

BEYOND BAROQUE: CONTEMPORARY ART AT THE SCHLOSS WALDEGG

27.08–25.09.2022

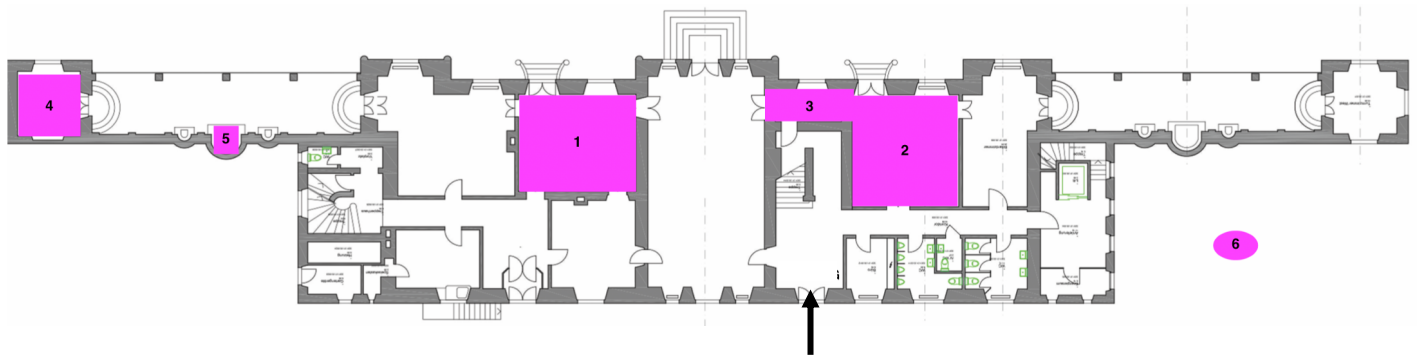
Curated by Dr. Valentina Locatelli

For the third consecutive year, the Berne-based non-profit organisation art+château presents an exhibition of contemporary art in an historic castle.

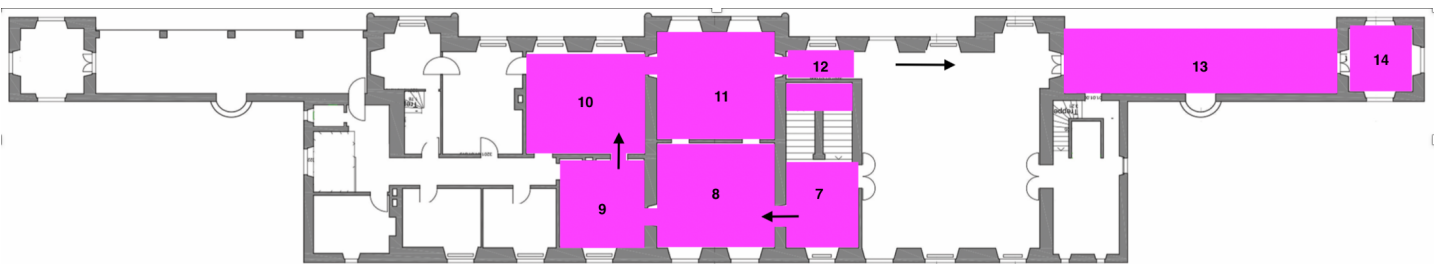
This year's exhibition *Beyond Baroque* will take place at the stunning Schloss Waldegg (Waldegg Castle, Canton of Solothurn), bringing together fourteen Swiss and international contemporary artists whose artistic practices demonstrate an intimate yet unexpected visual relation with the traditional formal vocabulary of the Baroque period. The artworks included in the exhibition highlight different aspects of the permanence and reinterpretation of the Baroque style in contemporary art and in today's society, offering a fresh and surprising insight into this subject. Artworks of different media – drawings, paintings, videos, sculptures, installations, and a music performance – enter into dialogue with the architecture of Waldegg Castle and some of its most iconic, historic holdings.

MAP OF THE EXHIBITION GROUNDS

Ground Floor and Garden



First Floor



[1] BESENVAL SALON: Franziska Baumgartner; Luisa Kasalicky; Alina Kopytsia.

[2] SALON OF THE AMBASSADORS: Gergana Mantscheva; Jan Bajtlik with Frydmann Kuhn.

[3] HALLWAY: Verena Thürkauf.

[4] ST.MAURITIUS CHAPEL: Charlotte Hug.

[5] LOGGIA (NICHE): Alina Kopytsia.

[6] REAR GARDEN: Pável Aguilar.

[7] STAIRS AND STAIRWAY: Kaspar Flück; Franziska Baumgartner.

[8] BEDROOM: Luisa Kasalicky; Christian Fogarolli; Jan Bajtlik with Frydmann Kuhn.

[9] SMALL SALON (Video Raum): Alina Kopytsia with Coco Schwarz.

[10] BLUE SALON: Gergana Mantscheva.

[11] RECEPTION ROOM: Yuan Yuan; Alina Kopytsia; Luisa Kasalicky; Jan Bajtlik with Frydmann Kuhn.

[12] HALLWAY: Verena Thürkauf.

[13] TERRACE: Pável Aguilar.

[14] TOWER: Charlotte Hug.

The text in square brackets next to the titles of the artworks in this brochure signal where they are located in the exhibition grounds.

INTRODUCTION

Built between 1682 and 1686 as a summer residence for the Schultheiss Johann Viktor I von Besenval (1638–1713) and his wife Maria Margaritha von Sury (1649–1713), Waldegg Castle is located just outside the city of Solothurn, internationally renowned as “the most beautiful Baroque city in Switzerland”. Following the style which dominates the old town of

that distances the Baroque individual from the idea of durability transmitted by classical artworks brings them at the same time closer to the contemporary subject. Metamorphosis has a primary thematic prominence, but it is also a category of Baroque anthropology that justifies the taste for mixing and evolving artistic genres. Kopytsia's practice incorporates traditional crafts like sewing and stitching, generally associated with female skills, a creating method that allow her to generate an enticing juxtaposition between form and content.

Taking an uncomplicated and humoristic approach, Kopytsia's provocative work addressing social taboos has been shown in selected festivals and exhibitions in Europe, America and Asia. At Waldegg Castle, the artist deals with fluid identities by creating non-binary gender extensions with silicone and ceramics, two materials which perfectly represents concepts including the opposite, the ambiguity and the sensuality of Baroque. In particular, *Flashback (2022) [5]* is a silicone sculpture, which display in a niche under the portico in the castle's garden and flanked by two full body statues describes quite well the humanistic approach mentioned above.

Kopytsia's white ceramic objects titled *White Flower XI [1]* und *White Flower XII (all 2019) [11]* ironically remind of Baroque stucco through their floral motive, but they are not "just decorations": the asymmetrical white flowers could initially recall female genitals, but assume each time another form through the fluidity of the Baroque waves yet revealing their hard materiality. GB

GERGANA MANTSHEVA – Born 1975 in Sofia, Bulgaria. Lives and works in Solothurn, Switzerland.

Life-size portraits of people and objects are the absolute protagonists in Gergana Mantscheva's work. For over twenty years, since she left her native Sofia to settle in Switzerland, her artistic practice has been characterised by the repetition and personal elaboration of recurring themes and topics which she draws from direct experience and from everyday life: people who are dear to her; an old mattress she used as a child; a wedding dress; the façade of a "Plattenbau" (slab building) in Sofia. As she explains: "I can translate into painting only what has become a personal and *inner image* to me". The objects she portrays always carry a human presence and tell the story of the human condition: of joy and pain, hope and fear, resignation and resistance. Mantscheva, who received a classic training in painting at the National Academy of Arts in Sofia, works on motifs collected from her childhood and youth spent in Bulgaria and the Eastern Bloc as well as elements of her life in Switzerland. She always departs from the photographs which she takes during the first phase of her research, in her studio or during one of her frequent trips back to her home country, to then edit them digitally, develop the compositions and masterfully transfer them onto canvas.

While the realism in Mantscheva's paintings finds its origin in the socialist context she was brought up in, her skilled use of acrylics and oil paint applied layer by layer on canvas is nothing less than virtuoso and speaks for her artistic sensibility and her study and profound understanding of Old Master paintings. For the exhibition at Waldegg Castle, the artist has created three new paintings which are both a tribute to the Baroque epoch and a keen reflection and powerful visual commentary of the dark time we are living in. For this new series of works, focusing on the haptic presence and texture

of materials, Mantscheva has combined an object-based investigation with the traditional codes of official portraiture, infusing life to the inanimate artifacts which she has selected for her composition. In *Jenseits des Barocks I, II and III (all 2022) [10]* we are confronted with the portraits of three Baroque busts like the ones which punctuate the rooms of Waldegg Castle, among them also a copy of Gian Lorenzo Bernini's *Bust of Costanza Bonarelli* (Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence). They are draped in black plastic bags similar to those used for garbage disposal, but also reminiscent of the body bags we have tragically become accustomed to seeing in the news. Although we cannot see their traits, we can imagine the physiognomy of the people portrayed under the plastic wrapping. Is the cover meant to protect the sculptures from dust? Is it the artist's ironic commentary on the relation between social status and material? Or do these paintings serve as a chilling *memento mori* in a time of war and destruction?

The fourth painting in the exhibition is *Sampiero (2021) [2]*, in which the artist has portrayed a young man wearing only sports shorts and a so-called "space blanket" as a coat – a flyweight, plastic sheet layered with aluminum and capable of protecting the body from cold. Inspired by the paintings and altarpieces Mantscheva has encountered in the cathedrals and churches of Solothurn, the protagonist of *Sampiero* stands midway between the figure of a Saint wrapped in gold and the image of a migrant rescued at sea. "The gold foil takes on an autonomous role between clothing, space and symbol. For me, appearances and representations of people on the street flow together in this motif, in the new and old media, and in spaces consecrated as sacred or only perceived as such. It is exactly these contradictory sources which inspire me. I am driven to transfer them into a composition and give a pictorial harmony to my painting technique." (Gergana Mantscheva). VL

VERENA THÜRKAUF – Born 1955 in Basel, Switzerland. Lives and works in Basel.

Verena Thürkauf's artworks are characterised by a minimalism of materials and forms. It is only upon taking a second glance that their apparent simplicity reveals an underlying conceptual complexity. The artist challenges the viewer to come to terms with the tricks played by perception. She stimulates a reflection on sight – on one's capability to see things and on how observation can generate new forms of knowledge. In Thürkauf's artistic universe, words and signs shine from a different perspective and activate unexpected chains of thoughts beyond their traditional meaning. As Konrad Tobler fittingly summarises it: "Verena Thürkauf aims at the perception of reality or at the reflection of this perception in language" (in: *Über das Verfließen von Sprache*, 2020). Although she is especially well-known for her artistic investigation on language and communication, a focus on gestural drawing – the inspiration of which can be drawn back to her encounter with the Viennese artist Arnulf Rainer (born 1929) during her student days – is equally evident in Thürkauf's artistic production. An interest for graphism and for the playful relation between complex and yet simplified networks of lines is combined with an investigation of materials and surfaces. There is also a curiosity for tactile perception in Thürkauf's practice and it is precisely this aspect which conveys a more sensual component to her work.

The Baroque epoch was characterised by numerous scientific and medical discoveries which were grounded in

observation. While the traditional knowledge was undermined by the new law of optics and the invention of instruments such as the telescope, artists reacted by developing methods of representation capable of deceiving the eye, creating spatial illusion, and questioning the perception of reality.

Thürkauf's series *Meetings* (2015) [3 and 12] can be interpreted in the lineage of the Baroque *trompe-l'oeil* paintings, the most famous of which is probably Andrea Pozzo's monumental frescos on the ceiling of the Church of San Ignacio in Rome. In *Meetings*, what at first sight seems to be a documentation or reality – the photograph of groups of people seemingly admiring and talking about large format artworks in a museum setting – turns out to be an illusion. The “viewers” are nothing more than architectural scale model figures which the artist has placed and photographed in front of her small format black-and-white drawings. Each photo is like a scenography – they remind us of a theatrical scene and offer a subtle commentary about the relativity of the awareness of space. Playing with proportions and scales, volumes and balances, the artist manipulates our understanding of reality. She does so with a keen sense of humour and without any ambition of wanting to suggest an authoritative reading, but rather with the objective of forcing open the codes of perception and normative thinking. VL

ARTIST STATEMENT:

“My attention is focused on the tightrope walk between seeing and thinking, recognising and naming, as well as uncovering gaps that can release a poetic potential.

Drawing – Object – Installation – Art and Construction.”

YUAN YUAN – Born 1973 in Zhejiang, China. Lives and works in Berlin, Germany.

Yuan Yuan is an internationally acclaimed Chinese artist best known for his large format realistic paintings depicting mysterious and abandoned architectures and interiors. With a Master of Fine Arts from the prestigious Oil Painting Department of the China Academy of Arts in Hangzhou, Yuan moved to Berlin in 2019 to start a new chapter of his personal life and creative career.

When the Chinese Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, Yuan was just a toddler. He grew up in China at a time of great economic and cultural revolution characterised by vertiginous modernisation and speculative urbanism. The country was looking firmly into the future and had little interest in preserving the emblems of its past history and culture. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that Yuan, who has always been fascinated by the old continent with its Renaissance and Baroque art, has made the passage of time and its visible manifestations the absolute protagonist of his work. In his paintings, Yuan proposes not only a conversation between Western and Eastern visual cultures but also a personal reflection on the impermanence of cultural emblems and its meaning.

Combining tradition and modernity, Yuan's paintings are executed with impeccable skill and mastery of hand painting techniques. Yet, by scratching with a knife on the surface of the still fresh paint, the artist voluntarily intervenes to dampen and blur the otherwise almost photographic realism of his representations. Observing his canvasses is like looking into a magic mirror and a parallel dimension, where architectures and objects do not respond the same way to the laws of

physics but seem crystallised and suspended in the thick atmosphere of eternal time.

For the exhibition at Waldegg Castle, Yuan has completed two canvasses which he had started painting while still living in China as part of the series *The Other Side* (2015/22). For this, the artist reproduced the Hall of Mirrors – the Latin American replica of the famous original version at Versailles – of the Museo de la Revolución in the Old Havana. The building served as the Presidential Palace of all Cuban presidents until Fulgencio Batista, and Yuan visited it in 2013 during a one-month trip to Cuba. As he remembers: “I went to Cuba to see socialism. I travelled by bus across the island, from Havana to Trinidad, Camaguey and Santiago. I thought that Cuba was very similar to what China must have looked like in the 1970s and 1980s, although I was only able to compare it on the basis of photographs of that time. When I was growing up, China had almost already erased everything from that age.”

In his paintings *The Other Side I* and *The Other Side II* (2015/2022) [11], Yuan has combined the opulent and almost excessive splendour of an historicist Neo-Baroque and Neo-Classical building in communist Cuba with the discrete atmosphere of the original Baroque Reception Room at Waldegg Castle. Despite never visiting the room before, he was able to research its colour palette by means of numerous photographs and descriptions provided by the curator. Although the artist's figurative ability is undeniable and his canvasses could be taken for photographs if observed from a certain distance, Yuan's works are not realistic. The interiors he portrays do not exist as such: they are cacophonous and liminal non-spaces suspended between different times and distant geographies. VL

TEXTS: Giulia Busetti [GB]; Valentina Locatelli [VL]

SCHLOSS WALDEGG

Waldegg Castle is located on a hill at the foot of the Jura, in the middle of the idyllic recreational area of the Baroque city of Solothurn. Inspired by French and Italian architecture, it was commissioned as a summer residence by the powerful Solothurn patrician Johann Viktor von Besenval, who oversaw its construction between 1682 and 1686. By designing the layout of the castle, the avenues extending far into the landscape and the gardens, Besenval created a Baroque synthesis of the arts.

Waldegg Castle has been open to the public as a museum since 1991. A centre for culture in the canton of Solothurn, it serves as a platform for encounters and exchange between the language and cultural regions of Switzerland as well as between Switzerland and the rest of the world. The rich cultural programme of Waldegg Castle ranges from guided tours to exhibitions, from concerts, opera and theatre performances to scientific lectures.