

The exhibition *Who Are We Are Who* reflects on the huge diversity of influences that shape us as people. Some are under our control, others not. Where we were born, our family of origin, the political system of our birth country—all of these determine how our identity unfolds, and the possible combinations and permutations are as numerous as the number of people on the planet. The very thought is fantastic, overwhelming, and confusing all at the same time. “We are who we are” is the slang saying, and it sounds so simple. But it isn’t. This question is the subject of entire academic fields—sociology, psychology.

This exhibition reflects—sometimes explicitly, sometimes obliquely—on how this diversity shapes artistic creation. Some works deal with political or social issues; others ask fundamental questions of art on an abstract level. The featured pieces range from drawings and prints to paintings, photographs, sculptures, and video. Consistent throughout, however, is the premise that openness and diversity are not only to be considered abstractly, but to be lived and celebrated, as the foundation of art, culture, and all there is.

Igshaan Adams (*1982, Cape Town, ZA; lives and works in Cape Town) uses ropes, beads, and found textiles for his tapestries. Each thread and knot, each bead, reflects his examination of identity, cultural diversity, and his own experiences. Adams grew up in the “colored community,” as it was called under apartheid in South Africa. Although a Muslim himself, he was raised by Christian grandparents, and his work is inspired by a precarious balance between his faith and his sexual orientation. He combines materials and iconography from both Muslim and black cultures and develops a critical and subtle engagement with the various limitations, whether sexual, social, or cultural, in the complex context of post-apartheid South Africa.

Photographer and filmmaker **Loretta Fahrenholz** (*1981, Starnberg, DE; lives and works in Berlin) produced her series *Europa II* between 2002 and 2004 in collaboration with photographer and filmmaker Jan Mammey. The photographs show visitors to clubs, hotels, and bars in various East German cities. With the help of analog medium-format cameras and artificial light, studios were improvised on location. On view are people who grew up in two different state systems: they spent the first part of their lives in the GDR, and now live in the FRG. In the photographs, two states and two ideologies symbolically collide, and the individual citizens become their representatives.

Rochelle Goldberg (*1984 in Vancouver, CA; lives and works in Berlin) is best known for her sculptural works that question the notion of the art object and the boundaries between living beings and objects. *Ice Box* (2018) was conceived for the *Casa del Sol* exhibition at Casa Masaccio in San Giovanni Valdarno, Italy. Her own childhood home, a typical Spanish bungalow on the west coast of Canada, had a plaster sign bearing the words “Casa del Sol” hanging on the facade. The work is a repurposed domestic object inspired by the last scene in *Les Rendez-vous d’Anna* (1978) by Chantal Akerman. The entire movie centers on the imposed projections of personality and career unloaded onto the filmmaker. After a long journey through the ritualized imaginations of all the others, she finally returns home. The protagonist looks into a very brightly lit, empty refrigerator and drinks milk. This empty yet illuminated refrigerator is the home of her choice. Goldberg’s refrigerator’s contents consist of photographs of the sculptures, which the fridge lights up in various permutations as if it is remembering them.

Piotr Łakomy (*1983 in Gorzów Wielkopolski, PL; lives and works in Poznań) explores the relationship of sculpture to the human body, architecture, and the environment. Influenced by Le Corbusier’s rationalism and the biomorphism of Frederick Kiesler, the artist uses both organic and industrial materials in his work. He regularly folds panels of aluminum honeycomb—a material used in the aerospace and construction industries—in a way that suggests a more organic nature. His inclusion of ostrich eggs refers to the sphere as a basic architectural form and protection for life.

Sandra Mujinga (*1989, Goma, DR Congo; lives and works in Oslo) explores mechanisms of representation: the social impact of images and their use in creating identities. Mujinga moves fluidly between online and physical spaces, viewing the exhibition context as only one of many stages for her artistic work; others include social media, music distribution

channels, and the intermingling space of nightclubs. The work *Stretched Delays (3)* (2017) is a multi-layered video-installation and another work by the artist that thinks about what is hidden and what is represented, which is “constantly subject to negotiation and adaptation in an ongoing power dynamic.”¹

Since 2001 the artist **R. H. Quaytman** (*1961 in Boston, USA; lives and works in New York) has been working in so-called chapters. Each one is developed individually, sometimes also for a specific exhibition space. The first, *The Sun*, conceptually referred to the death of her grandfather and great-grandfather in a train accident. In the second, first presented at the Lodz Biennial in 2004, Quaytman turned her attention to the Polish modernists Katarzyna Kobro and Wladyslaw Strzeminski (her grandfather was born in Lodz). To date there are thirty-five chapters, all interwoven in one way or another. They speak of her as an artist, and her family, but also the histories of other artists, the social circumstances under which they worked, and the places they lived. The link between all this is painting and the question of its materiality and representation. The display cases in the exhibition show studies for *Chapter 32*, which Quaytman presented at Vienna Secession in 2018, supplemented by the painting *An Evening, Chapter 32* (2018). This chapter is primarily concerned with two paintings by the Flemish painter Otto van Veen.

Erna Rosenstein (1913–2004) was an artist, writer, and poet born in Lviv, a city located in Poland during her youth and now in the Ukraine. She grew up as the daughter of a judge in Krakow. Against her family's desire that she follow her father into law, she studied art and joined a leftist art movement known as the Krakow Group. She survived the Shoa and joined the Polish Communist Party after World War II. Recurring motifs in her work include pictures of her parents, Anna and Maksymilian Rosenstein, who were murdered in July 1942. In the midst of a desperate attempt to escape the Lodz ghetto and reach Warsaw, the Rosensteins were attacked in the woods by a man who had promised the family safe passage. Only Erna was able to escape. The memory of this event underlies her surrealistic imagery.

Cinga Samson's (*1986 in Cape Town, South Africa; lives and works in Cape Town) surreal canvases deal with his identity referentially. The paintings reveal the complicated relationship between contemporary life, African traditions, globalization, and representation. Samson explores what it means to genuinely celebrate being a young African man at a time when, after such a long history of withdrawal and oppression, one can be oneself again. The artist works mainly in oil, and combines realism with fantasy, adorned with familiar signs and symbols from everyday life. In an interview he offered this take on the nuances of blackness, black body politics, and representation in South Africa:

I am a young black African man who is painting himself, so these politics come into it undoubtedly, but I do want to channel experiences specific to my lived experiences. I'm not just dealing with blackness and black body politics, as my work touches on different subjects as it evolves. In the past I have depicted more familiar things, like flowers, and might return to more of that kind of representation. I am more interested in starting a different conversation on representation than the ones that already exist. I also want to represent the spirituality of where I am from, while leaving the politics of representation for the audience to interpret. I grew up witnessing rituals and cultural codes that some might view as dark.²

Since 2006 the French photographer **Bruno Serralongue** (*1968 in Châtelleraut, FR; lives and works in Paris) has been photographing the everyday reality around the refugee camp in Calais. Despite the official closure in 2002 of the camp, which opened in the 1990s, and the police repression that followed it, the flow of migrants has not stopped. This development and these changed circumstances prompted Serralongue to return regularly to Calais and continue the series indefinitely. His first photos were taken in April 2006, when the Jules Ferry Day Center opened. Since then, many concerned groups have drawn attention to the dangers of resettlement and the violence it generates. In September 2015, the associations calculated that between three and four thousand people were still being forced to live in the camp. The shantytown is at saturation point and violence is an almost daily occurrence. The police do not intervene inside the camp.

Amy Sillman's (*1955 in Detroit, USA; lives and works in New York) *After Metamorphoses* (2015–16) is a five-minute fast-action animated film based on Ovid's mythographic epic. In the Roman poet's work, hundreds of gods and humans are transformed into diverse animals, vegetables, and minerals, often as acts of divine revenge. Sillman's elaborate caricature consists of a breathtaking visual catalog of these mutations. Some of the more famous examples can be seen in the video—Juno placing the eyes of the slain giant Argus on the tail feathers of the peacock, for example—but many of the continually flowing events in *After Metamorphoses* are far more elliptical and mysterious. For the video, Sillman superimposed abstract drawings (made in a bathtub in Berlin) with sketches (created on an iPad), which follow the exact sequence of changes in Ovid's narrative drawn in fifteen books. Set to music by Berlin-based musician Wibke Tiarks, the video shows a multicolored background flashing behind a series of figures that transform into one another in a temporal rhythm. The flower prints by Sillman were made in recent months. For most of the Covid-19 lockdown, she had no painting studio access, so she started drawing flowers. She recounted to her gallery:

As Lorraine Hansberry asked (in her 1962 play), "What use are flowers?" I was obsessed with their colors and shapes, the simple joy of observing them, and how they exude libido, healing, and rebirth, even though while I was drawing them I was wondering if we might all die. Were they funerary or optimistic? During this spring, painting itself was overshadowed by the question of whether painting-life could continue to exist at all. But after months of the flowers, they started to morph into abstractions. The flower stems looked like the legs of figures stalking around, their heads bent over in a kind of looped narrative with no particular story except growth and then withering.³

In the work of artist **Tobias Spichtig** (*1982 in Lucerne, CH; lives and works in Zurich and Berlin), the environment in which a piece is created is just as important as the artwork itself, be it painting, sculpture, or installation. Among the central sculptures of recent years are certainly Spichtig's series of narrowly worked, dark and lifeless bodies titled *Ghosts*. These figurative sculptures consist of hardened pieces of clothing pressed into resin and formed into physical, rigid shells. They recall the work of Alberto Giacometti, yet are fundamentally different: Giacometti made bodies, Spichtig makes shells. What they have in common is the absorption of the spirit of their respective present times into sculptures. For Giacometti, it was the friendship and texts of Jean-Paul Sartre that made the artist's work an embodiment of existentialist philosophy. The French philosopher wrote about Giacometti's shadow-like sculptures in 1948: "These figures, which appear so completely immaterial that they often turn almost transparent, and at the same time are so entirely, so thoroughly real that they enter consciousness like a fist punch and are unforgettably imprinted on it—are they manifestations or disappearances?"⁴

The conceptual artist **Jessica Vaughn** (*1983 in Chicago, USA; lives and works in New York) employs the readymade tradition to examine questions of representation and documentation within the everyday US infrastructure. Her well-known works investigate both micro and macro hierarchies of power within the institutions of the working world. The Brooklyn-based artist repeatedly draws on data from her hometown of Chicago, arguing, "It is essential that the materials relate to a particular social history that I can talk to."⁵ In the work presented here, Vaughn addresses urban movement and displacement. In doing so, she shifts familiar elements of urban life, such as seats on public transportation, into the exhibition space. The floor sculptures are upholstery remains backed with Plexiglas, titled after the fabrics or colors of the fabric, such as the patterned *South Beach Blue No. 389* (2017) and *Boomer Blue No. 340* (2017).

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¹ Attilia Fattori Franchini, *Transforming Darkness Into a Space of Agency: Sandra Mujinga*, Mousse Magazine, issue 72, in: <http://moussemagazine.it/sandra-mujinga-attilia-fattori-franchini-2020/>, 02.11.2020

² Jareh Das, "Cinga Samson: 'A Different Conversation on Representation,'" Ocula, February 21, 2020, <https://ocula.com/magazine/conversations/cinga-samson/>.

³ Amy Sillman, comments on the exhibition *Twice Removed*, Gladstone Gallery, New York, 2020, <https://www.gladstonegallery.com/exhibition/6800/twice-removed/info>.

⁴ Tim Ackermann, *Die Menschen sind nur Staub*, 2010, in: <https://www.welt.de/print/wams/kultur/article11100747/Die-Menschen-sind-nur-Staub.html>, 10.11.2020

⁵ Caleb Mathern, *Artist Jessica Vaughn Undermines the Narratives of Everyday Materials*, 2019, in: <https://www.culturedmag.com/jessica-vaughn/>, 10.11.2020