

From one stitch to the next

When Claudia–Maria Luenig tackles spaces, she reflects the structures they present on the most diverse levels and finds points of connection with the historical, aesthetic and gender–specific layers of architecture. In the case of the former Hamam one way she approaches the spaces is through the separation of the sexes in the use of the traditional Turkish bath, in so doing she plays with associations, goes against accepted patterns. The corset, for example, an item of clothing at once assigned to the female domain and steeped in sexuality, she places on the male side of the bath. The irritation is intentional, but without hitting the viewer primitively in the face.

Moving through the chain of rooms, now newly occupied with modern art, there is still a sense that for many years the bath was a place where the art of cleansing was indulged, embedded in a strictly prescribed cult of procedures. In the mind's eye you can see women undressing, bathing with obvious enjoyment, evaporating in steam, to return purified on all levels to their old existence. The clothes, which Claudia–Maria Luenig “drops” in various positions in the Hamam, alter the space, charge it with semantic content and create the kind of tension which can only arise in context. Utilising a White Cube, in which the work of art stands in splendid isolation, interests the artist far less than the interplay with the domes, with the light falling into the various rooms from above, with the arches and the ornaments.

The careful positioning of isolated pieces for affect is contrasted by Claudia–Maria Luenig with serial productions, like the 50 pairs of trousers of padded cloth in the old–fashioned style, which she connects by means of “word cables”. Reading the text it has to do with the house and the experience of pain. Likewise the embroidered men's vests lit from behind, with the title “soulmates” appear as a group. Functionalities are questioned, everywhere the absence of the bodies is apparent, only the wraps are left.

The materiality of her works is an important element in the sculptural approach of Claudia–Maria Luenig. She sews objects, she crochets them. When she says “the material leads me,” that also means becoming one with the object during the production process, for creating the works of art requires great physical exertion: Claudia–Maria Luenig works unruly materials like wire or cable into delicate weaves. Hybrid materials like silicone, too, can be the starting point for her eccentric body wraps. In her hands in the production process the material seems to become liquid, most appropriately for an exhibition venue, in which water plays such an important role.

In her new series “Medusas” she explores the jelly–like water creatures, which are the source of occasional unpleasant encounters for bathers in the sea. The source of her fascination with jelly fish, with their silent dance–like movements through the water, was not only the name, Medusa, the most dangerous of the Gorgon daughters from Greek mythology fascinated Claudia–Maria Luenig. In a sense jellyfish can be attributed with the quality of eternal life, for– even if the Medusa generation develops through

sexual reproduction into the polyp generation– the polyps in turn reproduce through division.

The umbrella with the long tentacles Claudia–Maria Luenig places above an upturned fish trap, onto which she crochets a “dress.” The fish trap frequently serves as a starting point for her works. In use for catching fish as far back as the Stone Age, they entice the animals through the funnel–shaped entrance into the inner chambers, from whence there is no return. The penetrable nature of the barrel or cone–shaped tubes of nets is– like the stitches of the crocheted shapes– an apparently penetrable structure, yet one which defines clear boundaries. Transparency and the sense of volume exist side by side. Like shed skin the objects of Claudia–Maria Luenig simulate the forms of animal and human bodies alike. The emphasis is not on copying, but on simulation. By inflating the size, whilst maintaining a free interpretation of the proportions, a reference to one’s own body form is preserved, which is the starting point of the works.

In the Hamam the fragile structures pose the question of transience, of the eternity of the thread of fate, which is spun on from one generation to the next and continues into eternity. Yet again, one stitch links with the next.

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