

## Purple Rain

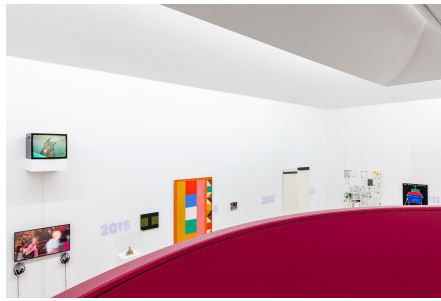
On 'Heute Nacht geträumt [I dreamt last night]. An exhibition by Ruth Buchanan'

by Clémentine Deliss

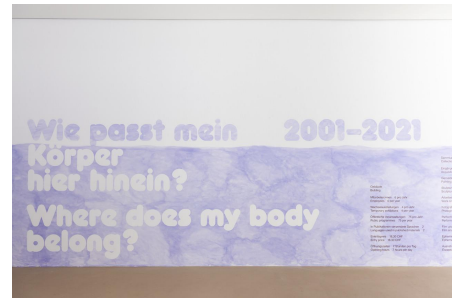
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Installation view, Ground Floor. *Enclosure* (When the sick rule the world reverb), 2019/2022, Ruth Buchanan. Powder coated perforated steel, 7 parts each 258 x 291 cm. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.



Installation view, 2nd Floor. *Heute Nacht geträumt. An exhibition by Ruth Buchanan*, 19 March - 14 August 2022, Kunstmuseum Basel | Gegenwart, Switzerland. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.



*Epoch Studies* (2001–2021), 2022, Ruth Buchanan with Len Schaller. Acrylic, hand-stencilled and cut vinyl on wall, dimensions variable. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.



Installation view, 1st floor with *Highlighters*, 2022, Ruth Buchanan. Coated wood and glass, 240 x 78 x 62 cm; *Can tame anything*, 2016/2022, Ruth Buchanan. Acrylic, hand-painted on wall, dimensions variable; *Ankauf* 1986, Inv. G 1986.8, *Treppenkopf*, 1985, Walter Dahn. Bronze, 17 x 36 x 23 cm; *Depositum in der Öffentlichen Kunstsammlung Basel* Inv. H 1986.2, *Sledujuschtschaja ostanowka Tarakanowo*, 1979–1983, Ilya Kabakov. Enamel paint on fiberboard, 260.5 x 380.7 cm. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.



Installation view, 3rd Floor. *Spiral Time*, 2022, Ruth Buchanan with museum staff. Elderberry-wild-hand dyed cotton, powder coated steel, 1000 x 645 x 295 cm. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.

*Freshly announced as the next director of Artspace Aotearoa, Ruth Buchanan currently presents a solo exhibition at Kunstmuseum Basel | Gegenwart in Switzerland, open until 14 August 2022.*

*In this essay, writer and curator Clémentine Deliss walks us through a museum space in which viewers' experience of existing collections, curatorial practices, and their own bodily relationship to the institution is put to the test. Displaying pieces from the collection alongside statistical information about the museum's collecting practices, and placing her own artworks alongside collection works to create new dialogues, Buchanan's practice calls into question the colonial and gendered practices of collecting history, curatorial practice and institutions themselves.*

*Heute Nacht geträumt. An exhibition by Ruth Buchanan*, currently on view at the Kunstmuseum Basel, is an artwork as exhibition. This all-encompassing exhibition shifts today's prevailing focus on identity politics, drawing us into a field of resonance and oneiric embodiment that is both art-historically challenging and utterly compelling. In Buchanan's work, the discursive infrastructure of the museum is put to the test. Major artworks from the Kunstmuseum's collection are removed from display, while others are placed in unexpected configurations. Each floor of the exhibition is framed by a central question that is accompanied by a set of statistics printed onto the wall, or the 'spine' of the building, as Buchanan calls it. These quotas inform the visitor on the backstage activities of the museum in relation to the artworks and exhibitions it has presented, indicating, for example, the number of acquisitions made in each calendar year, the gender distribution of artists whose work was bought, and the medium, be it painting, sculpture, photography, performance, film, video, or works on paper. Two additional categories named "ephemera" and "exception" suggest that these classifications of art are not as absolute as one might think. As we progress through the show, Buchanan's four key questions stay with us:

*From what point does the contemporary begin?*

*Which documents say what?*

*Where does my body belong?*

*Do I want to come back?*

Buchanan provides no authoritative answer. Instead, she asks us to respond somatically and move beyond the normative sociological and cultural expectations of what a museum should be today. By working on every generative dimension of the museum, she introduces poetics and vulnerability where we least expect them. She redefines everything that constitutes the understanding of an exhibition within her conceptual and aesthetic structure. This extends from the overall scenography, furniture, graphics, titles and wall texts, through to the museum shop that sells her selection of books by women authors, and socks and caps in a delicate lavender colour. The building's temporary walls have been removed, and even the boarded-up windows on one floor have been

opened after several decades, offering a vista onto the Rhine and an architectural refresh that includes Roche Tower, the tallest skyscraper in Switzerland. The exhibition curators, Maja Wismer and Len Schaller, took part in this new mapping of the museum that included the respectful suspension of Joseph Beuys' permanent installation of several key works on the third floor. With the artist, they developed the bilingual series of questions that set the agenda for the exhibition. Buchanan's new production of *Can tame anything* (2016/2022) required her to hand-paint several walls in lilac acrylic, over several floors. The team of *Heute Nacht geträumt* jumped in to help her, including Wismer, who is also the museum's Head of Contemporary Art. The museum staff were involved in the production of the vast cloth painting *Spiral Time*, (2022) and some even dyed their uniforms with elderberry juice to reflect the soft swirl of violet that characterises Buchanan's presence throughout the museum. Buchanan's exhibition as artwork offers a series of dialogues that mediate between the building and its past, and the remarkable selection of artworks from both the Public Art Collection of Basel held in the Kunstmuseum and the private collection of the Emanuel Hoffmann-Stiftung.



Installation view, 3rd Floor. *Heute Nacht geträumt. An exhibition by Ruth Buchanan*, 19 March - 14 August 2022, Kunstmuseum Basel | Gegenwart, Switzerland. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.



Installation view, 3rd Floor with *Epoch Studies (2022-Future)*, 2022, Ruth Buchanan with Len Schaller. Acrylic, hand-stencilled and cut vinyl on wall, dimensions variable; *Can tame anything*, 2016/2022, Ruth Buchanan. Acrylic, hand-painted on wall, dimensions variable; *Priorities*, 2022, Ruth Buchanan. Bespoke seating: upholstered suedette, powder coated steel, 205 x 140 x 45 cm. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.



Installation view, 3rd Floor with *Can tame anything*, 2016/2022, Ruth Buchanan. Acrylic, hand-painted on wall, dimensions variable; *Spiral Time*, 2022, Ruth Buchanan with museum staff. Elderberry-wild-hand dyed cotton, powder coated steel, 1000 x 645 x 295 cm. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.



Installation view, 3rd Floor with *Epoch Studies (2022-Future)*, 2022, Ruth Buchanan with Len Schaller. Acrylic, hand-stencilled and cut vinyl on wall, dimensions variable. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.

Moving between the four floors of the exhibition, each designed around one of the salient questions, Buchanan's own sculptural interventions operate like a series of different ocular lenses. On the ground floor, the show begins with *Pre-history – 1982*. Here iconic works by Carl Andre, Michael Heizer, Sol LeWitt, Richard Serra, Al Held and Bruce Nauman have been grouped together. However, to see them, visitors must peep through perforated holes in a powder-coated steel wall titled *Enclosure (When the sick rule the world, reverb)* (2019/2022). Physical entry to this part of the show is restricted to one hour a day. This throat-red wall does more than prevent access—it provides an oblique reference to the barriers that sequester artworks from the Global South in so many European museums. As an artist from Aotearoa New Zealand, Buchanan is acutely aware of the inaccessibility of so much of the

world's art history. Her sculpture operates like an expression of classificatory transgression, disrupting our vision of the pinnacle of 1960s art production in Europe and North America. She speaks of this as an act of "institutional transformation" rather than institutional critique. On another floor, she addresses ergonomics in the museum and how the visitor handles the presence and mobility of their body in an exhibition. With *Tongue/Platform*, another throat-red sculpture, she makes us walk up this ramp to experience another panorama. As we peer down onto groupings of artworks, the wall text asks, "Where does my body belong?" One immediately wants to touch the lettering and the painted walls, to feel the hands that made them. Indeed, Buchanan's synesthetic phenomenology transports the latent presence of human activities that have taken place in the museum since its inception. Like tangible ghosts, the architecture and equipment of the past feed into our current experience of the artworks she brings together.

As one proceeds further through the exhibition, the lilac wash on the walls rises again like a water level in the building. At the top, we reach the room that Beuys' artworks had occupied for over forty years. In this sacred space of the museum, Buchanan presents *Spiral Time*, a huge paravent made of dyed purple cloth that hangs from a sulphur-yellow powder-coated steel rail. In contrast to the static interventions of her other sculptures on the floors below, here Buchanan introduces a dynamic sense of movement and circular flow. Lying down on one of her emerald-green beds named *Priorities*, the visitor looks onto the mesmerising cloth painting while listening to her voice hum a recurring phrase, "touching, touching, finger-licking, fingering, as much as possible". Buchanan induces the visitor with her voice, nurturing a feeling of protection, privacy and provocation.



Installation view, 3rd Floor. *Spiral Time*, 2022, Ruth Buchanan with museum staff. Elderberry-wild-hand dyed cotton, powder coated steel, 1000 x 645 x 295 cm. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.



Installation view, Ground Floor. *Heute Nacht geträumt. An exhibition by Ruth Buchanan*, 19 March - 14 August 2022, Kunstmuseum Basel | Gegenwart, Switzerland. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.



*Enclosure (When the sick rule the world reverb)*, 2019/2022, Ruth Buchanan. Powder coated perforated steel, 7 parts each 258 x 291 cm. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.



Installation view, Ground Floor. *Enclosure (When the sick rule the world reverb)*, 2019/2022, Ruth Buchanan. Powder coated perforated steel, 7 parts each 258 x 291 cm. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.



Installation view, 3rd Floor with *Spiral Time*, 2022, Ruth Buchanan with museum staff. Elderberry-wild-hand dyed cotton, powder coated steel, 1000 x 645 x 295 cm; *Priorities*, 2022, Ruth Buchanan. Bespoke seating: upholstered suedette, powder coated steel, 205 x 140 x 45 cm. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.



Installation view, 3rd Floor with *Can tame anything*, 2016/2022, Ruth Buchanan. Acrylic, hand-painted on wall, dimensions variable; Kunstmuseum Basel, Ankauf mit Mitteln der Karl und Margrith Schaub-Tschudin-Stiftung 2019, Inv. G 2019.41, *heute nacht geträumt (meine werkstatt in N.Y.)*, 2011, Miriam Cahn. Oil on canvas, 190 x 270 cm. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.



Installation view, 2nd Floor with *Tongue / Plattform*, 2022, Ruth Buchanan. Coated wood and linoleum, 1920 x 1155 x 266 cm; Ankauf 2011, Inv. G 2008.1, *Ostgut Freischwimmer, right*, 2004, Wolfgang Tillmans. Inkjet print; exhibition copy, 240.5 x 611.5 cm. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.

Next door, as if to seal the process, one large oil painting hangs on the wall: Miriam Cahn's spectacular portrait of her studio in New York from 2011, *heute nacht geträumt (meine werkstatt in N.Y.)*, which vibrates in the space like a life-giving, geometric armature.

In appropriating Cahn's title of this painting for her exhibition, Buchanan demonstrates just how close to the bone her methodology of rearrangement can become, sending "impulses for future-thinking"<sup>[01]</sup> along a snail-like route within the shell of the museum. Perhaps this last floor, the heart of the spiral, is best experienced first. With its meditative choreography, it is a space of conditionality where people gather, and where Buchanan asks, disconcertingly, "Do I want to come back?" Back to the museum? If the museum breeds its own metaphors and expectations, can Buchanan's assemblages motivate an alternative sense of presence and belonging, a structure of care? In a poem published in the online journal *Evacuation Tapes* (2020), she writes,

"described and built at a distance by other bodies, like a tradition—it is a tradition to build buildings and put bodies inside them ... things in places, put in relation, by those things in places in relation."<sup>[02]</sup>

Bodies and things—so often construed through taxonomies of control—are shuffled into new adjacencies that are both disturbing and energising at once. How do the combinatory dialogues that Buchanan proposes between so many canonical artworks enhance the meanings of the artists' original intentions? To come closer to this question, it is necessary to unpack the logic Buchanan deploys to select the works.

There are two reservoirs from which the artist chooses to generate her "infrastructural transformation".<sup>[03]</sup> The first is the Public Art Collection of Basel, and the second, the holdings of the Emanuel Hoffmann-Stiftung, a private foundation that began building a contemporary art collection in the 1930s. The museum, niched in the valley of St. Alban, was built in 1980—it's the same age as the artist herself. To decide which works to include from these collections, Buchanan foregrounded the timing of acquisition, rather than the date of artistic production. She selected the first work and the last work acquired in each calendar year, a system that can sometimes prove bewildering. For example, a painting by Bernard Frize from 1980, acquired in 2005, hangs on the second floor, which covers the period 2001–21.



*Epoch Studies (1983-2000)*, 2022, Ruth Buchanan with Len Schaller. Acrylic, hand-stencilled and cut vinyl on wall, dimensions variable. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.



Installation view, 1st Floor including *Highlighters*, 2022, Ruth Buchanan. Coated wood and glass, 240 x 78 x 62 cm; *Can tame anything*, 2016/2022, Ruth Buchanan. Acrylic, hand-painted on wall, dimensions variable; *Depositum in der Öffentlichen Kunstsammlung Basel* 1984, Inv. H 1984.3, *When the Tomahawk Dances*, 1984, Martin Disler. Oil on canvas, 195 x 260 cm. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.



Installation view, 1st floor with: *Highlighters*, 2022, Ruth Buchanan. Coated wood and glass, 240 x 78 x 62 cm; *Can tame anything*, 2016/2022, Ruth Buchanan. Acrylic, hand-painted on wall, dimensions variable; *Ankauf 1986*, Inv. G 1986.8, *Treppenkopf*, 1985, Walter Dahn. Bronze, 17 x 36 x 23 cm; *Depositum in der Öffentlichen Kunstsammlung Basel* Inv. H 1986.2, *Sledujuschtschaja ostanowka Tarakanowo*, 1979–1983, Ilya Kabakov. Enamel paint on fiberboard, 260.5 x 380.7 cm. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.



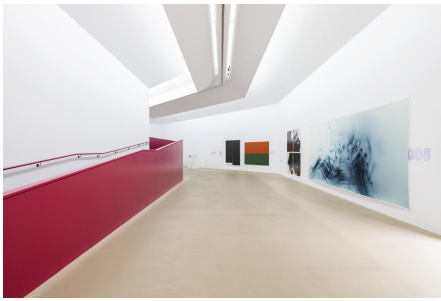
Installation view, 1st Floor including *Highlighters*, 2022, Ruth Buchanan. Coated wood and glass, 240 x 78 x 62 cm; *Depositum in der Öffentlichen Kunstsammlung Basel* 1997, Inv. H 1997.3, *Warengestell mit Gehirnen*, 1989/1997, Katharina Fritsch. Aluminium, plastic, pigment, Ed. 1/3 + 1 AP, 250 x 120 x 120 cm; *Depositum in der Öffentlichen Kunstsammlung Basel* 1998, Inv. H 1998.2, *Untitled*, 1997, Heimo Zobernig. Pressboard, wood, steel, 260 x 204 x 204 cm; Geschenk von Dr. Christian und Antoinette Wittwer Bottmingen 1998, Inv. G 1998.1, *Tapada (Madder Light)*, 1997, Jean Pfaff. Oil on plywood (Madder light), 59 x 111 x 9.5 cm. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.

Each floor corresponds to a particular timeline that is complemented with a set of statistics that refer, on the one hand, to the institution's parameters, and on the other, to the contents of the collection. For the building statistics of 1983–2000, we discover how many employees worked there at the time, how many temporary exhibitions and public programmes took place, how many languages were used in published materials, the cost of an

entrance ticket, and the museum's opening hours. Another column of statistics addresses the gender and origins of the artists, and the total number of acquisitions made by the Public Art Collection of Basel. Broken down into various mediums—from painting, to video, to works on paper—the list gradually edges out to the previously mentioned categories of “ephemera” and “exception”. As you walk through each floor, you start to pick up on various discrepancies over the years and put together your own biography of the museum. Buchanan challenges you to reassess your expectations of art history. A video, *Black Temple. Shirley Temple Goes Black* (2016) by Theaster Gates, the last artwork to have been bought in that year, is placed next to a portrait of four Black men in green suits by Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, the first work to have been purchased by the museum in 2017. Buchanan unveils a moment when the museum and the public fund made a concerted effort to purchase works by leading artists of African descent for the first time. Other constellations reveal favourite Swiss artists, such as Fischli/Weiss, Martin Disler, or Jean-Frédéric Schnyder. The latter's *Hoodle*, a vast, folded blanket made of smaller paintings stitched together like patchwork, signals the inevitable sedimentation of artistic positions, which Buchanan unearths in her archaeology of the contemporary. *Even*, Fischli/Weiss's pile of clay bones, begins to resemble something that cartoon dogs might chew on.

In another unexpected constellation, denoting the year 2009, a huge swirling photographic print by Wolfgang Tillmans (*Ostgut Freischwimmer, right*, 2004) is placed next to four C-prints of Polaroids by the late Swiss artist Hannah Villiger from 1996. Not far away, an Epson Ultra-Chrome work by Wade Guyton from 2008 hangs next to Günther Förg's *Ohne Titel*, from 1987. This produces intense formalist friction, duping one to sense proximity while the works harbour different temporalities, not to mention cultural, technological and aesthetic concepts. Moving in, you see that the painting by Förg is made from two superimposed sections, one green, the other terracotta brown, both painted on lead and wood, and producing a palpable sensation of gravity quite unlike Guyton's speed prints. Further along, positioned next to these two structural paintings is a small, smiling face by Miriam Cahn made

in 1996 and purchased between 2009 and 2010. Close by, we find a work by Helmut Federle from 1993, purchased in 2015.



Installation view, 2nd floor including *Tongue / Platform*, 2022, Ruth Buchanan. Coated wood and linoleum, 1920 x 1155 x 266 cm; Ankauf 2011, Inv. G 2008.1, *Ostgut Freischwimmer*, right, 2004, Wolfgang Tillmans. Inkjet print; exhibition copy, 240,5 x 611,5 cm; Geschenk der Hans und Renée Müller-Meylan-Stiftung 2008, Inv. G 2008.23, *Skulptural*, 1996, Hannah Villiger. 4 C-prints from Polaroid, on aluminium; unique; exhibition copy, circa 255 x 251 cm; Ankauf 2009, Inv. G 2009.1, *Untitled*, 2008, Wade Guyton. Epson UltraChrome inkjet on canvas, 213.5 x 175.5 cm; Geschenk der Erben aus dem Nachlass von Vera und Jakob Oeri-Hoffmann 2009, Depositum in der Öffentlichen Kunstsammlung Basel, Inv. H 2009.8, *lächelnd*, 1996, Miriam Cahn. Öl auf Leinwand / Oil on canvas, 31.3 x 24.8 cm; Ankauf mit Mitteln der Karl und Margrith Schaub-Tschudin-Stiftung 2009, Inv. G 2009.32, *Untitled*, 1987, Günther Förg. Acrylic on lead on wood, 180 x 250 cm. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.



Installation view, 1st Floor. *Highlighters*, 2022, Ruth Buchanan. Coated wood and glass, 240 x 78 x 62 cm. Depositum in der Öffentlichen Kunstsammlung Basel 1997, Inv. H 1997.3, *Warengestell mit Gehirnen*, 1989/1997, Katharina Fritsch. Aluminium, plastic, pigment; Ed. 1/3 + 1 AP, 250 x 120 x 120 cm; Depositum der Freunde des Kunstmuseums Basel 2000, Inv. G 2000.7, *UND WÜRDE, / WENN ICH HIER BIN, / DIE WELT / MICH ANBLICKEN*, 1995/1998, Rémy Zaugg. Screen print, paint on aluminium, 224.2 x 200.2 x 4 cm. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.



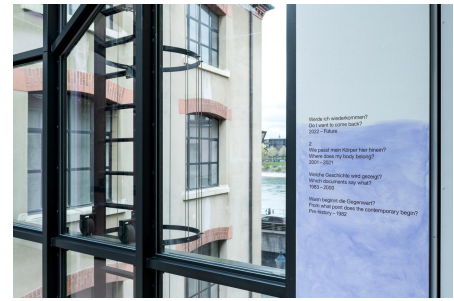
Detail, 2nd Floor. *Can tame anything*, 2016/2022, Ruth Buchanan. Acrylic, hand-painted on wall, dimensions variable; Ankauf 2005, Inv. G 2005.1, *Suite Second 120F*, 1980, Bernard Frize. Alkyd urethane paint on canvas, 130 x 195 cm. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.



View, 2nd Floor. *Heute Nacht geträumt. An exhibition by Ruth Buchanan*, 19 March - 14 August 2022, Kunstmuseum Basel | Gegenwart, Switzerland. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.



Installation view, 2nd floor including *Tongue / Platform*, 2022, Ruth Buchanan. Coated wood and linoleum, 1920 x 1155 x 266 cm; Ankauf 2017, Inv. G 2017.5, *A Culmination*, 2016, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye. Oil on canvas, 200.5 x 250 x 3.8 cm, Erworben mit Spenden zum Andenken an Gustav E. Grisard 2017, Inv. G 2017.11, *Walsum*, 1986, Reinhard Mucha. Glass holder, float glass, alkyd resin varnish painted on the back of the glass, table top veneered wood panel (modified found object), felt, blockboard, steel angle joint, profiled wood cuttings, corrugated cardboard, 130 x 200 x 54 cm; Geschenk des Künstlers 2016, Inv. G 2016.32, *Black Temple. Shirley Temple Goes Black*, 2016, Theaster Gates. Video projection, black-and-white, with independent audio track, 2 min. 54 sec.; Ed. 1/4 + AP; Geschenk des Künstlers 2015, Inv. G 2015.27, *Owl (Face to Face)*, 2004, Eric Hattan. Video, colour, silent, 1 min. 50 sec.; Ed. 1/3 + 1 AP; Ankauf 2015, Inv. G 2015.6, *A Visit to the Sistine Chapel*, 2005, Andrea Fraser. Video, colour, sound, 12 min; Ed. 3/8 + 2 AP; Geschenk von Virginie Barth 2014, Inv. G 2014.1, *Sinnbild II*, 1992, Wolf Barth. Tempera on canvas, 195 x 130 cm; Ankauf 2013, Inv. G 2013.2, *Bootleg (Empire)*, 1997, Douglas Gordon. Video installation with a monitor, colour, silent; 2 hrs. 5 min.; Ed. 1/11. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.



View, 2nd Floor. *Heute Nacht geträumt. An exhibition by Ruth Buchanan*, 19 March - 14 August 2022, Kunstmuseum Basel | Gegenwart, Switzerland. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.

What do we learn from this arbitrary system in terms of the works' individual agency? Does Buchanan's art-historical iconoclasm explode the canon and produce a new syntax for interpretation? And do the works on each floor speak to the four questions raised by the artist? At times, I am not sure if I'm looking at the way she thinks and distinguishes art, or if I should be considering factual purchase structures. In a room dedicated to acquisitions made between 1986 and 1988, one comes across a huge Ilya Kabakov painting, a sculpture by Walter Dahn, the Fischli/Weiss video *Der Lauf der Dinge* from 1985, and an invitation card announcing a group exhibition in 1988 called *Farbe bekennen – Contemporary Art from Basel Private Collections*. This appropriate throwback to the

late 1980s highlights the museum's delicate yet determining relationship between private and public collections. Such ephemera is placed in a *Highlighter*, a set of elegant bright-yellow table vitrines developed by Buchanan with designer Andreas Müller. Oddly, some are sparsely filled with photographs or texts. Buchanan measures the power of the archival wisely. By not including the usual flood of documents to support the visitor's experience, she emphasises the readability of the artwork through a multiplicity of sensual and visual contexts, asking us all the while to think critically about which documents say what.

At certain points in the exhibition, Buchanan seems to be engaging in latent one-to-one conversations with artists and their work. The first, as mentioned previously, is Miriam Cahn, whose painting provides the eponymous title for the exhibition. A second reference is to the late Swiss painter Rémy Zaugg, whose works also feature in the exhibition. In 1986, Zaugg published a concise and brilliant polemic on how to install works and what to watch out for as an artist.<sup>[04]</sup> He spoke against linear chronological presentations, claiming that exhibitions structured in this way reduced artworks to illustrations. Chronology in an exhibition was the “tomb of the work”, he wrote. Buchanan also draws attention to the constituents of the environment in which artwork and audience interact. Like Zaugg, she prefers a less regimented canon. Her exhibition is neither a ‘solo’ nor a ‘group’ show, but closer to other artists’ interventions in curatorial space, such as Ugo Rondinone’s seminal exhibition *The Third Mind*, at the Palais de Tokyo in 2007, or the numerous juxtapositions of artworks and historical epochs by Danh Võ. Buchanan’s exhibition stimulates several forms of confusion—around time, curatorial practice, appropriation, authorship—but as she said to me recently, “I am an agent with nothing to lose ... like a geographer, drilling into the earth and measuring the health of the land.”<sup>[05]</sup>



Installation view, Ground Floor. *Enclosure* (*When the sick rule the world reverb*), 2019/2022, Ruth Buchanan. Powder coated perforated steel, 7 parts each 258 x 291 cm. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.



*Spiral Time*, 2022, Ruth Buchanan with museum staff. Elderberry-wild-hand dyed cotton, powder, coated steel, 1000 x 645 x 295 cm; *Priorities*, 2022, Ruth Buchanan. Bespoke seating: upholstered suedette, powder coated steel, 205 x 140 x 45 cm. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.



*Highlighters*, 2022, Ruth Buchanan. Coated wood and glass, 240 x 78 x 62 cm; *Depositum* in der Öffentlichen Kunstsammlung Basel 1998, Inv. H 1998.2, *Untitled*, 1997, Heimo Zobernig. Pressboard, wood, steel, 260 x 204 x 204 cm; *Depositum* in der Öffentlichen Kunstsammlung Basel 2000, Inv. H 2000.42, *Warten auf den Lift I*, from the series *Plötzlich diese Übersicht*, 1981, Peter Fischli / David Weiss. Unfired clay, 12.8 x 16.8 x 12 cm. Photo: Jonas Hänggi. Courtesy Kunstmuseum Basel and the artist.

So what does this exhibition by Ruth Buchanan tell us? First, that all museums, not only those as exemplary and as young as the Kunstmuseum Basel | Gegenwart, need to do much more to address their practice around collections. This exhibition, as well as her shows at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in 2020, and more recently at Coastal Signs in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, speak to the remediation of the museum as an aesthetic and political experiment, which takes institutional critique into life-defining arenas.

Second, an artist like Buchanan, who goes beyond the borders of the hermetic artwork to engineer meanings through other artists' works, can be seen as an iconoclast who dislocates the history of the contemporary. When she implements statistics to select works from two renowned European collections, she operates with a decolonial strategy. The sociological matrix that supports the Western canon is flipped onto its own taxonomic system and revealed as insufficient or, at best, partial. Iconoclasm may include the falling of monuments to slave traders and other colonisers, but in Buchanan's practice it's more about needling disciplinary divisions and bringing artworks from the past into new fields of interpretation. At a collateral event organised by the museum, around the question "Where does my body belong?", historian Henri-Michel Yéré said, in relation to the show, that the archive is all about "how you organise your capacity to imagine."<sup>[06]</sup>

Buchanan's exhibition does just that, it "dances within us like a poem" (in Yéré's words) that we return to, and through which we imagine these art collections from the past through new lenses.

## Footnotes

01. Ruth Buchanan, in conversation with the author, April 2022.

02. Ruth Buchanan, "My I, I, I be broke / Where I be put," *Evacuation Tapes*, 2020, [www.evacuationtapes.net/evacuation-tapes#content](http://www.evacuationtapes.net/evacuation-tapes#content)

03. Ruth Buchanan, *Where Does My Body Belong? From Institutional Critique to Infrastructural Transformation Or Standards and Mothers*, Beacon 01 (Vancouver: Artspeak), 2020.

04. Remy Zaugg, *The Art Museum of My Dreams or A Place for the Work and the Human Being* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 1986).

05. Ruth Buchanan, in conversation with the author, March 2022.

06. The Art of Intervention: Where does my body belong?, 13 April 2022. A cooperation of the Kunstmuseum Basel with Art of Intervention, Zentrum Gender Studies and Zentrum für Afrikastudien der Universität Basel. Moderation: Lorena Rizzo, African Studies, Universität Basel.

## Biographies



Ruth Buchanan is an artist of Taranaki, Te Ātiawa and Pākehā descent living in Tāmaki Makaurau. She works across exhibition making, writing, design and teaching. Her work draws out the contested and dynamic relationships between the body, power, language and the archive. This process of contesting often relates closely to the types of relationships that standardised infrastructures, such as archives, libraries and museums, create between our bodies and society at large, and actively asks how these relationships could be otherwise.



Dr Clémentine Deliss works across the borders of contemporary art, curatorial practice, independent publishing and critical anthropology. She is Global Humanities Professor of History of Art, University of Cambridge, and Associate Curator at KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin, where she directs the Metabolic Museum-University. Between 2010 and 2015 she directed the Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt, instituting a new lab for post-ethnographic research. She has been a Fellow of the Institute of Advanced Study Berlin, and has taught art theory and curatorial practice at the Ecole nationale supérieure d'arts de Paris-Cergy, Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design and the Hamburg University of the Arts. Her book *The Metabolic Museum* was published by Hatje Cantz in co-production with KW (2020), and in Russian translation with Garage Publishing (2021).

