**ENGLISH** 

# **Further Thoughts on Earthy Materials**





Suse Bauer, Katinka Bock, Neil Brownsword, William Cobbing, Anna Lena Grau, Ilana Harris-Babou, Emma Hart, Judith Hopf, Emre Hüner, Lou Masduraud & Antoine Bellini, Johannes Nagel, Kate Newby, Nicolás Osorno, Pablo Schlumberger, Kerstin Stoll, Jennifer Tee, Ingo Vetter, Franziska Windolf, Jesse Wine, Xiaopeng Zhou



Further Thoughts on Earthy Materials, Installationview, Kunsthaus Hamburg 2018, Poto: Hayo Heye, (c) VG Bild-Kunst Bonn, 2018

In times when contemporary art more strongly reflects the conditions and aesthetics of virtual realities, post-human theories abound, and the digitization of the world has created a fascination with surfaces and found images, a parallel art production is emerging, one that deliberately uses haptic materials and artisan production processes.

The exhibition asks what the underlying questions of the shift towards techniques and the material of ceramics in the artistic production of the 21st century are. Further Thoughts on Earthy Materials brings together works of a younger generation of artists that take an unconventional approach to ceramic material and establish references to the present.

The exhibition is a cooperation of Kunsthaus Hamburg and GAK Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst Bremen. With a different focus, the presentations complement each other thematically to create a comprehensive joint project. The Kunsthaus Hamburg chapter addresses the inherent paradox of fired clay: both its being one of the oldest cultural techniques of serial (re)production (i.e. bricks, porcelain) and its haptic qualities that highlight immediate and time-consuming sculptural creation and craftsmanship. The exhibition at the Kunsthaus thus presents artistic approaches that employ ceramics, being a cultural technique which has been handed down from generation to generation, as a medium of engaging with contemporary technologies and issues, and question these in their current relevance: which role does the recreation, depiction, and reproduction of three-dimensional forms though fired clay play today (in the era of 3D scans and printers)? Which material, cultural, moral, or technical implications are connected with the medium? The selected works take up questions concerning the significance of seriality, authenticity, and originality as well as the archeological, anarchic, and dystopic character of the material.

Curator: Katja Schroeder

#### SUSE BAUER

Suse Bauer (\*1979, DE) engages with the question of whether art can be used as an intermediary to outline utopias and function as a hinge between reality and potentiality. Her ceramics, oil drawings and digital prints have the character of sketches. Drawing from a "vocabulary" of reproductions of everyday objects, tools, foodstuffs, or remains of works, she sets recurring elements in ever new relations to each other. Bauer's compositions are created on surfaces which, from a top view, resemble archaeological fields or maps. The view of the world from a vertical perspective is becoming more and more important nowadays, for example, in accessing space with satellites or using drones for economic and military purposes. The artist also applies the analytical gaze from a bird's eye view typical of her working method to the scanner. She creates her compositions made of unfired clay as snapshots directly on the flat board, like the large-format print Landschaft unter Aufsicht (2018).

The material of the work has a purely preliminary character here. The shift in scale of the originally small-format piece to the huge size of approximately 3 x 2 meters in a high-resolution scan allows a precise view of all details. On the other hand, the division into four separate viewing fields relativizes the image space and, in regard to its screening, corresponds with a scientific mode of working, in which a frame of perception is established and that which is visible is divided into smaller fields. However, the structured scan with the aid of the scanner light is not suitable as a tool of cognition, since the model has long been further processed. The reality of the artwork merely consists in its depiction. RS

## KATINKA BOCK

Katinka Bock's (\*1976, DE) sculptures and installations refer to specific material qualities that underscore a direct and individual creative design. Stone, clay, sand, chalk, or metal possess a meaning inherent to the material for the artist and are both the formable substance and the distinct idea of matter. Clay, as the mankind's oldest creative resource, defines itself for Bock via its purity and is juxtaposed with timeless ceramics as a sign of culture.

She often conceives her works on site, thus integrating the exhibition space and interacting with it. Transforming old works into new ones is also a recurring element in her art. Bock's installations break open reference systems and enable a situational narration that emerges both from the individual object and the references between the works and the spatial structure described in the process. Five Speakers (2014/2018) for example, was created in 2014 for an exhibition at KIOSK, Ghent. A copper plate with a fabric was placed on the floor, on which five ceramics were then distributed. Visitors had the opportunity to moisten the fabric by opening a water faucet. The condition of the material changed during the course of the show, with the chemical reaction leaving traces on the plate and marks on the fabric. In 2018, Bock reworked the piece. The canvas is now hanging on the wall, while the copper plate is converted to a pedestal for the ceramics, so that a dialogue arises between the ceramic speakers and the foreground and background. Time often plays a pivotal role in her work – both as a moment and a process. AN

## **NEIL BROWNSWORD**

Neil Brownsword (\*1970, GB) creates installations using ceramics, film and performance. His work takes the ceramics industry of his native Staffordshire as its primary subject, observing its people and production systems. The industrial area became a centre of ceramic production in the early eighteenth century because of the local availability of clay, lead, coal and salt. Adopting the role of both artist and archaeologist, Brownsword unearths discarded by-products from the closed Staffordshire potteries and uses these materials to create sculptures. His work reflects on the inevitable effects of global capitalism which continue to disrupt indigenous skills and a heritage economy rooted in North Staffordshire for nearly three centuries. He has sought to challenge the marginalization of craft skill in industrial contexts and to highlight the danger of specialist knowledge being lost. Recent work has been made in collaboration with former industry artisans, revealing their people-embodied skills and exploring the value of the industry's intangible cultural heritage. KS

#### WILLIAM COBBING

In many of William Cobbing's (\*1974, GB) sculptures, performances and videos, clay appears in an original, still raw state: muddy and malleable. The material marks these intersections between media, and is the perfect means of expression of Cobbing's variegated fields of artistic interest: he engages with archaeological sites, the concept of entropy, disorder, volatility, archives, as well as with language. Cobbing brings all of them together in a complex manner in the material of clay. Clay is at once nature and culture. It possesses an archaic quality and refers back to ancient history. As a raw material, clay is directly connected with nature, possessing a strong haptic appeal and giving rise to associations with recalcitrance and disorder. At the same time, clay functions as geological memory, a medium for passing on knowledge of the past. Ceramic objects can survive for millennia, and they were used as a medium for inscriptions and imprints from early on. The Cover Versions (2017) on display at the Kunsthaus—book covers that Cobbing interpreted with glazed ceramic—symbolically combine features that the written word and the material of clay have in common: both are longlasting carriers of information. In this respect, the book covers appear as ironic plaques that in the age of e-readers and tablets resist the fleetingness of digitization. In the future, Cobbing's very personal selection of contemporary literature could bear witness to different times. LZ



Further Thoughts on Earthy Materials, Installationview Kunsthaus Hamburg 2018, Katinka Bock, Five Speakers (Detail), 2014 / 2018, Courtesy the artist & Galerie Meyer-Riegger, Berlin, Photo: Hayo Heye

## ANNA LENA GRAU

The Hamburg based artist Anna Lena Grau (\* 1980, DE) explores the stages of transition and the relationship between the final product and intermediate state in her sculptural and installation works. Found Footage serves as a template, sometimes it becomes part of an arrangement.

In the exhibition at the Kunsthaus, Grau is showing a re-enactment of the film *Hand Catching Lead* (1968) by Richard Serra. An outstretched hand tries to grab falling pieces of clay from the off, in order to release them the next moment. The gripping, fleeting forming and releasing of the material is also a reference to different states and phases,

which goes through a work in the studio. At the same time, the artist updates Serra's engagement with production processes and the understanding of work as a dynamic process, which changed significantly from the 19th to the 20th century. She refers to our daily work, which is often characterized by growing demands and pressure to perform. Mechanically quickly, the hand catches and opens in the video, stops gripping and withdraws from the film screen. It's Gray herself that acts here. The artist thus also addresses artistic creative processes and questions the expectation of creative productivity that does not define itself through routine functioning at fixed working hours. Grasping becomes a concern and reflection on working fundamentals, conditions, structures, and the reassessment of work. AN

## **ILANA HARRIS-BABOU**

In her video *Reparation Hardware* (2018), Ilana Harris-Babou (\*1991, USA) imitates the visual language of image films of the advertising industry. As with the hand-made clay hammers in this film, she embeds her own ceramics in a world of popular imagery between YouTube and Instagram in her other works as well. With subtle humor, she succeeds in turning her oftentimes dysfunctional art objects into quite natural protagonists of an eternally happy world of good taste in the flow of digital media images, while at the same time critiquing the double standards and stereotypes of a hegemonic reality.

In her video, the artist evokes the nostalgia for an aesthetics of worn surfaces and crafted objects that are currently trending in home design. She not only makes reference to the artificially produced "authenticity" of restorer workshops, however, but also sets her critique of advertising clichés in relation to the colonial history of America. On the visual level, the artist addresses the restoration of old furniture. The textual level, however, reveals the video's political dimension. For example, Harris-Babou's video voiceover features quotes from a designer image film and from the context of the so-called "Sherman's Field Order No. 15." This historical document from the 19th century can be understood as a synonym for the hope for emancipation and equal rights of the oppressed African American population. So when Harris-Babou cites lines such as "Recognizing one another's differences -... is something that hasn't happened yet" or "we've earned the right to the soil," she indeed leaves the context of feel-good design behind and enters into a current socio-critical discourse. KS

## **EMMA HART**

Emma Hart (\*1974, GB) makes work that tests personal, domestic and familial relationships. It awkwardly exposes them whilst the power relation between the viewer and artwork – who is attending to who? – is scrutinised. Working in series, the accumulative effect of visual repetition is used to lean on and position the audience, often trying to manipulate them.

Her series of ceramic speech bubbles You Two-Faced Lying Motherfucker (2016), which are shown at Kunsthaus put words in people's mouths. When standing in front of the work, the speech bubbles emanate from the person looking at it and they appear to be saying two different things at the same time. The speech bubbles also form a head, the letters become facial features, some are actual photographs of the artist: the viewer and the artist have got entangled in a lovers' fight.

A selection from Hart's *Private Eyes* (2014) is also on show at Kunsthaus. A series of wall mounted clipboards conceals things from the viewer, the viewer has to look up into the mirrors in order to catch a glimpse of what the clipboard keeps private. This causes uneasiness, as the unidentified figure with pink arms holding the clipboard seems to observe and evaluate visitors' behaviour as they stare intensely into their eyes.

Hart's practice has previously combined photography, video, and sound with ceramics. Her turn towards clay is partly based on a critical attitude towards digital media and its overwhelming incorporation of signs, signals, feedback, infographics and filtered im-ages. Due to the physicality of working with clay, the material possesses an immediacy allowing for something crude and personal. In Hart's hands it forms an ideal vehicle for a practice that addresses the repetitive patterns of, up and down, human behaviour. LZ

#### JUDITH HOPF

In her comprehensive oeuvre that mostly consists of sculptures, spatial installations and videos, Judith Hopf (\*1969, DE) deals with objects of everyday life that she restages by means of unexpected, minimal interventions. She often defamiliarizes the usual contexts of use of materials such as bricks, concrete, glass, or packaging, thus causing disturbances that prompt us to newly reflect on our daily lives.

In her most recent works, she turns architecture into sculpture by forming over-sized objects, such as pears, spheres, feet or hands, using bricks. She thus resolves the impossible task and turns the square of the building material into circular elements. The hand and index fingers are reminiscent of emojis that are becoming increasingly widespread in our internet-based, daily communication. Feet and trolley bags trigger the association of being nonstop on the road. The artist uses these motifs to negotiate mobility, which today implies both individual and social adaptability and a diversity of options, but also unstoppable acceleration. By falling back on a heavy building material that for centuries has been used in the development of sedentariness and urban civilization, she halts the process of the economy of time and invites viewers to pause. Her works are therefore always also commentaries on current developments and existing structures relevant to society. AN

## EMRE HÜNER

Watching Emre Hüner's (\*1977, TUR) films feels something like time travel. In two 16mm shorts, *Aeolian Processes #1 #2*, the camera shows us an array of objects—framed in close-ups or arranged as still lifes—that withhold immediate clues to their temporal or geographic origins. Archaic-looking tools mix with artifacts from the more recent industrial past, as if unearthed together many centuries from now. Hüner casts us as amateur archaeologists. When and where do these objects come from? What relation-

ship do they have to one another? A yellow motorcycle helmet, rough-hewn clay figures, colored metal sticks, an aerodynamic form: is this the secular altar of some off-planet cult? The films themselves are relics; as an outmoded, insistently analog medium, 16mm film produces a distanced effect suggestive of memories and dreams. Traveling through time, these films tell us what the past looks like from the perspective of a distant future. The films' title, *Aeolian Processes*, references the phenomenon of landforms shaped by wind inviting a morphological comparison between Hüner's clay figures and desert rock formations.

As an artist, Hüner travels between mediums and genres. His practice encompasses drawing, animation, video, film, sculpture and installation. These diverse media are vehicles for ideas connected to dense constellations of literary, filmic, artistic, and scientific reference points. In this allusive universe, Hüner returns to certain themes again and again: modernist experiments, failed utopias, myths of technological progress. JD



Further Thoughts on Earthy Materials, Installationview, Kunsthaus Hamburg 2018, Poto: Hayo Heye

## LOU MASDURAUD & ANTOINE BELLINI

Most of the works by Lou Masduraud (\*1990, FR) and Antoine Bellini (\*1979, FR) are performative or evolve in a process. With customary, yet deliberately chosen objects and materials, they create situations which, on the one hand, serve as props or as a stage for their performances; while on the other hand, produce a space for a shared experience. Thereby, sound, music, and text often play an important role.

Amongst other topics, the works engage with the ever-growing and seemingly natural incorporation of electronic devices in the private, domestic spheres. The boundary between technology and the private has dissolved – when going to bed with the laptop and wearing in-ear headphones. Masduraud and Bellini do not treat the technical device as an extension of the body in the sense of a prothesis; rather, it is considered a body itself, which stimulates perception and makes sensual experiences (possible).

The basic idea behind the installation From you through them to situation – From them through situation to you (2016/18) shown here is an all-embracing "conductive" network. Thereby, the cables nestle in their casing from reddish, unfired clay, lying softly on a cushion. The speaker becomes a resonating body that transmits the sound waves from its trunk to the ears of the audience. With special attention to the details and the

vague moments of daily life, Masduraud and Bellini take a critical look at a post-human society in which social, economic, and technological systems do no longer allow clear differentiation. KS

## JOHANNES NAGEL

Chance plays a key role in the artistic practice of Johannes Nagel (\*1979, DE). He uses a specially developed sand casting method to produce his porcelain sculptures, manually digging cavities into the sand and filling them with porcelain slurry. No model is used when applying this hardly controllable method. The form emerges in the process and in direct contact with his production means and material, which the artist literally is in touch with.

Nagel's ceramic work is situated between vessel and sculpture. The Kunsthaus presents *Weißes Cluster* (2017) and *Kleines dystopisches Cluster* (2017), two pieces each designed like a group of vases. As with other works, the artist fathoms the diversity of vessel shapes, but always defines them, independently of their function, as autonomous sculptures. Traces of the production process can be clearly discerned in his works. The forms are characterized by asymmetry. Dysfunctionality and irregular glazes often appear raw and incomplete. In the piece *Orbital* (2015), the form is entirely detached from any function. The title can refer both to the orbit of planets and, in nuclear physics, to the state of uncertainty of the tiniest material particles that no longer take on a form perceivable for humans. In the interplay of chance, knowledge of the material and creative freedom, Nagel consciously navigates at the technical and specialist borders of the craft of ceramics, developing an independent formal language in porcelain.

## KATE NEWBY

Kate Newby's (\*1979, NZ) sculptures and installations represent a repository for the senses, creating scenarios that change states. The process is more humble, though, than it first appears. She generally sticks to a limited material vocabulary: clay, glass, earth, metal, or rope. Some of these she finds, some she purchases—in any case, it's important that they come from nearby. The materials are not processed more than they have to be—a patina is as close as she comes to excessive surface treatment. When the final artwork is ready to be exhibited, it fills space subtly, and with respect to its given position.

I can't hear it enough (2018) is an adaptation of the installation presented during her solo-exhibition at Kunsthalle Wien Karlsplatz earlier this year which continued her ongoing engagement with ephemeral and often peripheral situations. She created a large-scale work installed on the floor in the Kunsthalle consisting of modified fired bricks with inserted elements such as shattered glass fragments left behind as a result of people spending time outdoors in the Karlsplatz area, coins, and hand made ceramic pebbles and rocks. Through the firing process unexpected formations are produced that imprint the inserted pieces of glass and clay. Newby also adds some small, individual ceramic and bronze pieces that turn out—only upon closer inspection—to be handmade objects. The sculpture unfolds as a material texture that invites visitors to step onto the work, to move across the surface and encounter its details. Discreetly integrated into the exhibition space, the artwork allows the incoming natural light to become part of the installation, and also deliberately encourages the viewers' gaze to wander outside. MV

## NICOLÁS OSORNO

Nicolás Osorno (1980, CO) belongs to a younger generation of artists who employ ceramic techniques as a medium to engage with contemporary issues. In his sculptures and spatial installations, the artist deals with the politically precarious situation in his homeland Colombia. What is humanity worth in a country plagued by decades of civil war and social tensions between an oligarchy that is becoming increasingly richer and an impoverished rural population? If violence and terror become a permanent state, vision and deception also turn into an alternating duet. The artist transfers this reciprocity to his works and counters the seriousness of the topic with a fragile material. For example, the works of the series Mártires (2014), remind one of blossoms, yet they are the martyrs of a loud bang caused by fireworks exploding in the fresh clay. Other pieces were lent their shape by directly shooting at the clay. Brutality manifests itself in the experimental creation process – but the result is innocently tender. This is the other way around in the work untitled, 2011. Danger and threat are directly revealed by the collection of weapons, twelve replicated rifles and guns, compiled to a showcase. Only upon closer examination does one see that the guns were made of clay, burnt and elaborately glazed. In this case, it is the fragile ceramic that defines the deception. AN

#### PABLO SCHLUMBERGER

Pablo Schlumberger's (\*1990, DE) work draws from an aesthetic world of things that seem to have little to do with art. Be it gutters, small crochet tablecloths or oversized earthenware jugs, which he converts into fountains spouting coffee or inserts in large-scale installations, or — as in this show — outdated ceramic humidifiers for radiators. His works are usually created in series and are often interconnected by a sort of circulatory system. Tubes or pipes suggest a complex system with an unknown function lying behind the things.

The anthropomorphic features of his ceramics are striking, reflecting different moods or characters and in aesthetic terms situated between Surrealism and folklore. They allude to historical gargoyles as they can be found on fountains or the façades of Gothic cathedrals. Like the so-called chimera that were traditionally mounted above doors and on house gables, the fabulous and grotesque grimaces serve to avert evil from the interior of buildings. By titling his water-filled ceramics with questions (What if...?, Am I...? or Will I...?), Schlumberger gives them less the role of restive protectors in this show. Instead, the objects have doubt and worries writ large in their faces, turning the humidifier into a reservoir of tears. It seems as if the overlooked everyday objects get alive and above all: express their feelings. KS



Further Thoughts on Earthy Materials, Installationview, Kunsthaus Hamburg 2018, Jennifer Tee, I can't hear it enough (Detail), 2018, Courtesy the artist & The Sunday Painter, London, Photo: Hayo Heye

## **JESSE WINE**

Jesse Wine (\*1983, UK) uses clay as a medium to reflect on everyday experiences through a diversity of shapes and colours. Wine seems liberated from canons and free to experiment. Through his installations with all their ironic imperfections and imprints of craft nature, Wine expresses internal resistance to digitalization of art and mass production, embracing hand-made techniques. Wine reflects on the coexistence of contemporary and decaying, making some objects colourful and playful, other ones rusted and dull. The artworks Metaphysical composition with slender mystery (2016) and Metaphysical composition with tremendous conflict (2016) recreate daily items from "rusted" clay that are obsolete and invincible while the deformed body parts seem to completely lose their abilities to perform manual labour. Many of Wine's works have a remarkable surrealistic touch, reproducing objects with their true meaning lost or skewed. The works on display here for example refer to Giorgio De Chirico's Pittura Metafisica, in which the artist combine everyday objects with symbolically charged relics in dream-like scenarios. The sculptures of a red glove hanging on the wall and a rusted hammer solemnly installed on the shiny blue surface look like cultural artefacts rather than means of production, reflecting the irony of their declining state. Will the glove rust or will it be taken off the wall one day? Wine leaves that as an open question. MV



Further Thoughts on Earthy Materials, Ausstellungsansicht, Kunsthaus Hamburg 2018, Foto: Hayo Heye

## XIAOPENG ZHOU

With his art, Xiaopeng Zhou (\*1985, CHN) investigates humans working on the crust of the earth. His interest is expressed in the form of research on and long-term observations of specific areas of work, for example, fossil energy production, the quarrying of stone or paleontological and archaeological research. Zhou draws up documents of his observations in the form of serial drawings employing, among others, techniques of lithography, 3D animation or also traditional drawing on paper. Since he refrains from photographic methods, his depictions are also always informed by a fiction. In the translation process from the direct observation of the work procedures into the visualization of the drawing, the artist fathoms the potential of the various rock formations that humans exploit. The series shown here, Working with the Stone (2014), is thematically related to this. It consists of a series of drawings in which Zhou depicts paleontologists scanning fossil and archaeological finds. What is striking is that the scientists seems to pay more attention to the digitally produced computer image than to the actual stone. The artist deepened and expanded his interest in the productive interplay between virtuality and real material, which he was able to observe in scientific research, for his presentation at the Kunsthaus Hamburg. A new series of drawings show scientists from afictive world of research drawn with permanent markers on blue foils. They are at an even greater distance to their object of study that they seek to grasp all the more profoundly with observation methods of the future. Although they are investigating layers of rock and sediments, not a grain of sand, not a speck of dirt can be found underneath their fingernails anymore. KS

Texts: Jill Dawsey, Nele Müller, Anna Nowak, Katja Schroeder, Rebekka Seubert, Mariia Vorotilina, Lea Ziegler

## Kindly supported by:

Stiftung Kunstfonds Bonn, British Council, Hypo-Kulturstiftung, Hamburgische Kulturstiftung, Mondriaan Fonds, Lithuanian Culture Institute