

English Version

Maëlle Gross. *HotHeads*

2nd Floor

With *HotHeads*, the Kunsthaus Langenthal presents Maëlle Gross's first institutional solo exhibition whose core consists of a tripartite video installation of the same name. Gross, born in 1988, who lives and works in Lausanne and Geneva, offers touching portraits of three women over 50 – Françoise, Micheline, and Marie-Rose – and their passion for motorcycles.

In the first video, Françoise invokes an “esprit infinit”, a universal spirit propitiated for the protection of the riders. The audience witnesses the three women at home: putting on their motorcycle gear, standing in front of their garages, or seated on their bikes proudly sporting their helmets. The women offer accounts of their lives as riders, beginning with their status as passengers and their subsequent emancipation from this passive role to take control of the wheel or, rather, the handlebars. The act of acquiring their licences itself was conceived as rebellious within their respective homes, which had all been shaped by the various conservative values and role models of the 50s, 60s, and 70s. The video offers intimate glimpses into the biographies of the women, in particular the tension that stems from self-identifying as a member of a male-dominated group from whose discriminative tendencies they fought to liberate themselves.

The documentary video sequences are complemented by performances developed by Gross in collaboration with the three protagonists and choreographer Claire Dessimoz. The women were invited to let themselves be inspired by the terms they used to describe their passion for motorcycles, and to transform this inspiration into physical movements. Rhythmical gestures, swathed in smoke and dramatic lighting, reveal the way they feel when riding their motorcycles. The extravagant costumes were designed by Gross herself. The glittery materials and the sewn-on strips of paper are inspired by 80s club culture and the frayed jackets of the biker scene, respectively. Composer Simon Acevedo provides the soundtrack to these pieces.

Maëlle Gross does not attempt to judge her protagonists, nor does she invite the audience to ridicule them. Rather, she creates an atmospheric space for the portrayal of their stories and passions, and she uses aesthetic exaggeration to bring to light the plurality of emancipatory movements. The women's experiences become relevant to other concerns related to the history of female empowerment and in this regard accrue an additional layer of meaning.

The three videos are presented in large-format projections that take over the exhibition space as an installation combined with additional elements, such as LED-text, light, sound, textiles, and other objects. The entrance, for example, has been transformed with embroidered flags and PVC-curtains to resemble a fan space or a garage. Maëlle Gross uses the aesthetic properties of the materials to her advantage: the multi-coloured shimmering created by the interplay of light on textile and plastic imbues the scene with a sense of glamour. These shimmering materials also were used to wrap the sand-filled cushions on which visitors are invited to sit. These seats allude to the idea of the sandbag, the derogatory slang term used by male bikers to write off women on the passenger seat as “ballast”. The exhibition is completed by the sculptural exhibition of individual pieces of motorcycles, either affixed to the walls or suspended from the ceiling where they develop sexual connotations as the glittering textiles and metals as well as the raw chains begin to resemble body parts or fetish objects. Collages of text based on fragments from interviews and research conducted for *HotHeads* are presented as LED-text.

The exhibition also features a performance based on the biographical relation of the artist to the region. On Saturday, April 4, a sculpture of the Greek goddess Hestia, which exhibits the features of her father, will be brought to and subsequently exhibited in a public space in Bollodingen. The transport will be accompanied by a parade of female motorcyclists of the Girls on Bike club.

Event:

Motorcycle parade with Maëlle Gross and the Girls on Bike

Saturday, 4 April 2020, 2 pm – 5 pm

Maëlle Gross and the women of Girls on Bike club accompany the marble sculpture of the goddess Hestia to Bollodingen. Participation (as a passenger on the back of a bike) is possible (registration required). The event will only take place in good-weather conditions. Should these not be met, a public conversation with the artists in the exhibition will be held in place of the parade.

More information: www.kunsthautlangenthal.ch