

Kyra Tabea Balderer
Recovery
4.11.–17.12.2023

Mayday

A John Schmid Project

Artist Talk

Saturday, 2. December, 5 p.m.
Kyra Tabea Balderer in conversation with Eva-Maria Knüsel

Kyra Tabea Balderer's photographic works depict atmospherically staged bronze casts from various perspectives against colored backgrounds. The objects appear raw and damaged, absorbing the earthy coloration of the red brick floor of the exhibition space but contrasting with the clinically white photo paper strips and the exhibition display reminiscent of the aesthetics of advertising or product design.

The sculptures show partial casts of body parts or formations resembling vessels. The bronzes were produced using the lost-wax casting process, a millennia-old method for metal casting. In the process of creation, the wax objects serving as molds for the cast were partially inverted—inner and outer become reversed or no longer clearly distinguishable. The inlets and vent tubes of the casting process were intentionally left visible. Supported by brackets and pierced by tubes, the objects evoke associations with machine parts, industrial equipment, organisms, or models thereof. Kyra Tabea Balderer thus refers to the procedural nature of her artistic practice and expands the objects with additional layers of meaning: the body becomes a vessel, the vessel becomes an anthropomorphic object integrated into functional purposes.

The artistic exploration of the vessel as a carrier and repository of stories and its proximity to the human body is based on Ursula K. Le Guin's essay "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction" (1986). The author argues that, according to many theories, the oldest cultural inventions are not weapons like spears and swords, but containers and carrying bags. Le Guin develops a poetics of storytelling that focuses on life stories beyond heroic epics and progress narratives.

The corporeality of her objects connects Kyra Tabea Balderer with the history of the exhibition space and its former use as a changing and shower room for dockworkers. This history revolves around work, physical exertion, and social class. Through the formal proximity of body parts to vessels and machines, Kyra Tabea Balderer portrays the body as something arranged, placed in the service of its function as a workforce, worn out, deformed, or damaged. Another form of objectification of the human body seems to arise in its reproductive function—individual bronzes evoke human reproductive organs.

"Recovery" thus focuses on the relationships between the biological body and the environment, society, and technology: What influence do social origins, working conditions of different social strata, and technological developments have on the appearance and temporality of our bodies? What stories are told about it? Who is heard, and who tells from which reality? The exhibition situation and artistic action are understood by Kyra Tabea Balderer as a metaphorical vessel, a counter-narrative to engage with the surrounding world. The body is not only addressed in its arrangement and vulnerability but also in its resilience and autonomy. The vessels serve as carriers and conveyors of diverse life stories, telling of processes of healing and restoration.