

Christiane Blattmann

*Un-Break My Walls*

(EN) Kunsthalle

Münster

Accompanying programme:

- 10.5.2019, 7–11 pm, Atelierhaus Speicher II  
*Open House* – Opening
- 11. / 12.5.2019, 12–7pm, Atelierhaus Speicher II  
*Open House*
- 26.5.2019, 3 pm, Kunsthalle Münster  
Guided tour with the curator
- 28.6.2019, 6 pm, Kunsthalle Münster  
Guided tour with the curator
- 3.7.2019, 18 Uhr / 6 pm, Kunsthalle Münster  
*William Joys: A One Man Show*
- 21.7.2019, 15 Uhr / 3 pm, Kunsthalle Münster  
Artist talk with Christiane Blattmann and Oriane Durand,  
Artistic Director Dortmunder Kunstverein

Kunsthalle Münster, Hafenweg 28, 5. Stock, 48155 Münster  
Opening hours: Tue–Fri 2–7 pm, Sat / Sun 12–6 pm  
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In her works Christiane Blattmann experiments with a variety of shaping methods, whereby the interaction of the materials used as well as the-oretical and literary references serve as important points of departure. Blattmann interweaves, intermeshes, combines, compounds, merges and processes; she creates tangled combinations of materials, structures, things, stories and characters. In their very diverse, at times contrasting texture, the artist's works impress through their strong material presence; they bear witness to a particular concern with the choice of materials and their specific qualities—including ceramics, jute, gauze, rattan, glass, plaster, silicone and various metals—and are marked by a tactile sensibility that challenges the “haptic viewing” of its observers. Blattmann plays off the material qualities against each other, joining them despite their difference. She employs the principal sculptural means of weight, proportion, gravity and space in a highly skilled manner. At the same time, she sounds out the essential characteristics of the genre sculpture by working on the verge to other genres like architecture, painting and fashion. Her hybrid objects shift between an “as well as” and a “neither nor”. Eluding all normative definition, it is dissolution that appears to be an underlying aesthetic strategy.

In many of her sculptural works and installations, Blattmann investigates the construction of space, takes spatial qualities as well as space-producing structures into consideration. This approach becomes quite evident in both of her large basket sculptures (1,9). Since 2018 the artist has engaged in the age-old cultural technique of basket weaving; she has chosen to work with a Japanese weaving technique that allows her to create spatially expansive structures, to extend her works into the space and thus enter into a dialogue with their environment. In *They Have Broken with the Tradition of Inside and Outside* (2019) (1), her interest in the sculptural aspects of architecture and the architectonics of sculpture are particularly apparent. The two convex bodies, which Blattmann has woven and assembled into one object, are spatially integrating and rejecting at once, are equally permeable and self-contained. Corresponding with the lightness of its material, the sculpture is free-hanging in the space. The two-dimensional component of the second large basket *Augurs* (2019) (9)

is hanging above the floor like a plateau held by three bodies stretching upwards. Here, the horizontal and the vertical, surface and space encounter one another, revealing more about the space-forming and space-creating potential of weaving. The texture of the basketworks alternates between woven textiles and the constructive element of architecture. The plaited material of the two large baskets is combined with reliefs of silicon. While the latter at first appear to be abstract structures, at closer inspection they become recognizable as birds' heads. Inscribed in the weavings, there is a story: *The Birds* (414 B.C.) by the ancient Greek playwright Aristophanes. In the comedy the two citizens from Athens, Pisthetaerus and Euelpides, draft the political utopia of a liberal community. They convince the bird population, against their better knowledge, to become involved with the humans, to jointly found the state of "cloud-cuckoo-land" and to build and live as humans do. Coupled with the qualities of birds, this puts them in the position to control the sky and earth, the gods and humans. Yet soon the democracy degenerates into an autocracy, and the consequences of their negative influence on the stupid, stubborn or rather naïve masses become manifest.

In the workgroup *6-Senses* (2017–2019) <sup>(12–16)</sup> organic and synthetic materials interfuse: the jute and the silicon reliefs blend to form a commingled substance; images and motifs penetrate and merge with the textile fabric. Empty spaces in the jute at the same time denote vacancies in the relief, an aspect which becomes particularly apparent in the work *They Say That in the First Place the Vocabulary of Every Language Is to Be Examined, Modified, Turned Upside Down, That Every Word Must Be Screened* (2018) <sup>(14)</sup>, where the artist has removed the longitudinal threads, the warp, from the woven material. This intervention as well as the method of working with multiple layers, as in *Smell* (2018) <sup>(12)</sup>, *Venus Wringing Her Hair, Standing at the Water's Edge* (2019) <sup>(13)</sup> and *Touch* (2018) <sup>(15)</sup>, break with the notion of the fabric as a mere support, turning it into an object in itself. A source of inspiration for the workgroup *6-Senses* were the tapestries *La Dame à Licorne* (1484–1538) at the Paris Musée national du Moyen Âge, *The Unicorn Tapestries* (1495–1505) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and *L'Apocalypse d'Angers* (1373–1382) in the Château d'Angers. Though only one of the characters from the tapestries directly entered Blattmann's works, a reference in view of formal aspects seems

interesting. With her works the artist alludes to textile as a woven spatial structure, standing between the male-dominated realm of architecture and the techniques of clothing production, which historically are rather ascribed to the female. Other than in the woven works, here it is the hull and not the underlying construction which is brought into focus.

Blattmann's works are imbued by a theoretical preoccupation with architectural principals. A reference point of the jute works is provided by Gottfried Semper's book, *Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts; or, Practical Aesthetics* (1860), in which he describes textile as a fundamental material of building, and the processing of textile yarn into protective and covering fabric—from tents to clothing—as a primordial art. He breaks with architectural history by defining the hull rather than the inner construction as the moment at which architecture occurs, whereby he alters established architectonic hierarchies. Simultaneously, the artist's works based on textile fabrics are emblematic for her oeuvre, for no other material, no technique is capable of affecting our sensual existence in such a universal manner as textile. In an increasingly unsensual time, the textile with its richness in weaving styles and textures seems to be the perfect medium to quench a need for sensuality. At the same time, it represents the intertwining of things, for endlessly entangled textures, which have originated from weaving to form a basis for technical networks.

Blattmann's interest in architecture and urban structures, together with their relationship to the human body, is the point of departure for the series of *Shoes* (since 2015) <sup>(23, 24, 26, 29, 32, 34, 35)</sup>. Using silicone, ceramics, plaster and latex, the artist has created sculptures which likewise represent shoes and houses, or rather models of both. One form seems to be inextricably linked to the other. Her *High Rise Boots* (2017) <sup>(19)</sup>, consisting of stacked ceramic elements, for instance, pile up to form the architecture of two high-rise buildings which, based on their boot-like shape, mutate into fashion. While some works from the series do not refer to a specific source, other models are replicas of iconic buildings, including Jørn Utzon's *Sydney Opera House* (1959–1973) <sup>(31, 32)</sup>, and Erich Mendelsohn's *Einsteinturm* (Einstein Tower, 1919–1921) <sup>(23, 24, 26, 29, 32, 34, 35)</sup>, which through its anthropomorphic and physiognomic appearance became a counter model of rationalist, industrial construction. The modified dimensions and shapes of the structures and the way they are staged as pieces of clothing

cause you to relate the architecture directly to your own body, even if the body is merely hinted at, is actually absent. Emphasizing how strongly the human physique is influenced by the surrounding space, the sculptures give rise to questions concerning the spatial-societal dispositif. Arranged together, Blattmann's *Shoes* become a model city, an urban landscape which is set in motion, as though marching towards you.

The simultaneity of standstill and play also reveals itself in Blattmann's series of *Ofensulpturen* (Stove Sculptures, 2019) (4–6). At the centre of the work are several old stoves. The heavy objects are standing on stove pipes of stainless steel, so they encounter the viewer nearly at eye-level. Apparently, the human figure has served as a proportional scale here, resulting in a notable anthropomorphization of the sculptures. They remind of suits of armour or hulls, suggesting a body. Emerging from the ovens are further shiny steel pipes recalling the original function, as if there were a fire blazing inside of the sculpture and smoke could come out of the pipes at any moment. In contrast to this are glass carafes as containers for liquid. The works are marked by a certain ambiguity: between industrial object and anthropomorphic appearance. The various materials and their specific characteristics are played off against each other by the artist. While, in two of the sculptures, shiny stainless steel is coupled with jute (4, 5), in the third sculpture (6), it is rough iron and stainless steel. The pleated jute swirls around the bare shapes of the stoves, enrobing them, while ignoring other aspects such as the frontal or main view. Similar to her *Shoes*, also the *Stove Sculptures* are marked by a revitalization of lifeless materials. The language of the material enters into a dialogue in her works. The way she plays with opposing qualities—organic versus inorganic, anthropomorphic versus geometric, calculated versus incidental – creates a tension that is characteristic for Christiane Blattmann's artistic oeuvre and turns her works into distinct figures of thought.

— Merle Radtke, *Translation: Barbara Lang*

## We Got Spirit: Literary Imagination in the Work of Christiane Blattmann

*Without [the] attribution of a soul to the material world ... artefacts would just be objects and we wouldn't even bother looking at them, as something that speaks, as art; or believe someone who claimed an artefact said something to them.*<sup>1</sup>

The connection between animism and art interpretation, so elegantly explained here by the critic Jan Verwoert, is something that often comes to mind when I think about the work of Christiane Blattmann. From early on in her practice, Blattmann has been interested in the ways in which objects have historically been imbued with meaning through tradition, mythology and ritual. Like Verwoert's essay, her work can be seen to trace a line between the spiritual, cultural and religious practices of times past and the staging of contemporary art today. It's an attitude that's been informed, in part, by an eclectic mix of art historical reference points—including, but not limited to, Roman sarcophagi, Pompeian wall painting, and, most recently, medieval tapestries—as well as a number of idiosyncratic books, such as Gottfried Semper's *Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts, Or, Practical Aesthetics* (1860–63) and Sir James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough: A Study In Magic And Religion* (1890), which take an anthropological approach to their subject matter with a liberal sprinkling of literary embellishment.

For *Un-Break My Walls*, Blattmann chose three works of fiction—Monique Wittig's *Les Guérillères* (1969), Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1972) and Aristophanes' *The Birds* (414 BC)—as touchstones for the body of work she produced. Although they differ in style and genre, all three texts can be seen to offer (alternative) models of coexisting. *Les Guérillères*, for example, features an all-female community that live in harmony with the land, with the story's conflict coming from the realization that this way of living was only made possible through a violent war between the genders. *The Birds* also revolves around a struggle for power—this time between birds, humans and Olympians. And *Invisible*

<sup>1</sup> Verwoert, Jan 2011, 'Animalisms', in *Art & Research*, Volume 4. No.1.

*Cities*, framed as a conversation between Marco Polo and the emperor Kublai Khan, builds its narrative through a series of fantastical vignettes describing daily life in 55 fictitious cities.

When it comes to revealing the intentions and inspirations behind art works, how much is too much? It's something that comes up when writing about any exhibition, but it's especially difficult to answer when, as is the case here, an artist works both intellectually and intuitively—mixing research with an instinctual material-based studio practice. For her part, Blattmann has said that you don't need to know anything about these sources to be able to “read” her work; instead she draws an analogy between Ikebana basket weaving, a technique used in a number of works in the exhibition, and the way that the information she collects is incorporated into her practice. “It gets tied in,” she says, “literally woven into a net that, in its entirety, shows another form, something else than the individual strands.” Furthermore, Blattmann sees her sculptures as “nourished by all those references, books and research, without being directly based on them.”<sup>2</sup>

While this way of working is hardly unique to Blattman's practice, what is perhaps special is the belief that while these things might not be seen on the surface they could still be sensed, or perhaps more to the point, *experienced*. Similar to the way that Jan Verwoert asks us to consider how objects can be seen as having a “soul”, as an artist she is interested in the ways that sculptures can be “charged”. To return to Verwoert's text, this charging can be seen as the point “when the work or thought comes to life because something in the work or thought happens that finds its rhythm in—and touches on—something other than itself.”

But although these three texts do not appear explicitly as motifs in the sculptures on display—there would be little enjoyment to be gained by holding them up against individual art works and trying to compare what is said against what you can see—they can nevertheless offer an expanded way of looking at the exhibition. Individually, they all hold interest for Blattmann: there's the caustic humour of *Birds*, the vivid nature imagery of *Les Guérillères* and the skilful way architecture and urbanism are intertwined in *Invisible Cities*. But together they can be taken as examples of writers

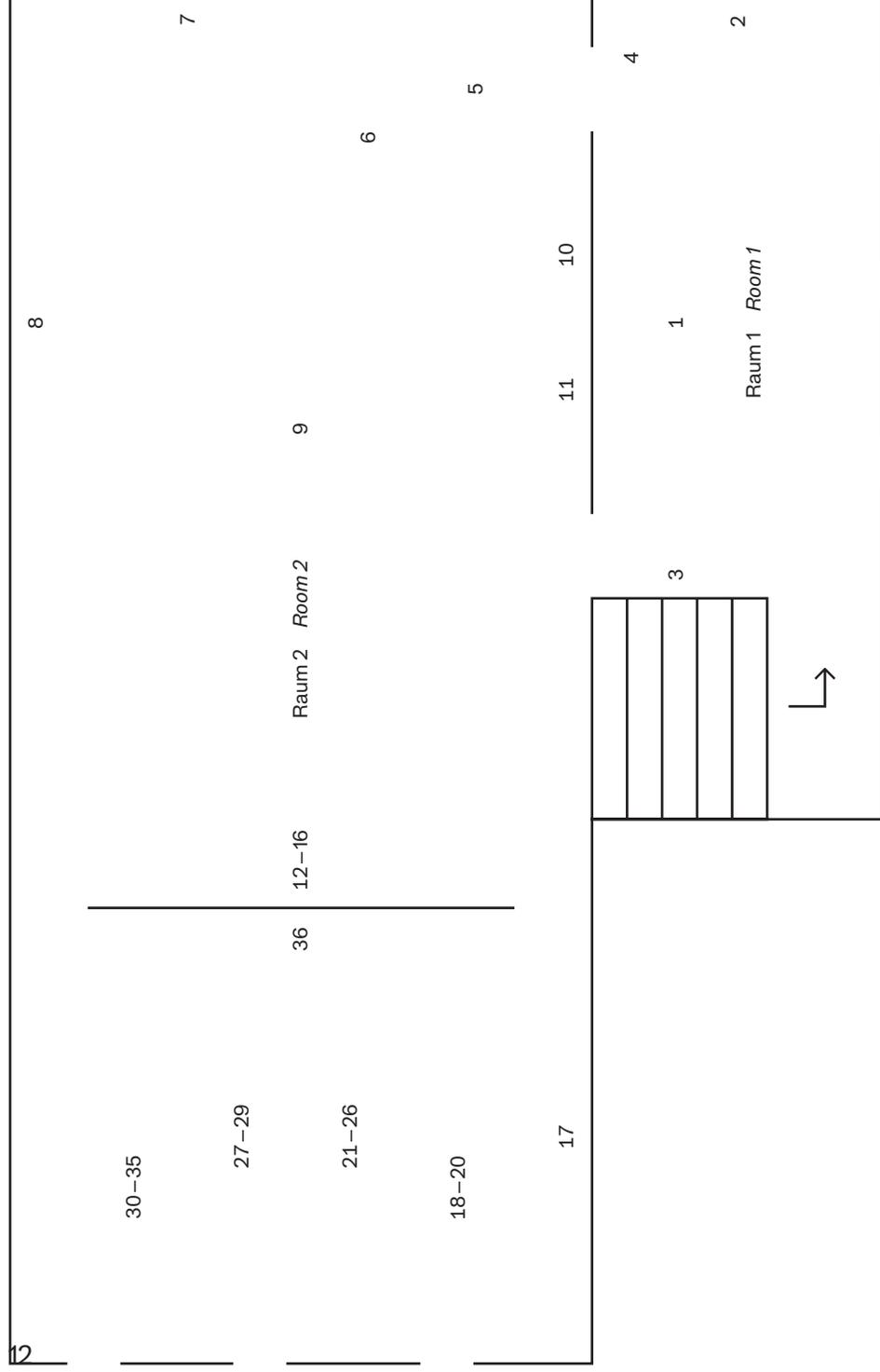
<sup>2</sup> All quotes by the artist are taken from a number of email, Skype and phone conversations in March 2019.

repurposing myths for their own ends: Aristophanes for satire, Wittig as a feminist rally to arms and Calvino to comment on the mechanics of fiction.

Myths are just one way that as a culture we have traditionally attempted to give meaning to the world around us; they tell stories that give weight to everyday occurrences, such as the flight of birds, for example, or the daily rising of the sun. Blattmann's literary pursuits are a way of attempting to tap into that power, while still being aware of its artifice. If we can believe that stories can have a transformative power on our daily reality, so too can the staging of art objects—as long as we're prepared to believe in them.

— *Chloe Stead*

Christiane Blattmann (born in Stuttgart in 1983, lives and works in Hamburg and Brussels) initially studied at the Berlin University of the Arts before transferring to the University of Fine Arts Hamburg in 2006, where she then graduated in 2013. Between 2011 and 2013, together with Jannis Marwitz, she ran the Betongalerie, an exhibition venue in public space in Hamburg St. Pauli. Since 2012 she has been part of the publishers' team of Montez Press, which she had founded the same year together with Than Hussein Clark, Anja Dietmann, William Joys and James Connick. In 2012 she also went to Mexico City with a scholarship from Neue Kunst in Hamburg e.V., and in 2018 she was a scholar at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris. Her works have been shown internationally, among others at The Community (Paris), at the Kunsthaus Hamburg, at Damien & The Love Guru (Brussels), at the art association Kunstverein Harburger Bahnhof (Hamburg), at Croy Nielsen (Berlin), the Mathew Gallery (New York/Berlin), the Goethe Institut Paris, VI,VII (Oslo), at Marwan (Amsterdam), the Biennale Regard Benin (Cotonou) and at the NEK – Neuer Essener Kunstverein.



- 33
- Raum 1 Room 1
- 30–35
- 27–29
- 21–26
- 18–20
- 17
- 12–16 Raum 2 Room 2
- 9
- 11 10
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 1
- Raum 1 Room 1
- 2
- 13 *Venus Wringing Her Hair, Standing at the Water's Edge*, 2019, Silikon, Pigment, Jute / Silicone, pigment, jute
- 14 *They Say That in the First Place the Vocabulary of Every Language Is to Be Examined, Modified, Turned Upside Down, That Every Word Must Be Screened*, 2018, Silikon, Pigment, Jute / Silicone, pigment, jute
- 15 *Touch*, 2018, Silikon, Pigment, Jute / Silicone, pigment, jute
- 16 *Hear*, 2018, Silikon, Pigment, Jute / Silicone, pigment, jute, Svenja und / and Mark Lüdemann
- 17 *Throwing Her Head Around*, 2015, Latex, Pigment / Latex, Pigment, Courtesy the artist and Oracle, Berlin
- 18 *Throwing Her Head Around*, 2015, Latex, Pigment / Latex, pigment, Privatsammlung / Private Collection, Berlin
- 19 *High Rise Boots*, 2017, Keramik, Gesso, Wachs / Ceramic, gesso, wax
- 20 *Throwing Her Head Around*, 2015, Latex, Pigment / Latex, pigment, Courtesy the artist and Oracle, Berlin
- 21 *Throwing Her Head Around*, 2015, Latex, Pigment / Latex, Courtesy the artist and Oracle, Berlin
- 22 *High Rise Boots*, 2016, Gips, Pigment, Wachs / Plaster, pigment, wax, Courtesy the artist
- 23 *Einstein Boots*, 2016, Silikon, Pigment / Silicone, pigment, Max Prediger, Hamburg
- 24 *Einstein Boots*, 2016, Silikon, Pigment / Silicone, pigment, Courtesy the artist
- Raum 2 Room 2
- 25 *Throwing Her Head Around*, 2015, Latex, Pigment / Latex, pigment, Courtesy the artist and Oracle, Berlin
- 26 *Einstein Boots*, 2016, Silikon, Pigment / Silicone, pigment, Courtesy the artist
- 27 *Throwing Her Head Around*, 2015, Latex, Pigment / Latex, pigment,
- 28 *High Rise Boots (blau)*, 2016, Keramik, Gesso, Aquarellfarbe, Wachs / Ceramic, gesso, watercolour, wax, Courtesy the artist
- 29 *Einstein Boots*, 2016, Silikon, Pigment / Silicone, pigment, Courtesy the artist
- 30 *Model for Opera Shoes*, 2018, Keramik, Gesso / Ceramic, gesso, Courtesy the artist
- 31 *Opera Shoes*, 2018, Keramik, Gips, Gesso / Ceramic, plaster, gesso, Courtesy the artist
- 32 *Einstein Boots*, 2016, Silikon, Pigment / Silicone, pigment, Courtesy the artist
- 33 *Throwing Her Head Around*, 2015, Latex, Pigment / Latex, pigment, Aleen Solari, Hamburg
- 34 *Einstein Boots*, 2016, Silikon, Pigment / Silicone, pigment, Courtesy the artist
- 35 *Einstein Boots*, 2016, Silikon, Pigment / Silicone, pigment, Courtesy the artist
- 36 *Post Equinox*, 2019, Rattan, Silikon, Pigment / Rattan, silicone, pigment
- Alle anderen Werke / All other works:  
 Courtesy the artist and Damien & the Love Guru,  
 Brüssel / Brussels