

Opening hours:

Tuesday 10:00 – 20:00

Wednesday – Sunday 10:00 – 17:00

Closed on Mondays

Extension

12 – 22 Sylvie Fleury
Shoplifters from Venus

First floor

- 3 Picasso, Morandi, Giacometti, Lassnig
- 4 Roussel, Maillol
- 5 Monet, Sisley, Pissarro, van Gogh, Bonnard, Vallotton
- 6 Vuillard, Redon, Toulouse-Lautrec, Sylvie Fleury
- 7 Picasso, Braque, Gris, Leger, Delauney, Sylvie Fleury
- 8 de Chirico, Magritte, Klee, Giacometti
- 9 Mondrian, van Doesberg, Taeuber-Arp, Arp, Brancusi, Calder, Mangold, Cragg
- 10 Albers, Loewensberg, Sylvie Fleury
- 11 Martin, McLaughlin, Baer, Weiner, Mosset, Sylvie Fleury

Ground floor

- 1 Franz Erhard Walther
Werke aus der Kienzle Art Foundation
- 2

Sylvie Fleury Shoplifters from Venus

3.6. – 20.8.2023

Fashion, glamour, and lifestyle...: Whenever the venerable halls of an art museum are transformed into the venue of a fashion show, Sylvie Fleury is likely to be a guest. For the first time in 15 years, Kunst Museum Winterthur is presenting a solo exhibition of the internationally sought-after artist in Switzerland. Alongside her iconic early works, new works realized especially for this exhibition will be on display. Together, they provide an insight into the steadily developed oeuvre of one of the most important artists of the country.

For about 25 years, Sylvie Fleury has been playing ironically with gender clichés and stereotypes of consumer society. She became famous for her sophisticated stagings of glamour, fashion, and lifestyle. *Shoplifters from Venus* – the exhibition title – on the one hand refers to an act of theft, and on the other one to the thief's place of origin, Venus, both as planet and Roman goddess of love. Programmatically, the title sums up the strategy of the artist, born in Geneva in 1961, as she literally pilfers the pictorial inventions of modernism in order to question them from a decidedly feminist perspective and re-interpret them in terms of content: "I don't consider my work an appropriation. I see it more as a personalization." (Sylvie Fleury)

The exhibition at Kunst Museum Winterthur already begins in the collection rooms: *Celine Bag* (2017), e.g., is found next to Cubist paintings by Fernand Léger. It is as if the connection between art and fashion is celebrated here in particular, with a painting peering boldly out of a handbag, genuinely immortalized by a bronze sculpture. This programmatic prelude is followed by additional dialogues spanning entire eras: in Sylvie Fleury's *Patrick, Piet & Josef (II)* and *Patrick, Piet & Daniel*, both created in 1996, objects by London shoe designer Patrick Cox from 1995 combine with the iconic pictorial inventions of Piet Mondrian, Josef Albers, and Daniel Buren and, thus, encounter works by these same artists in the collection.

The tour of the exhibition begins in the first room with Sylvie Fleury's famous *Shopping Bags*. In the 1990s, they caused quite a stir in the art world. Each of the bags, many of them from internationally known fashion labels, enclosed the object that the artist had purchased along with it. Combining art and commerce thus uninhibitedly seemed quite scandalous at the time. Even more irritating was the fact that an artist devoted herself to the almost obsessive purchase of luxury goods, and seemed



White Gold, 2010, Courtesy the artist

to uncritically indulge in glamour and lifestyle items. At the same time, the exchange between valorized archival items and profane space looks back on a long tradition in the visual arts ever since Marcel Duchamp. Sylvie Fleury consistently combines this tradition with the deconstruction of traditional gender clichés – ironically and with relish.

I was – strangely perhaps – never very popular with feminists. They were shocked by my attitude. I was even accused of being anti-feminist. American women were more outspoken, they considered my work and proclaimed: "This is new feminism."
Sylvie Fleury

Sylvie Fleury's wonderfully ironic approach is literally taken to extremes in the next exhibition space, or rather demonstrated on the catwalk of a fashion show. In 2008, the latter was used to present paintings in the style of Jackson Pollock's Action Paintings, which presented fashion models like handbags. In the Winterthur exhibition, this work is presented in its full potential, while visitors can view the exhibition on the catwalk and, thus, may themselves become a model or exhibit.

The artist's preoccupation with the heroes of Minimal and Post-Minimal Art, a focus of the Winterthur museum collection, takes up a lot of space in the *Shoplifters*

from *Venus* exhibition: neither Carl Andre, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, nor Frank Stella – that is, hardly any of the greats of American post-war art – seem to have escaped the artist's customizing, that is, her strategy of personalization and individualization. Sylvie Fleury satirizes her epochal artistic gestures with targeted interventions, whether by transforming their formal inventions by means of material or colour shifts, or by shifting them into the sphere of fashion and lifestyle by means of specifically selected additions, thus subtly contaminating the purity and sublimity of art as proclaimed in the 1960s. This, however, is never a playful end in itself. The historical context of *Shoplifters from Venus* becomes particularly obvious in its reference to classical modernism and American post-war art. Sylvie Fleury's artistic practice makes use of strategies of early Conceptualism, Pop Art, and Minimalism, thus allowing a critical view of the largely male-dominated history of art. Sylvie Fleury's *Shoplifters from Venus* set out to change this: When the thieving goddesses of love find their way from Venus into the museum, the most diverse levels of meaning resonate with erotic seduction, from more or less profane and sophisticated shopping pleasures to downright brazen shoplifting. The former awakens desires and sensual longings, the latter reveals a subversive artistic strategy of disappropriation and appropriation, which Sylvie Fleury has consistently pursued and independently developed since the 1990s.

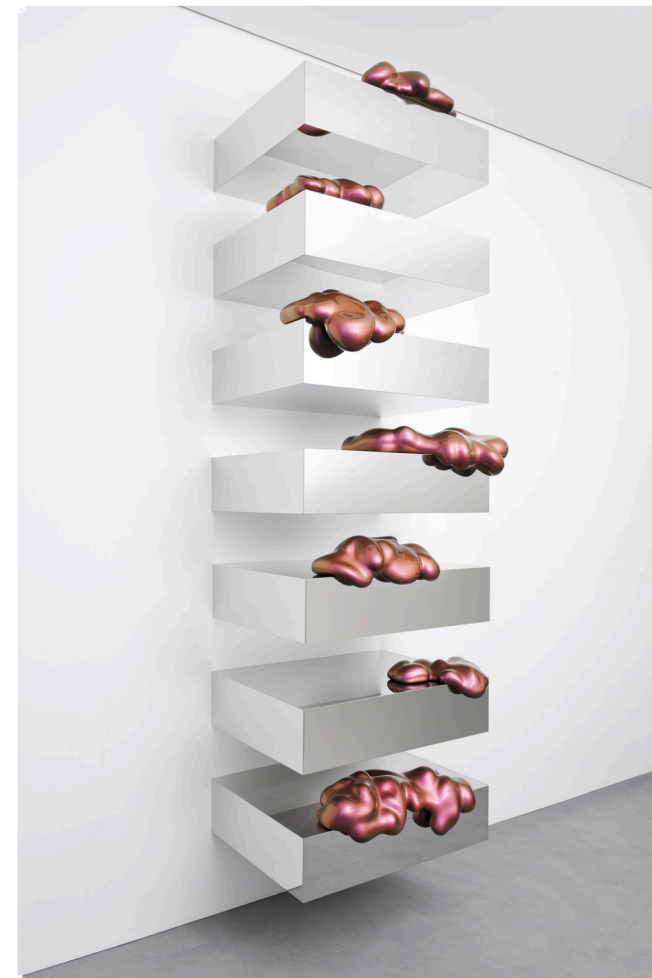
This is exemplified in her variations on Donald Judd's famous Stacks, which she "decorates" with unpleasant-looking organic objects, thus counteracting the idea of pure form cultivated by the master of Minimal Art with mischievous delight – not least by the unfathomable title of the work: *Eternal Wow on Shelves*. Sylvie Fleury's fashionable high heels also strut downright shamelessly and provocatively in her video works on Carl Andre's floor works, which were actually realized precisely for the purpose of being stepped on by art viewers, and were intended to open up a further dimension of perception. In Sylvie Fleury's videos, however, Andre's floor works turn into profane catwalks for the presentation of luxury shoes, whose art, as refined as it is provocative, is to direct attention away from the icons of art history to the short-lived world of fashion and, at the same time, pose fundamental questions about the values of the world of art versus those of the world of commodities. Or in the words of the artist: I'm going to tread hard on the entire history of sculpture, reducing it to an industrial base, a primordial gesture amplified by industry.

Thus, the surfaces of some of her rockets from the *First Spaceship on Venus* series, created from 1995 onwards, appear all the softer and plusher. A separate exhibition hall is dedicated to them, with the rockets standing ready as if in storage. Rockets are phallic symbols par excellence. Besides, space travel, or the idea of "conquering" outer space, also is a symbol of excessive masculinity. Sylvie Fleury's rockets break with these fantasies. Has her spaceship just landed on the planet Venus? Or does the surface made of fake fur or painted in iridescent nail-varnish colours refer to the Roman goddess of erotic

love and beauty? Here, Sylvie Fleury once again plays, tongue-in-cheek, with all kinds of associations...

While, in the two cabinet rooms, Martin Kippenberger's work and its persiflage *Ciao Martin!* (2021) by Sylvie Fleury is placed, ashamedly, in the corner of the first room and bumps into monumental hair clips in the second one, the conclusion of the exhibition seems once again ostensibly dedicated to the world of fashion. The title of *Double Positive* (2023) refers to Michael Heizer's famous Land Art project *Double Negative* of 1969 but consists of numerous golden, everyday clothes racks. The installation was originally realized for an exhibition at the Bechtler Foundation, where it took up the arrangement and rhythm of Walter de Maria's *The 2000 Sculpture* in the next room and "played" with numerous high-fashion pieces by Thierry Mugler, Vivienne Westwood, and Jean Paul Gauthier. At Kunst Museum Winterthur, however, the clothes rods are empty, as if they were ready for later use in a fashion show. This applies to the two *Fitting Rooms* in the final room of the exhibition tour.

Sylvie Fleury is a master of shifting between the lofty sphere of art and the banal world of commodities, between high and low approaches. These are artistic strategies that break into the very operating system of art



Eternal Wow on Shelves (bronze), 2008, Courtesy Galerie Mehdi Chouakri, Berlin

as a comeback from pop and popular culture: "It is true that, in general, art in the nineties is trying to break out of the cage of self-reference and intervene in other systems. Art projects that try to link disciplines are becoming increasingly popular. Things are brought together that were long thought to be incompatible, art and pop music, e.g. Today, many artists are fascinated by getting these complex facets of artistic forces to interact."

Critic Paolo Bianchi quoted above speaks of a permanent zapping of art, of leaps between the arts and cultures that suspends all thinking in boxes. Or in Sylvie Fleury's own words: "I have the vague feeling that I have developed a vocabulary that enables formal connections between art and fashion. But it is a crossover approach. If I have contributed, along with others, to bringing fashion into the sphere of art, I have conversely contributed to making art more present in fashion."

Ever since her first institutional solo exhibition at Zurich's Migros Museum in 1998, Sylvie Fleury's work has been widely and internationally recognized. Numerous solo exhibitions followed: in 2001, at the Centre for Art and Media (ZKM) in Karlsruhe and Le Magasin – Centre national d'art contemporain, Grenoble; in 2007, at the Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin; in 2008, at the Musée d'art moderne et contemporain (MAMCO) in Geneva, and in 2016, at Villa Stuck, Munich. In 2018, the artist was awarded the Swiss Grand Prix Art / Prix Meret Oppenheim. *Shoplifters from Venus* is Sylvie Fleury's first comprehensive institutional solo exhibition in Switzerland in fifteen years.

I have always wanted to reshape reality and transform the objects of everyday life. And I always desired to do everything differently from everyone else – like an obsession.
Sylvie Fleury

Publikation

The exhibition is accompanied by a comprehensive publication in the Binding Selection d'artistes book series, designed by Teo Schifferle, with texts by Simon Baier, Konrad Bitterli, and Elisabeth Bronfen, edited by Konrad Bitterli and David Schmidhauser. www.kmw.ch/shop

Publication date: End of July 2023

Events accompanying the exhibition (english)

– Artist Talk

Tuesday, 27 July 2023, 6.30 pm

The artist in conversation with director Konrad Bitterli

Private guided tours

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