

Andrea Wikhammer Heir



Fatland 2014 2014, C-print on aluminum, 110 × 70 cm.

Wretched Beauties

Andrea Wikhammer Heir's works draw you in and push you away. Her photographs, drawings and sculptures feature internal organs or evoke their presence. You see a body part without quite knowing what body it once belonged to. Despite the shock, your eyes linger over the details. Is that a claw wrapped in burlap and twine? Or a skinny man's middle finger? A tuft of fur or hair? The artist often hangs her sculptural pieces from hooks on sturdy metal frames or from strings on the walls or the ceiling; other sculptures are crowded together on display tables or overlapped in photographic collages, life-size or extra-large. Such tactics recall the butcher's display methods, thus augmenting the sense of a disembowelment, albeit sanitised, even medicinal. Her works share an almost soothing smoothness and colour palette – warm beige to soft pink to crimson rose – which underscore their purely formal qualities: shape, texture, elasticity, density. Wikhammer Heir – who doesn't always mind if viewers end up touching her sculptures to satisfy their curiosity – associates this repelling-fascinating moment with the abject. This experience was traditionally explored by older generations of mothers who dealt with every substance produced by children's bodies, in sickness and in health. It's not surprising that the psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva linked the abject with a rejection of the mother's body in order to achieve an autonomous subjectivity. Yet in addition to psychoanalytic theories, there's a smaller philosophical tradition ignited by Karl Rosenkranz's *Ästhetik des Häßlichen* (Aesthetics of Ugliness, 1853) which restored the rightful significance of ugliness, if only in demarcating beauty. His title may sound like an irreconcilable mismatch – how can ugliness be aesthetic? – but Rosenkranz implicitly revives the original meaning of aesthetics as sense perception. The classic Greek term *aisthesis* covers the body's entire sensory realm – without judgements about beauty, ugliness or any other quality, made in the mind. Wikhammer Heir views the body as a container, perhaps akin to an archive of both sensations and sculptures. All of her works confront us not only with that polarised feeling of repulsion and fascination but also with the very »tools« that make such feelings possible. *Jennifer Allen*

Andrea Wikhammer Heir (1986, Levanger, Norway) is an artist currently based in Oslo. Her medium varies from printmaking and sculptural objects to video and photography. She completed her MFA studies at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts and the Escola Massana Centre d'Art i Disseny Barcelona in 2015. Wikhammer Heir has participated in several group exhibitions, including »Nytt blikk på grafikk 2011« (A New Perspective on Printmaking 2011) at Galleri Skårer in Oslo with artists from The Norwegian Printmakers Studio.

Andrea Wikhammer Heir



Flesh Species 2013, detail, mixed media, 9 × 5 × 4 cm.



Untitled 2014, C-print on aluminum, 80 × 50 cm.
All images courtesy: the artist.

Is it possible to find a balance between the repulsive and the attractive? Today, more and more areas of life are being shifted into the visual sphere. To move in the world, physical presence is no longer required. Is perception tending towards a detachment from bodily consciousness? Inspired by the duality of beauty and the grotesque in relation to the body, I set out to portray human conditions in connection with nature and to explore our impermanence as beings that are submissive to the laws of nature. Items such as hair, skin and liquids are present, both in the real and in the metaphorical sense. Through abstraction, I attempt to prevent viewers from immediately recognising these items so that my works must be closely explored. My reconstructed bodies are imperfect, sexless and headless. They often contain abject and sexual references, which in the three-dimensional pieces are supported by the use of materials such as nylon, wax and latex. In addition to sculpture, I use photography as a direct and indirect basis. The process is experimental, and coincidences that occur are developed instead of being ignored or eliminated. An emotional response – pure fascination – depends upon a compelling desire to experience flesh but, at the same time, to recoil in shame and aversion. *Andrea Wikhammer Heir*



Flesh Species 2013, detail, mixed media, 120 × 80 × 20 cm.