

JOACHIM
BANDAU

DIE
NICHTSCHÖNEN

WORKS
1967–1974

02.03.–
06.06.2021

KUNSTHALLE
BASEL

Joachim Bandau was just over thirty years old when he began to forge the body of sculptures and drawings that marks a distinctive phase in his early practice. In 1967, he had begun the creation of his amorphous, vaguely humanoid sculptures built up from mannequin segments in combination with then-new industrial materials, and already by 1974, he announced the abrupt end of this production in order to move into a different direction. In those few but prolific years, Bandau made well over one hundred sculptures and countless related drawings, each as strange and singular today as when he first created them. This exhibition concentrates on a selection of key pieces from that period, some rarely or never seen since they were first made.

All adamantine surfaces and abstracted curves, Bandau's early sculptures were typically achieved by way of chopping up department store mannequins and slathering these fragments with fiberglass-reinforced polyester that he then sanded and coated, sanded and coated, again and again. The segments of the dismembered figures were often used in the most unexpected ways, with Bandau's process usually concealing the bodily antecedents at a particular artwork's core. Their final, painstakingly created shells, either absolutely smooth or mottled with skin-like pores, were then lacquered in high-polish paint, mostly black or white, but sometimes in such colors as fire-engine red or bright orange, metallic silver or bruised grey. Some were even combined with chromed pull handles and caster wheels, stainless steel shower heads or hardware couplings, rubber tubes or flexible hoses—gaping or jutting out like so many orifices and tentacles. At once technoid and bodily, minimal and monstrous, these “non-beauties” (Nichtschönen)—to use the neologism invented by the artist to describe them—were the perfect marriage of voluptuous sensuousness and clean, hard froideur. **EN**

The backdrop to their genesis was the rise of industrial automation of the late 1950s and early 1960s, scientific advances such as the first heart transplant that made headlines in 1967, and the memories of World War II that the artist had lived through as a child and whose dark legacy he was actively grappling with as an adult. Bandau unraveled the body's relationship to technology and commodification as much as its connection to the atrocities of war. The resulting sculptures bear an uncompromising strangeness. It is hard to say *what* they are exactly, even what era they might belong to, not to mention the fact that, if humanoid they are, their sex seems often as obscure as their purpose. “Organoid-technoid hermaphrodites” is what one critic called them at the time.

Their presentation at Kunsthalle Basel is deliberately non-chronological, following instead a loose dramaturgy and unfolding, room by room, the lexicon of themes, materials, and forms that preoccupied Bandau in these crucial years. Punctuated by curves and color, the first room introduces both the hardened, commodity-like gleam and the modular structure that links the sculptures to the logic of mass production (despite being entirely handmade). These characteristics are integral to *Großes weißes Tor* (Great White Gate, 1969/1970), the piece that partially blocks the exhibition's entrance; it is one of several related works focusing on thresholds, with passageways that are deliberately too narrow to actually be functional.

ROOM 3

1
Ohne Titel, drawing for
Georgische Tänzer, 1971
Gouache on paper
70 × 50 cm
Neues Museum Nuremberg, DE

2
17.04.1971, 1971
Pencil and chalk on cardboard
96 × 67.5 cm
Neues Museum Nuremberg, DE

3
17.04.1971, 1971
Pencil and chalk on cardboard
96 × 67.5 cm
Neues Museum Nuremberg, DE

4
Drawing for *Fahrbare
schwarze Sesselgruppe*, 1971
Dated 7.1.1971
Pencil on paper
15 × 20 cm

5
Drawing "Kanonen-Sessel,"
1971
Dated 16.1.1971
Pencil on paper
30 × 41 cm

6
Drawing "Panzerwagen,
fahrend...," 1971
Dated 16.1.1971
Pencil on paper
30 × 41 cm

7
Drawing "Kanonenwagen
Kanonenmonstrum," 1971
Dated 16.1.1971
Pencil on paper
30 × 41 cm

8
O. T., 1971
Pencil and gouache
on cardboard
96 × 68 cm
Neues Museum Nuremberg, DE

9
13. August 1974, 1974
Mixed media on paper
59.8 × 42 cm
Neues Museum Nuremberg, DE

10
13. August 1974, 1974
Pencil and graphite on paper
59.8 × 42 cm
Neues Museum Nuremberg, DE

11
"Stehende Figur," technical
drawing for *5 Kabinen-Mobile*,
1973
Dated 21.2.1973
Pencil on graph paper
60 × 42 cm

12
"Figur 'Zurücklehnen,'"
technical drawing for
5 Kabinen-Mobile, 1973
Pencil on graph paper
60 × 42 cm

13
"Sitzen," technical drawing
for *5 Kabinen-Mobile*, 1973
Dated 1.2.1973
Pencil on graph paper
60 × 42 cm

14
Drawing for *5 Kabinen-
Mobile*, 1972
Dated 25.12.1972
Pencil on paper
30 × 41 cm

15
Drawing for *5 Kabinen-
Mobile*, 1972
Dated 26.12.1972
Graphite on paper
30 × 41 cm

16
"Berwagen," drawing for
5 Kabinen-Mobile, 1972
Dated 27.12.1972
Graphite on paper
41 × 30 cm

17
"Liege-Wagen," drawing for
5 Kabinen-Mobile, 1973
Dated 11.7.1973
Pencil on paper
30 × 41 cm

18
Documentation of *5 Kabinen-
Mobile*, 1973, during production
at the Daimler-Benz AG
factory in Sindelfingen, DE
Black and white photographs
6, each approx. 24 × 18 cm

19
Weißes Organgerät, 1970
Plastic, mixed media, lacquer,
bathroom fittings, shower
hoses, metal handles, casters
113 × 60.5 × 30 cm

20
Zwei graue Sesselfiguren, 1971
Mannequin segments,
fiberglass-reinforced
polyester, mixed media, lacquer,
metal handles, casters
2 elements, each 112 × 75 × 75 cm
Private collection, Aachen, DE

ROOM 4

Georgische Tänzer, 1971
Electronically controlled chassis,
wiper motors, plastic, rubber
7 elements, each in 7 parts, each
approx. 210 × 80 × 80 cm overall
Neues Museum Nuremberg, DE

CHANGING LOCATIONS (MOVED WEEKLY)

Lenkbarer Genosse, 1971
Mannequin segments, fiberglass-
reinforced polyester, mixed media,
lacquer, metal handles, casters
3 parts, 156 × 35 × 75 cm overall

ROOM 2

1
Zungenfuß, 1973/1976
Fiberglass-reinforced
polyester, mixed
media, lacquer,
tire inner tube
21 × 69 × 233 cm

2
Hanteln, 1967
Cast polyester resin,
shower hose
2 parts, each
23 × 15.5 × 6 cm
Collection Dieter Geller,
Cologne, DE

3
Großes Flossenrelief, 1974
Fiberglass-reinforced
polyester, mixed
media, lacquer
218 × 104 × 10 cm

4
Maske, 1974
Fiberglass-reinforced
polyester, mixed
media, lacquer
2 parts,
105 × 41 × 21 cm overall

5
Flossenrelief, 1974
Fiberglass-reinforced
polyester, mixed
media, lacquer
145 × 70 × 12 cm

6
O. T., 1974
Fiberglass-reinforced
polyester, mixed
media, lacquer
82 × 57 × 13 cm

7
O. T., 1971
Mannequin segments,
fiberglass-reinforced
polyester, mixed
media, lacquer, wood,
tire inner tubes
186 × 55 × 20 cm
Mietinen Collection

ROOM 5

1
Manta, 1972
Mannequin segments,
fiberglass-reinforced
polyester, mixed media,
lacquer, D-hose couplings,
Vacuflex hose
30 × 138 × 95 cm

2
Beinprothesen-Sarg, 1972
Used leg prostheses,
mannequin segments,
fiberglass-reinforced
polyester, mixed media,
lacquer
47 × 60 × 196 cm

3
Weißes Duschtor, 1969
Mannequin segments,
fiberglass-reinforced
polyester, PVC tubes,
mixed media, lacquer,
shower heads
3 parts, 180 × 110 × 35 cm
overall

4
*Fahrbares schwarzes
Schlauchmonstrum*, 1971
Mannequin segments,
fiberglass-reinforced
polyester, mixed media,
lacquer, aluminum,
rubber, C-hose couplings,
metal handles, Vacuflex
hoses, casters
4 parts, 220 × 72 × 91 cm
overall

5
Hose durchsichtig, 1969
Fiberglass-reinforced
polyester, mixed
media, lacquer, Plexiglas,
tire inner tubes
4 parts, 185 × 65 × 40 cm
overall

6
*Schwarzes ruhendes
Schlauchmonstrum*, 1972
Mannequin segments,
fiberglass-reinforced
polyester, mixed media,
lacquer, C-hose couplings,
Vacuflex hose
85 × 85 × 240 cm

7
Wasserwerfer, 1974
Mannequin segments,
fiberglass-reinforced
polyester, PVC tubes,
mixed media, lacquer,
C-hose couplings,
malleable cast iron rolls
4 parts, 223 × 55 × 85 cm
overall

8
Weißer Sarkophag, 1972
Fiberglass-reinforced
polyester, mixed media,
lacquer, plastic, D-hose
couplings, Vacuflex hose
49 × 65 × 228 cm

9
30.06.1972, 1972
Pencil and chalk
on cardboard
64 × 90.5 cm
Neues Museum
Nuremberg, DE

ROOM 1

1
Großes weißes Tor, 1969/1970
Mannequin segments,
fiberglass-reinforced polyester,
mixed media, lacquer
13 parts, 230 × 170 × 30 cm
overall

2
Kleines Hörchel, 1967
Wood, lacquer, shower heads,
shower hose
3 parts, 75 × 54 × 15 cm overall
Private collection, Switzerland

3
Ophelia, badewassergrün, 1967
Mannequin segments,
fiberglass-reinforced polyester,
mixed media, lacquer
4 parts, 26 × 50 × 360 cm overall

4
*Transplantationsobjekt VI
(Kölner Spritze)*, 1968
Mannequin segments, fiber-
glass-reinforced polyester, PVC
tubes, mixed media, lacquer,
C-hose coupling, PVC hose
190 × 93 × 33 cm

5
Gnom, 1969/1970
Mannequin segments,
fiberglass-reinforced polyester,
mixed media, lacquer, shower
heads, shower hoses
30 × 50 × 43 cm
Private collection

6
Silbernes Monstrum, 1970/1971
Mannequin segments,
fiberglass-reinforced polyester,
mixed media, lacquer,
aluminum, hose couplings,
Vacuflex hose, casters
4 parts, 175 × 78 × 114 cm overall
Paul Ege Art Collection,
Freiburg im Breisgau, DE

7
Große weiße Figur, 1971
Mannequin segments,
fiberglass-reinforced polyester,
mixed media, lacquer
5 parts, 276 × 100 × 40 cm
overall
Paul Ege Art Collection,
Freiburg im Breisgau, DE

8
Figur, 1971
Aluminum, birch plywood,
lacquer
9 parts, 190 × 56 × 57 cm overall
Neues Museum Nuremberg, DE

9
Kleiner Torso, 1968
Mannequin segments,
fiberglass-reinforced polyester,
mixed media, lacquer
3 parts, 46.5 × 33.5 × 31 cm
overall
Private collection

10
Figur, 1967
Dated 19.9.1967
Gouache and pencil on paper
70 × 50 cm

All works, unless otherwise mentioned,
courtesy and collection of the artist

The three pillars holding it up are comprised of four parts each, with a number of mannequin segments helping to form the top “arch” of the gate. Near it, reliefs evoking a head and feet protrude from the modular, floor-bound elements of *Ophelia, badewassergrün* (Ophelia, Bathwater Green, 1967). Beneath the slick curves of *Silbernes Monstrum* (Silver Monster, 1970/1971), on the other hand, the body is almost completely abstracted, as is similarly the case in the upright, wooden *Figur* (Figure, 1971). Analogies between the human, ever present, even if sometimes elusive, and the commodity set the tone of the beginning of the exhibition.

One might detect a Pop-like playfulness about these works, yet a questioning of the more sinister aspects of humanity often also lurks at their core. Consider the ominous implications hinted at by the title, *Transplantationsobjekt VI (Kölner Spritze)* (Transplantation Object VI [Cologne Syringe], 1968), one of a series of works inspired by medical advancements contemporaneous with its creation; or, at the center of the room, the perfectly shiny, black, rounded *Gnom* (Gnome, 1969/1970), from which multiple flexible stainless-steel gooseneck hoses emerge. Compact, easily portable, and at first glance almost cute, like its title, it was made after the artist had seen gruesome images of a war veteran, a full-body amputee, unable to move or speak but technically kept alive for years. It presages the black pieces in the exhibition’s second room characterized by the rubberized aesthetic of bondage gear, apparent in *Zungenfuß* (Tongue Foot, 1973/1976) and in *O. T.* (Untitled, 1971), a phallic contraption that looks equal parts torture device and masturbation tool. Surrounding these, cryptic forms emerge in various wall works as if from the depths of a pool of tar or blackened waste. Oblique, never actually indecent, but often weirdly suggestive, Bandau’s sculptures owe some of their curious force to their dogged ambiguities.

Underscoring the diversity and importance of drawing to his practice, the third room gathers gauzy watercolors for pieces that never came to be (such as *13. August 1974*, 1974); detailed renderings of works that would eventually be realized (as those for his various “*Sesselgruppe*” [Chair Group] works, with one set of these sculptures also featured in the room); precise technical drawings used in the fabrication of works (such as his now defunct *5 Kabinen-Mobile* [5 Cabin Mobiles] from 1973, also pictured in vintage photographs); and impressionistic sketches of works once they were made (such as his *Silbernes Monstrum*, 1970/1971). All of these convey a sense of both the vibrant

imagination and the rigorous planning that accompanied the creation of his three-dimensional objects.

The fourth room holds *Georgische Tänzer* (Georgian Dancers, 1971), a multi-part work comprised of amorphous, white, upright figures (literally modeled on *Figur*, presented in the first room), like a small army of cartoony ghosts hitched to robot vacuum cleaners. Motorized, each is almost—but not quite—an animatronic clone of the next, advancing with glacial slowness until it bumps into the boundary of the work’s precisely delimited arena or another “dancer,” causing both to shift course. Theirs is a machinic ballet of sorts, and a scathing social commentary, in which Bandau’s zombified beings follow rules that are not their own, and are unable to experience closeness or intimacy (since touching prompts distancing).

The last room, featuring some of Bandau’s more explicitly devastating pieces, is the first room’s antagonistic companion: while the show opens seemingly colorful and fun, it closes in a brutal tenor. Among the works shown is *Beinprothesen-Sarg* (Leg Prosthesis Coffin, 1972), an unusual piece in Bandau’s repertoire, in which a pair of well-worn prosthetic legs appear unveiled and unadorned from a slender tombstone-slab. It gives way to other eerie, coffin-like forms, like *Weißer Sarkophag* (White Sarcophagus) and *Schwarzes ruhendes Schlauchmonstrum* (Black Dormant Tube Monster, both 1972), the latter among a series that Bandau termed his “monsters.” Towering in the background is *Wasserwerfer* (Water Cannon, 1974), a menacing black monolith-like form on wheels that disguises a mannequin’s thighs used to create the curved barrels at its top, ready to shoot. Central to the room is the gleaming, immaculate surface of another of Bandau’s gates, this one with multiple built-in shower heads as if born from mannequins’ breasts; *Weißes Duschtor* (White Shower Gate, 1969) reads as a Nazi extermination device turned fancy, high-gloss appliance. As a coda to the exhibition, these pieces perfectly encapsulate the “aesthetic of violence” (to use Bandau’s own term) that undergirds his work, making as much reference to the body’s damage (and its capacity to damage others) as to its imbrication in desire and commodification.

Kunsthalle Basel, focused as it is on the art of the present, rarely stages shows of historic work. Yet given how topical Bandau’s weird, little known sculptures and drawings from 1967–1974 are, they exceptionally merit our attention. Indeed, even today, these early works remain, insufficiently recognized in many art histories of either

postwar sculpture or the global tendencies of the 1960s and 1970s. Surely part of the reason for this state of affairs is that Bandau's art failed, in so many ways, to conform to popular currents of the moment, being neither principally conceptual nor minimal, neither properly figurative nor fully abstract, using then-new industrial materials (ignoble by classical art standards) to recall the sleek efficiency of products while being flagrantly useless, and, finally, making highly political statements while evading the look of "political art." It is exactly this "failure" to fit in, along with the relentless ambiguities these early works radiate, that makes them so fascinating. Thus, despite having been produced decades ago, it is their extraordinary relevance to contemporary artistic practices and to the political moment we are currently living that motivates their exhibition here and now.

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

Accompanying the exhibition, a richly illustrated catalog with extensive historic material and several newly commissioned contributions by Joachim Bandau, Alexandra Bircken, Elena Filipovic, Martin Herbert, and Renate Wagner will be published in German and English by Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König in Spring 2021.

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