

Carol Wyss | Liechtenstein

The Mind has Mountains

March 26 to May 19, 2024 at the Kunstraum Engländerbau

The exhibition *The Mind has Mountains* serves as a bridge between Carol Wyss's earlier and current works. It encompasses pieces that originally emerged from a technical environment (such as *Fragments* and *Change*) and contrasts them with large-format prints inspired by the human skeleton. These prints, which are created in a complex artistic process, come together to form here an expansive installation. Through this body of work, Carol Wyss's authentic and consistently evolving artistic language is vividly revealed.

Her work is based on a fundamental interest in the laws of organizational structures and their mutability. At the forefront is the question of the developmental processes shaping various forms of existence. This thematic thread was already evident in her early works, where she transformed machine parts and technical objects into organic-looking forms through her artistic lens. During this phase, Carol Wyss's concept of «parallel appearances» began to take shape.

Beyond mere aesthetics, she perceives a profound interconnectedness between basic structures across diverse realms, organic and inorganic, technical and biological, micro- and macrocosmic. This interconnectedness is guided by an inner, overarching logic, which is a continuous thread through her work.

After extensive exploration, she discovered a rich repertoire of forms within the human skeleton and its individual components. These foundational elements became the basis for her distinctive artistic vocabulary. Wyss has subsequently based her two- and three-dimensional works and installations, which are primarily created using printmaking techniques, on this vocabulary. In a wide variety of expressions, her work revolves around the framework of the human body. She views this framework as a representative model for the diversity found in other organic structures and patterns of life. Drawing inspiration from the idea that all living beings share a common genetic code at their origin, the artist observes intriguing parallels between the structures of human bones, the earth's surface and vegetal phenomena.

The pursuit of abstraction is a central theme in her work. While acknowledging its formal origins, Carol Wyss intentionally leaves room for ambiguity, allowing her creations to transcend superficial interpretations.

The Mind has Mountains, 2021–24

Installation with 15 triptychs, etching on handmade paper, cloth, aluminium

Large-format etchings, presented as triptychs, not only create a formal but also a conceptual interior space. They reveal structures from within the human skull, into which the visitor can effectively enter. Originally developed for an exhibition in the library of John Ruskin House in Brantwood (UK), they offer a space for thought and reflection. In keeping with Carol Wyss' artistic practice, the configuration also evokes associations with landscapes, especially rock and stone formations in the mountains, which is also reflected in the installation's title. Thus one's mental gaze transcends from the innermost boundaries and expands into the vastness beyond.

Actual mountains have always posed a challenge, appearing insurmountable, sublime, impressive and frightening at the same time. And yet people have always risen to this challenge, have found ways to trade, exchange and test their own limits by climbing the highest peaks. As such they can also symbolize the challenges that existence brings to mankind and that confront us with the task of climbing or overcoming the «mountains of the mind».

Printed on heavy, handmade cotton paper with untrimmed deckled edges, the works convey a material density and a haptic, almost physical presence. The process of creating these works is laborious and time-consuming, involving a combination of various techniques across multiple steps. For *The Mind has Mountains*, the large-format steel plates are first treated with a photo etching process followed by further steps using an array of tools. Alongside the traditional etching needles and engraving tools, industrial equipment such as an electric sander is employed. In order to achieve the intensity of the black tones and the variety of structures in these etchings, the artist mixed the crystalline carborundum (silicon carbide) with soil from the Brantwood gardens or from the Swiss and Liechtenstein mountains, as well as with sand from the Thames. The focus was on physical traces of places that are of essential importance to the artist.

Change, 1998 | Video, Super 8 film (digitized)

Change Stills, 2024 | Glicée photo prints on Hahnemühle Photo Rag

The more than forty wax elements of this sculpture are formally derived from intaglio prints of electronic circuit boards. Stacked on top of each other, they form a seemingly sculptural-architectural shape. While the underlying technical patterns remain discernible, the sculpture's materiality simultaneously takes on an organic appearance. Though perceptible in the stills this becomes particularly obvious through the flowing process of deterioration in the film. At the centre of the artistic reflection is the observation of an irreversible change inherent in the decay of all organic life.

Fragments, 1998 | Etched steel plates

Working tools and processes are not only seen as aids or techniques for materializing or illustrating an artistic concept. Instead Carol Wyss makes it clear how important the individual steps towards the work are to her by emphasizing printing plates or printing elements to be equivalent to the final graphics and often presenting them without the prints themselves. The *Fragments* series for example, shows a series of small-format early printing plates that have their very own haptic and material quality. For the artist however, they are above all the material traces of an intangible thought, preserved even when it is no longer discernible.

Into the Wild, 2011–2014 | Installation with etchings on handmade paper**Mikrokosmos, 2002** | Installation with etchings on 350 g laid paper

In the broadest sense, Carol Wyss' artistic exploration delves into the cycles of becoming and passing away and processes of transformation. This is accompanied by thoughts on the interplay between micro- and macro-organisms and the relationship between chaos and order. Objectively speaking, chaos can refer to anything that is unformed or in a state of flux. In her works Carol Wyss dissolves an established order, such as the human skeleton, and breaks it down into its individual components allowing her to create new structures. Rearranged they are sometimes reminiscent of landscapes, sometimes of plant life (*Into the Wild*) or, as in this series of works, of complex microorganisms.

Text: Cornelia Kolb-Wieczorek

Biographies**Carol Wyss**

Attended the School of Arts & Design in St. Gallen, graduating in graphic design. Subsequent studies in London at the Slade School of Art (University College London), 1998 MFA (Master in Fine Art). Her preferred medium is printmaking with etchings and silkscreens, with which she frequently creates expansive installations. She also works with photography and film.

Cornelia Kolb-Wieczorek

Studied art history and journalism. Since 1992 freelance author, curator of numerous exhibitions on contemporary art and editor in the field of cultural history and archaeology. Member, organizer and management of juries/competitions.