

Urs Lüthi

HOW TO GET COMFORTABLE IN AN
UNCOMFORTABLE WORLD

Exhibition in Lucerne: 19.5. - 23.7.2022

Opening: Thursday, May 19, 5.30–7.30 pm

Galerie Urs Meile proudly presents the exhibition *HOW TO GET COMFORTABLE IN AN UNCOMFORTABLE WORLD* by the artist Urs Lüthi showing his latest body of work. Upon entering the gallery space, one instantly meets the artist's dismembered torso, tightly squeezed on a sterile metal table, positioned in front of a green wall. As usual, Urs Lüthi's world presents itself as a familiar yet uneasy encounter. The extended, irritatingly green color and twisted body images prepare one for a journey in a kafkaesque setting, insinuating growing old and telling just another story of disappearing in time. However, the unfolding scene does not pretend to present grand answers; instead Lüthi welcomes you to feel. *HOW TO GET COMFORTABLE IN AN UNCOMFORTABLE WORLD* is an invitation to get touched and intimate with the protagonist on view.

Over the past decades, Urs Lüthi has developed a diverse morphology of artistic expression incorporating sculptures, photography, video, body art, and happenings. Lüthi's oeuvre provides a playground for experiencing one's sensations and the all-too-human contradictions. His brilliance lies in creating a framework for ambivalences where one finds oneself in oscillation between hope and despair, lust and disgust, reason and desire.

We can already feel this commuting in the entry, stumbling across the artist's fragmented torso. One meets an aged Lüthi in the form of a naturalistic silicon sculpture with a super soft, infant-like skin, yearning to be caressed and put at ease. The exclamation *HOW TO GET COMFORTABLE IN AN UNCOMFORTABLE WORLD* unravels itself within seconds. This naked, physically old carcass is presented on a steel platter evocative of sterile dissecting tables or industrial countertops. Even though the body appears to lie comfortably on his lower legs and sort of self-hugged by his upper arm, it barely fits on the table. The figure tries to comfort itself, but hand and feet—the extremities to find self-realization in the world—are missing and thus render appeasement difficult. Naturally, questions arise: How comfortably can one live in a world menaced by war, social injustice, and ecological threats? Or above all, what *constitutes* comfort?

An aesthetic and content-related tension elaborates into an emotional discomfort: Nowadays, it is fashionable to stay young at all times at whatever price. Everything aging is veiled, dismissed, and tabooed. Yet aging is probably the most natural process of all existence. The understanding that old age equals wisdom has long disappeared. Chasing the ever-new everywhere and nowhere has become the norm. In the back of the head, another deeper sense of unease creeps in whispering a seemingly forgotten theme: to become and pass away is to live, isn't it?

However, one is not left standing alone in melancholy. The tension is overturned by the two contrasting images *Selfportrait (HOW TO GET COMFORTABLE IN AN UNCOMFORTABLE WORLD No. 3)* and *No. 4*, (2022). Elegant hands with red nail polish strike the back of a naked male. This embrace seems to soothe the vulnerability of the figure, and it confesses a sensual grace attuning with one's own mixed feelings of susceptibility and lust. Here too, another taboo is revealed: sensuality, desire, and transience—maturity as eroticism? An almost devouring ambivalence is reflected in an aesthetic intensity and indicates that the story that Lüthi always tells is nothing other than the very story of *you and me*.

In humanistic psychology and philosophy, the mirror analogy is a widely known theory, explaining that it needs an opposite or other to render the self aware of its external and inner world. To that effect, emotions serve as the foundation to enter as a conscious self into relation to being here in time. This is a being that is aware of and, in order to actualize itself, must confront issues such as emotional paradox, mortality, or the dilemma of relationships with other humans while ultimately facing loneliness. As many philosophers have extensively analyzed the other is necessary for becoming a determined subject.

It is precisely this ontological scope that Urs Lüthi adopted early on because he realized that there is no truth a priori and that being in the world is always a subjective experience. The pivot in his artistic practice was the understanding that objectivity does not exist. This experience made him wonder what is all this about? His mastery lies in expressing himself formally as simply as possible to create such a space of experience accessible to all. Here again, the circle closes. Urs Lüthi continuously changes his medium of exploration while his artistic concept remains unchanged.

This self-contemplation becomes easily tangible in the dialog opened between *Selfportrait (Small Monument for Old Men No. 5)* (2012/2019) and *Selfportrait (TRANSMISSION ERROR III No. 7)* (2022). First, one encounters a lacquered bronze sculpture with a little figure set on a proportionally massive metal base. The color choice was of great importance because Lüthi did not want to please the eye by using a natural green shade. He instead chose an odd yet slightly repulsive green, which is often associated with governmental offices or hospital infrastructures.

Again, the figure is missing its limbs, and the pasty color application creates the impression of immobility and almost oppressive confinement. In opposition, *Selfportrait (TRANSMISSION ERROR III No. 7)* opens into a green surface as vast indefinite greenery. The shot clips a closeup of branches slowly letting fall their leaves. The autumnal scene sets a poetic mood making the mind linger on the value of fleeting moments. At a second glance, the eye catches hold of the sculpture's shadow reflected in the near distance. The artist touches on the story of the vanishing self in time. Not only does he illustrate the relationship of a human being to the world as such, but he also continuously delves into the shifting of appearing and disappearing.

The steady rhythm of evanescent experience also echoes in the latest series of embodied images "Selfportrait" (*TRANSMISSION ERROR III*) (2022). It is not easy to detect a human figure in the black and white prints, but the original motif was a bust of the artist. The photograph of the statue was later digitally reworked to create the effect of the figure being pulled through a bottomless abyss or twister. Then the image is layered with grid lines evocative of transmission images of surveillance cameras. Lüthi states that this is an intentional means of breaking the complacency and aura of black-and-white photography.

The large size of 200 x 150 cm is a deliberately chosen and frequently used format in Lüthi's oeuvre. The size enables a merging of the viewer with the artwork and pulls one into a black hole raising questions about man in the cosmos. Possibly, "Selfportrait" (*TRANSMISSION ERROR III*) (2022) records that decisive moment when the thinking being discovers that one is not lonely or lost in the infinite lands of the universe but that there reigns universal energy. One could dare say that man is not the world's fixed center, as he has believed for too long, but the apex of creation. The general theme of these self-portraits shows that it is always a single person experiencing feelings, and while we may dismiss them as a personal affair, it is and always will be a general experience too.

With *HOW TO GET COMFORTABLE IN AN UNCOMFORTABLE WORLD* Urs Lüthi offers a changing landscape of intimacies—something in translation. The artist has realized a taut, affectionate exhibition with artworks that function as suggestions. They are thoughts of reflection, offensive enough for a possible conversation on a festive evening. They remind me of Nabokov's saying that one should learn a language well enough to understand the whisper behind one's back.

Selected Public Collections

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Text by Samantha Grob