into the figures, but also points to their (imminent) death. In some places, the skin separates from the flesh, revealing muscles and tendons. An unborn child is hiding under the bulging belly of one of the women. The relief is deeply rooted in the artist's personal experiences. It tells of mourning for loved ones and mourning for losses that are self-imposed. The blossoming hands on the pregnant woman's shoulders symbolize the support that the dead can still give to the living.

Isa Schieche (*1988) creates objects out of wood that theoretically could be used as instruments and tools. In them she addresses customs and crafts, games of skill, and dance in connection with (physical) closeness and distance, intimacy, and queerness.

Most of the works created for the exhibition **(8)** are arranged directly on the floor like equipment at a playground. To a certain extent, Schieche democratizes her artworks: Within the scope of guided tours, she offers viewers an opportunity to participate in her works, rock on the saddles, or elicit melodies from the instruments. Some of them are based on traditional agricultural tools. In historical folk dances, they were used as an accessory by men to simulate certain tasks and to demonstrate skill, especially in

front of potential partners. Many of these accessories lost their usefulness over the years and became mere ritual objects. Isa Schieche transforms them into scenery for the performance *Reverse Cowgirl: skills and tools*, which she will perform throughout the exhibition. Her objects often exhibit a certain lewdness, despite how colorful and cheerful they appear at first glance. Pears hang in close proximity of the two heads of Medusa like forbidden fruits in the Garden of Eden, which, according to story in the Old Testament, Eve ate, thus committing the “original sin,” encouraged by the devilish snake. The snake is associated with fear and death, but also with (re)birth and life when it sheds its skin and “renews” itself. In Schieche’s works, it becomes a symbol of subtle resistance to transphobia. The snake and the lassos demonstrate dominance: they are powerful and potentially dangerous, yet supple and graceful.

The spinning top (called a *Drahdiwaberl* in southern Germany and Austria) is quite different.³ It is the same size as the artist but is subject to the rotation she applies.

The *Ratschenbäume* are also passive instruments: they are rotated around their own axis, and the long hair is twirled around like an unmistakable expression of femininity. The rattle makes noises, but only if you use your own body. In a similar way, one’s own self-perception and (sexual) identity are significantly shaped by other bodies and intimate relationships with someone else.

³ The word *Drahdiwaberl* comes from the expression *Drehe dich, Barbara!*

Camilla Steinum (*1986) works primarily with everyday objects, wood, metal, and textiles. Her works focus on how we experience these things emotionally and physically.

In the installation *You can move* (**3**), she invigorates the corridor with flocks of dark birds. Their appearance changes depending on the viewer's perspective. Then they change their direction of flight or transform from crows into wild geese. This illusion plays with the gaze: What do we see? How do our expectations influence perception? The way people intentionally or unintentionally interact with the outside world is a theme of Steinum's works. Visitors can pull a string on some of the birds to make them flap their wings. The artist invites us to focus on touching, moving, and letting go. In this sense, the mobiles become a tool for meditation.

Their effect is disturbed by noises coming from the left and right. They are sometimes very hard, metallic-sounding dull beats. On listening to them, visitors quickly realize that they can trigger an unexpected relaxation. The artist makes use of a form of bilateral stimulation that is used in trauma therapy. This activates both hemispheres of the brain and allows it to more quickly recall memories and images from the past.⁴ The ability to regain control over what has been experienced is important for many trauma victims.

When viewing the *Beaters* (**10**), one could imagine that the audible blows came from these cast bronze carpet beaters. These antique-looking objects are so beautiful that they could also be purely decorative. For a long time they were used for beating carpets, which were usually knotted by women. They allude to arduous housework, often done by the same women or lowly servants. However, carpet beaters were also a widespread means of punishment up until the late 20th century.

The implied violence is another part of Steinum's balancing act between control and loss of control. The perceived vulnerability of body and mind becomes

⁴ Cf. van der Kolk, Bessel (2015): "Letting Go of the Past: EMDR" in *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, London: Penguin Random House UK, p. 297–314.

comprehensible in her works, and the special aspect of this state can be experienced.

Theresa Weber (*1996) develops installations and paintings that deal with themes such as ideals of beauty, traces of belonging, as well as questions of identity and social segregation and exclusion.

The series *Woven Memories* consists of several objects whose shape is reminiscent of protective shields or coats of arms and are positioned along the walls like in a guard of honor. They act as archives in which personal and foreign body extensions such as synthetic hair, gloves, jewelry, and accessories are collected and presented. In between, a self-portrait of the artist occasionally becomes visible. At first it seems as if she is displaying facets of her own identity. Transparency and visibility enable participation: if we see something, we can understand it better. In works such as *Purple* (5), however, a few areas of the picture appear cloudy and cannot be clearly seen. Withdrawing oneself from visibility, making one's own identity or works impenetrable and not having to explain them can also be a form of resistance. In *Woven Memories*, Weber insists on a "right to opacity."⁵ She weaves different stories into a whole without revealing a concrete meaning.

The work *Tears* (6), which was created for the exhibition, hangs from the ceiling like drops of synthetic resin. Weber calls them "freestyle fossils" because they archive traces that represent the body—especially the female body. Colorful beads, rhinestones, hoop earrings, shells, photos, and texts by the artist are suspended in them. Some of the teardrops appear playful and cheerful, while synthetic braids curl down from another as if from a scalp. They are penetrated by piercings, which connect them to an infinite number of other elements.

In between, two-piece suits from the artist's closet hang on abstract hangers. Other fabrics and objects have been woven into these *Costume Objects* (6). They can be worn like a second skin, augmenting the body underneath. Elements made of modeling clay look like minimal armor, as in *Atrocities Top and Bottom*. The blue and yellow colors recall the Ukrainian flag: Theresa Weber uses it to address the war in Ukraine as well as the racist treatment of black people who had to flee from there. Just as the costumes tell of oppression, they also offer future prospects for a world in which mutual appreciation will replace such discrimination.

The exhibition was curated by Nantje Wilke.

⁵ Cf. Glissant, Édouard (1999): *Traktat über die Welt*, Heidelberg: Verlag das Wunderhorn.