You are greeted by gleaming technoid forms of vaguely human dimensions. Joachim Bandau’s too long overlooked, but utterly contemporary-seeming sculptures of the 1960s and 1970s appear to be functional (note their quasi-industrial finishes, their wheels, handles, tubes, and protective rubber casings), yet they are resolutely without purpose. They stand like alien devices, weirdly sensual and creaturely. Nearby, a recent composition involving a thrift store blanket and textile scraps by Eric N. Mack hangs limply; further into the exhibition, other examples of his textile collages are affixed to a curtain railing or swoon onto the floor. Without fixed shape or form and released from the strict geometry of a stretched canvas, Mack’s sewn and arranged material remnants are marked by their kinship to commodities and popular culture: street style, Prince, greasy takeout food, a Harlem dog hospital advert, et cetera.

You sense that these works engage a history of painting, just as Caroline Achaintre’s hand-tufted rugs do, the latter even more pronouncedly engaging with domesticity, with “women’s work,” with a dirtiness (of the floors they allude to), and exhibiting a flaccidity that is neither genteel nor heroic. A yet different engagement with the history of painting is that of Michaela Eichwald, whose works feature abstract traces. Those gestural marks stick to cheap imitation leather on which the paint doesn’t dry as it would on canvas; it remains tacky for a long time, dust invariably clinging to the gummy surface. All of these works’ insistent materiality plays with that most auratic of art history’s mediums, rendering it less noble—even debased somehow.
And the vaunted tradition of sculpture, for its part, is made irrepressibly strange (Freud had a name for it, *unheimlich*, or uncanny) by Liz Magor’s *Sleepers*. These works are variations on a theme: a doll wrapped in a rubberized silicone cast of a baby blanket, “swaddled” so only the uppermost part of its forehead and hair spill out. “Creepy” is perhaps the best word to describe them. They lie, casually but eerily, on the floor and in your way (indeed, much of Magor’s materially confounding oeuvre operates this way, and pieces are scattered throughout the show). So opens the exhibition.

There is no easy way to account for a show that goes by the title *Ungestalt*. The German term signifies neither exactly the English “formlessness” nor the French *informe*, yet shares something of their essence. Indeed, the rather arcane word conveys wildly different senses, which seems perfectly fitting for the present circumstance. It is a description of something that struggles against delineation—indeed, against the clean, articulated wholeness suggested by *Gestalt*. It also describes something clumsy and misshapen, even monstrous—so. Under these rubrics, amorphous, gooey, abject, and fugitive emanations might be described as *ungestalt*. Perhaps something that both is a form, and actively undoes that form, comes closest to embodying a term that itself escapes capture. But how might we apprehend this notion not only materially, but also perceptually and conceptually? And how might thinking about it offer a vehicle for understanding the divergent practices of the artists, living and dead, who made these works half a century ago—or as recently as last month?

In the gallery’s second room and presented a bit as if in the storage area of a *Wunderkammer*, pedestals abutting pedestals, sculptures, drawings, and photographs are positioned so low that you must get on your knees to properly view them. Here works by Marcel Duchamp and Alina Szapocznikow serve as core historic elements. In the 1950s, long before it was possible to recognize them as “outtakes” of his final artwork, *Étant donnés: 1. La chute d’eau 2. Le gaz d’éclairage* (1946–66), Duchamp produced a series of three strangely formed objects, looking like body casts. Although they don’t immediately reveal their indexical counterparts or their relationship to the nude figure in Duchamp’s final installation, this trio of so-called “erotic objects” have a curious corporeality and take up an indeterminate role as both things in themselves and preambles to another artwork beyond them. They encircle a 1971 sculpture by Szapocznikow in polyester resin cast from body parts (a foot, a breast), amalgamated with the ordinary stuff of her studio (pantyhose, newspaper). The Polish sculptor described her works from the late 1960s and early 1970s as nothing more than “awkward objects,” which might have been another way of calling them *ungestalt*. Haunting, visceral, sensual, endlessly uncanny: Szapocznikow’s body casts, lugubrious forms, and accretions of matter using unorthodox materials, methods, and forms act, much as Duchamp’s works here do, as harbingers of the absent but nevertheless disquieting (real) body at the heart of the presentation.

Populating this exhibition are exquisitely ungainly, recalcitrant works that, each in their own way, refuse to be docile, stable, well-balanced. There is something obscene, unsettling, or (quite literally) rotten about them, even when they might also be described as inexplicably attractive, even elegant. Sometimes the artworks’ resistance is material: as with Olga Balemia’s ever so slightly quivering, mechanized and mysterious, or viscous and dripping, always odd sculptural forms; Lucie Stahl’s resin-coated photographs that depict hands grasping various dirty industrial or natural elements; the artistic duo Pakui Hardware’s industrial shelves and trays with archival NASA images of Mars imprinted on silicone so that they look like diseased skin; or Park McArthur’s upright, pocked, partially plastic-draped, scribbled-upon foam pieces that stand like strange sentinels or anti-monuments in the final room of the exhibition.

Sometimes the artworks’ resistance is more perceptual than material, as with Trisha Donnelly’s two filmic works, one an abstract moving image, the other a still projected image, each hovering somewhere between analog and digital, and each appearing at once present and effaced, almost apparitional. Or Adrián Villar Rojas’s comestibles slowly rotting in a crammed refrigerator-freezer. His encased display of domestic entropy—neither entirely solid nor liquid, increasingly oozing the more the audience opens its door to take a look—creates not only a slippage between luxury commodities (lobsters, champagne, scallops, pomegranates) and disgusting waste, but also fills the air of the gallery with its nasty, olfactive signature.
Sometimes the artworks’ resistance is conceptual, as Tomo Savić-Gecan’s literally self-undoing works. For example the one that is nothing more than its value—a value declining every minute of the exhibition’s run. Set at CHF 100,000 at the opening of the show, it dwindles until it announces its own worthlessness. Another piece by him quite literally changes the conditions of the exhibition, impacting humidity levels in the galleries according to unseen forces. Nathalie Perrin’s drawings, on the other hand, portray the chaos of a mind that sees connections between wildly divergent points of reference: classical music, military strategy, Russian novels, chess maneuvers, geography. To read them is to trace vertigo-inducing connections between the incomprehensible plenitude of the world and Perrin’s scribbled attempt to in some way map it.

_Ungestalt_ brings together a subjective ensemble of newly commissioned and existing pieces of drawing, photography, sculpture, textile, and video by fifteen artists and one artistic duo, each of whom has responded to their moment with works characterized by a tantalizing, yet unnerving, volatility. In its amorphous excess, the show also poses the question: How can an exhibition itself become subject to a certain degree of _unforming_? One answer is: through some abdication of control. Accordingly, Florence Jung, known for her various acts of artistic evasion in which rumors or audience sequestration or counterfeit items replace art, was invited to exert her influence upon the exhibition. Her (possible) interventions into every aspect of the show’s preparation, presentation, and communication constitute her artwork, the details of which will remain confidential. Her imperceptible, incommunicable influence undoes the exhibition just as the shifting humidity levels and the rot wafting in the air subtly outmaneuver curatorial control, rendering a show that is not quite governable, not quite containable, not quite able to itself achieve _Gestalt_. 

LIST OF WORKS

Florencio Jangung, 2022

ONLINE KUNSTHALLEBASEL.CH

Tomio Sarvá-Cecán

Unstitulit, 2007-2017

The value of the artwork is the amount,

which points out the value of the artwork at any
given moment or consult the website.

Pakui Hardware

Heidelberg, 2017

UV print on silicone, images from NASA digital archives, plastic,

rubber tubes, stainless steel, transportation box.

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and Dali Gallery, Berlin

Joachim Bandau

Palladio suadade, 2017

Anodized aluminium, Close couplings, glass felt reinforced polyether,

inorganic semiconductors, rolls, rubber tubes, vacuum tubes

305 x 165 x 84 cm, 105 x 84 x 94 cm

Courtesy Joachim Bandau, Galerie Thomas Fischer, Berlin, and Galerie Mark Martha, Zurich

Joachim Bandau

Flautenfus, 1973

Glass reinforced polyester, pigmented,

wax

35 x 98 x 33 cm

Courtesy Joachim Bandau, Galerie Thomas Fischer, Berlin, and Galerie Mark Martha, Zurich

Lucie Stahl

Fressen, 2017

Inlay print, aluminium, epoxy resin

337 x 280 x 2.5 cm

Collection Artemis Baltoyanni

ROOM 4

1 Tamo Sarvá-Cecán

Unstitulit, 2005-2007

Lithograph and screenprint, serigraphs printed from six series of images to the exhibition The Day, held at the New Zealand Centre Gallery in New York from October 15 to November 14, 2003; the date from that machine is shifting the humidity levels at Kazlow Esale for the duration of the exhibition from May 15 to August 17, 2013.

Courtesy the artist

2 Pekui Hardware

Heidelberg, 2017

UV print on silicone, images from NASA digital archives, plastic,

rubber tubes, stainless steel, transportation box.

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and Dali Gallery, Berlin

Joachim Bandau

Ungestalt IV

2015

Aluminum, silicon rubber, glass felt, metal plate, polished silicon rubber, inorganic semiconductors, rolls, vacuum tubes, rubber tubes, printed silks

105 x 84 x 54 cm

Courtesy Joachim Bandau, Galerie Thomas Fischer, Berlin, and Galerie Mark Martha, Zurich

Joachim Bandau

Ungestalt III

2015

Aluminum, silicon rubber, glass felt, metal plate, polished silicon rubber, inorganic semiconductors, rolls, vacuum tubes, rubber tubes, printed silks

105 x 84 x 54 cm

Courtesy Joachim Bandau, Galerie Thomas Fischer, Berlin, and Galerie Mark Martha, Zurich

Joachim Bandau

Ungestalt II

2015

Inorganic semiconductors, rolls, rubber tubes, printed silicon rubber, vacuum tubes,

rubber tubes, vacuum tubes

105 x 84 x 54 cm, 105 x 84 x 54 cm

Courtesy Joachim Bandau, Galerie Thomas Fischer, Berlin, and Galerie Mark Martha, Zurich

Joachim Bandau

Ungestalt I

2015

Aluminum, silicon rubber, glass felt, metal plate, polished silicon rubber, inorganic semiconductors, rolls, vacuum tubes, rubber tubes, printed silks

105 x 84 x 54 cm

Courtesy Joachim Bandau, Galerie Thomas Fischer, Berlin, and Galerie Mark Martha, Zurich

Joachim Bandau

Palladio suadade, 2017

Aluminum, silicon rubber, glass felt, metal plate, polished silicon rubber, inorganic semiconductors, rolls, rubber tubes, vacuum tubes

305 x 165 x 84 cm, 105 x 84 x 94 cm

Courtesy Joachim Bandau, Galerie Thomas Fischer, Berlin, and Galerie Mark Martha, Zurich

Joachim Bandau

Flautenfus, 1973

Glass reinforced polyester, pigmented,

wax

35 x 98 x 33 cm

Courtesy Joachim Bandau, Galerie Thomas Fischer, Berlin, and Galerie Mark Martha, Zurich

Lucie Stahl

Fressen, 2017

Inlay print, aluminium, epoxy resin

337 x 280 x 2.5 cm

Collection Artemis Baltoyanni

ROOM 5

1 Liz Magor

Pearlsite, 2015

Cork, silicone rubber, pearl

Collection of the Royal Bank of Canada

2 Park McArthur

Polyurethane Foam, 2014

Polyurethane foam, plastic

288.28 x 124.46 x 124.46 cm

Collection of Scott J Lederer

3 Ola Balem

ogyte, 2017

Coral, fabric, snow, steel

90 x 50 x 30 cm

Courtesy the artist and Cory Nielsen, Vancouver

4 Ola Balem

the gulf of tears, 2017

Black, snow, steel

30 x 15 x 15 cm

Collection of Barbara and Howard Morse

5 Eric N. Mack

How You Became an Accomplice (Scroll), 2013

Acrylic, aluminum, burlap, seed pods, pieces, speech and plastic on jute

26 x 81.28 x 15 cm

Courtesy the artist and Cory Nielsen, Vancouver

6 Ola Balem

the gulf of tears, 2017

Black, snow, steel

30 x 15 x 15 cm

Collection of Barbara and Howard Morse

7 Eric N. Mack

Parade, 2016

Acrylic, aluminum curtain rod, cardboard, cotton, ABC, fashion magazine pages, grommets, newspaper pages, occult fragments, rope, zzzz, fabric, fabric

198.1 x 175.3 x 5.1 cm

Almine Rech Gallery, New York

8 Trisha Donnelly

Untitled

2015

Approx. 100 x 200 x 300 cm

Polyurethane foam, plastic

288.28 x 124.46 x 124.46 cm

Collection of Scott J Lederer

9 Lucie Stahl

Water Crist, 2016

Inkjet print, aluminium, epoxy resin

128 x 128 x 2.5 cm

Collection of the artist and Fredinand Freiheip, Los Angeles

10 Ola Balem

Ballets, 2017

Cardboard, fabric, extension cord, mortar

30 x 30 x 15 cm

Cory Nielsen, Vancouver

11 Ola Balem

Saloon in the shape of wolves, 2017

Felt, wool, fabric, ski tube

Approx. 180 x 265 x 385 cm

Courtesy the artist and Cory Nielsen, Vancouver
Caroline Achaintre was born in 1969 in Toulouse, FR; she lives and works in London.

Olga Balema was born in 1984 in Lviv, UKR; she lives and works in Berlin and New York, USA.

Joachim Bandau was born in 1936 in Cologne, DE; he lives and works in Aachen, DE, and Stäfa, CH.

Trisha Donnelly was born in 1974 in San Francisco, USA; she lives and works in Düsseldorf, DE, and New York, USA.

Marcel Duchamp was born in 1887 in Blainville-Crevon, FR, and died in 1968 in Neuilly-sur-Seine, FR.

Michaela Eichwald was born in 1967 in Cologne, DE; she lives and works in Berlin.

Florence Jung was born in 1984 in Fort-de-France, FR; she lives and works in Biel/Bienne, CH.

Eric N. Mack was born in 1987 in Columbia, USA; he lives and works in New York, USA.

Liz Magor was born in 1948 in Winnipeg, CA; she lives and works in Berlin and Vancouver, CA.

Park McArthur was born in 1984 in Raleigh, USA; she lives and works in New York, USA.

Pakui Hardware: Neringa Černiauskaitė was born in 1984 in Klaipėda, LTU, and Ugnius Gelguda was born in 1977 in Vilnius; both live and work in Berlin and Vilnius.

Nathalie Perrin was born in 1989 in Geneva, CH; she lives and works in La Croix-sur-Lutry, CH.

Tomo Savić-Gecan was born in 1967 in Zagreb; he lives and works in Amsterdam.

Lucie Stahl was born in 1977 in Berlin; she lives and works in Berlin.

Alina Szapocznikow was born in 1926 in Kalisz, PL, and died in 1973 in Passy, FR.

Adrián Villar Rojas was born in 1980 in Rosario, AR; he lives and works in Rosario, AR, and New York, USA.
Thanks to Ramsey Alderson, Isabelle Alfonsi, Robin Anthony, Cécilia Becanovic, Nathan Bennett, Leonardo Bigazzi, Alexis Blum, Bernard Blum, Aaron Bondaroff, Guillermina Borgognone, Ethan Buchsbaum, Justyna Buisko, Neal Curley, Dominic Eichler, Pascale Eisner, Thomas Fischer, Robbie Fitzpatrick, Alex Freedman, Maxwell Graham, Thomas Heyden, Susan Hobbs, Dona Hochart, Hannah Hoffman, Corrie Jackson, Catriona Jeffries, François Jupin, Irmel Kamp, Casey Kaplan, Brit Katke, Michael Kinsbergen, José Kuri, Gwenvael Launay, Hervé Loevenbruck, Scott J. Lorinsky, Mónica Manzutto, Kate Marra, Jacqueline Matisse Monnier, Ella Dawn McGeough, Antoine Monnier, Christian Mooney, Alberto Moran, Barbara and Howard Morse, Paul Aymar Mourgue d’Algue, Mark Müller, Monika Pawłowska, Loring Randolph, Almine Rech, Germán Rodríguez Labarre, Andrea Rosen, Lydia Ruby, Bernard Ruiz-Picasso, Samantha Sheiness, Piotr Stanislawski, Birgit Suk, Philip Tan, Camilla Toschi, Piotr Voelkel, Ayelet Yanai, and Michel Ziegler

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GUIDED TOURS THROUGH THE EXHIBITION

Every Sunday at 3 pm guided tour, in German
21.5.2017, Sunday, 3 pm Curator’s tour, in English
11.6.2017, Sunday, 3 pm Guided tour, in English
29.6.2017, Thursday, 6:30 pm Guided tour, in English

EDUCATION / PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Children’s tour I Spy with My Little Eye!
11.6.2017, Sunday, 3 pm
6.8.2017, Sunday, 3 pm
A tour and workshop for children, from 5 — 10 yrs., in German, by reservation only: kunstvermittlung@kunsthallebasel.ch

Lautstark 9 presentation
22.6.2017, Thursday, 5 pm
An audio guide for Ungestalt conducted by students from Birsfelden secondary school; available to all visitors.

Kunsthalle ohne Schwellen
7. – 13.8.2017, workshops for disabled people
In each all-day workshop, participants explore the current exhibitions and try out different forms of artistic expression. By reservation only, and for more information: kunstvermittlung@kunsthallebasel.ch

In the Kunsthalle Basel library you will find a selection of publications related to the exhibition.

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More information at kunsthallebasel.ch