

Studio Mirko Baselgia

materia viva

Exhibition in Lucerne: 17.3.–29.4.2022

Opening: Thursday, March 17, 5.30–7.30 pm

“The previous classification of the arts no longer exists: the artist of the future should have to work with a team of specialists in a development laboratory.”

Charlotte Posenenske, “Statements”, in: *Art international*, vol. XII/5, Mai 1968

materia viva – “living matter” from Latin - tells of the life behind the apparent static nature of materials. It highlights the life that preceded the formation of various materials and substances, as well as the vital energy invested in the creation of the works on display.

In the gallery’s first room, the installation *Transmutaziun*, consisting of a very delicate white porcelain disc in dialogue with a petuntse stone¹, refers to the almost alchemical savoir-faire required to transform the raw stone into fine porcelain. The two elements that make up the installation represent the material extremes of the long and complex process of crafting this refined material. In 2017, during his stay as artist in residence at Galerie Urs Meile in Beijing, Mirko Baselgia followed every step of the work of numerous of craftswomen and craftsmen in a workshop in Jingdezhen, where traditional techniques of porcelain making have been developed and processing has been perfected over centuries, closely observing the transformation of the material from raw material to finest porcelain.

The drawings in the first room were created with a specially made ink. The ink, mixed according to an old recipe, consists mainly of the tincture of a widespread fungus called “*Coprinus comatus*”. Also known as shaggy ink cap, it uses an unusual method for spreading its spores. In a process of self-digestion – called autolysis – its cap and gills dissolve and turn into a black, watery ink through which the spores are easily dispersed. Self-destruction here takes on an unexpectedly positive connotation, allowing the next generation to grow. Intrigued by this particular phenomenon, the artist purposefully collects this type of fungus in the area surrounding his studio and uses its ink to create approximate geometric compositions with the help of natural gravity.

A new series of paintings made from pigments obtained from stones found by Baselgia and a family friend in the Graubünden mountains are dominating the main gallery room. The stones were transformed into fine pigments in the studio. The pure pigments were then applied to the canvas with the help of a mouth atomizer, an airbrush system that is operated by breath, consisting of two tubes forming a right angle. The artist submerged the end of the narrower tube into a container with water and pigments and then blew into the wider tube, creating an evenly sprayed mist on the uncoated canvas. With his breath and the help of stencils or by making folds in the canvas, Baselgia has created abstract and geometric compositions of a subtle colour palette that reflects the mineral richness of the Graubünden landscapes. These colours give testimony to the geological events that have shaped and changed the area over the millennia. These rocks from which the pigments originate consist not only of the materials and phenomena that led to their transformation, but also contain biominerals, i.e., minerals formed by the metabolic activities of organisms and microorganisms. The combination of these pigments with the regional larch wood used for the stretchers and the linen of the handmade canvases makes the paintings into material landscapes evoking mountains, forests and meadows.

The material for *Bigger Fish*, an abstract relief consisting of aluminium yogurt lids arranged in scales on a wooden panel, was donated by the public after a public collection appeal. *Bigger Fish* was thus born out of a collaborative and communal process. Photographs of fish skins taken with a scanning electron microscope served as inspiration for the design of the dynamic surface. The multiple textures of the aluminium of the various yogurt lids, which gently vibrate in a light breeze, allowing their coloured undersides to peek out, create reflections and other effects that give the relief dynamism and depth. The impression of a moving, lively surface is created. The two sculptures of the series *Carrier Back* address a

theme that is central to the Studio Mirko Baselgia: the importance of respectful use of resources and the impact of our consumption choices on the environment. This series of works is directly inspired by *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, an essay Ursula K. Le Guin wrote in 1986², in which, based on the research of Elizabeth Fisher, she sees the emergence of civilization not in the invention of weapons, but that of objects useful for gathering, sustenance, and care. Collecting is a practice that is at the heart of the studio's activities. It is an act that allows one to become aware of the origin of materials, products, and resources, to come into direct contact with them and perceive their full features with all senses while exploring their full potential. Studio Mirko Baselgia is like a laboratory where, thanks to constant dialogue with experts, materials and substances are experimented with and processes and structures are analysed to create works that are an abstraction of the laws of nature that govern our lives.

Text: Laura Giudici

¹ Petuntse is a feldspathic rock found only in China. Ground to powder and mixed with kaolin, petuntse was and continues to be an important ingredient of Chinese porcelain.

² Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (1986), London: Ignota, 2019.