

Opening: 09.10.2021, 7 – 9 PM

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Attempts have always been made to divide the world into opposing concepts, man/woman, nature/culture, work/leisure, public/private. Yet neither the concepts themselves are conclusive, nor is their juxtaposition something that could depict reality. To what extent is a person wearing a smartwatch that monitors their sleep and waking time, step count and heartbeat not already a cyborg? And if they are wearing this watch, to what degree is it already part of the human and no longer part of technology? In 1985, the American scientist Donna Haraway wrote an important text titled “A Cyborg Manifesto” in which she deals with the transgression of the boundaries between human and machine. Her particular focus was on those aspects of the cyborg that might be of interest for a feminist perspective. The idea that one could dissolve the concept of the dualistic body with the male/female binary via the figure of the cyborg, i.e. a completely newly created being, is central to this. When everything dissolves, becomes more fluid, and humans and nature and humans and technology combine, when the inside and outside of buildings are up for discussion, and even the concepts of public and private can only be grasped diffusely, then the question of what constitutes humankind and where it stands within this new order becomes increasingly important. What role does the human body take on and, above all, where can it position itself?

In current literature, novels are frequently released that have a magical-dystopian bent, describing a world in which humans seem to have lost their connection to the world. In this world, they glide lonely and weightless through a universe that has become alien to them. As if they were cocooned, a presumed reality seems to only get through to the various protagonists very softly. As if they were not living on earth, where gravity is a law, but instead on space capsules on the moon, detached from physical principles.*

And then suddenly there are these strange metal structures. Filigree lightning rods, bending—perhaps already a little melted under the load of the electromagnetic mass. They waft gently through the room like marsh plants under water. They zap through the air like scintillation made visible. They are there and yet intangible.

For almost four years, artist Zuza Golinska has been working in a shipyard in Gdansk on her sculptures, which are made of black steel and which address all the questions about humans and technology and their interconnectedness. Black steel is steel in its most natural state. It is only through the manufacturing process—the reaction with oxygen in the blast furnace—that it acquires its black color. The steel she works with is left over from the shipyard’s production. The works thus join a cycle. They don’t interrupt it, they don’t add anything new, but they pick up what’s left over and make use of it. This automatically raises the question of material waste, sustainability, and the consequences of ever more production in a neoliberal, post-industrial world order. One in which the credo of higher-faster-further ultimately propels us in exactly the opposite direction.

At first, the men who work in the shipyard were surprised and curious about what Golińska was doing there. Today, they support her with their knowledge and expertise in welding to implement her ideas. The metal shapes that meander through the room, as elegant as they are ungainly, illustrate neuronal networks.

Or the movement of electricity. Or the idea of how nature and bodies approach and repel each other, just as the different poles of a magnet do. Or the contrast between a romanticized idea of nature and the effects of industrialization. Or how one sees oneself and one's own body in relation to architectural structures.

Because Golinska's own body is also reflected in the sculptures. It is important to her that she forms the objects herself. She could also work with a workshop that would do it for her, but she has decided against it. No one else can create these shapes but her. Sure, someone else could make something that would be very, very similar. But it would still be something very, very different. This is also about confronting the concept of the artist-genius, the masculine locus of the shipyard, and the classic image of a (steel)worker. Namely with her own body, which consciously creates space for itself in the room via the sculptures.

Steel conducts electricity. Neurons shoot through the brain. Lightning strikes. We are surrounded by chemical and physical marvels happening at all times within our bodies, but also around us in nature. Boundaries are constantly being crossed, explored, discarded as unnecessary, and yet then re-established. Everything is a cycle. And Golinska's sculptures give some fine hints of how to position oneself within it, despite all the chaos.

- Laura Helena Wurth

* Such novels from the genre of speculative literature written in German are, for instance: Leif Randt Planet Magnon (2015), Marius Goldhorn Park (2020), Joshua Groß Flexen in Miami (2020), Charlotte Krafft Die Palmen am Strand von Acapulco, sie nicken (2020).