

Art|Basel



From Germaine Richier to Kris Lemsalu: innovative sculptors making their mark at Art Basel in Basel

From 1950s France to contemporary Mexico, these artists have been using similar strategies to explore the vulnerabilities and strengths of humankind in three dimensions

Artists often address the flaws and strengths of humanity head-on. These six sculptors tackle it through sculptural techniques and strategies that overlap in surprising ways, considering their varied backgrounds. Their works, which will be on view at Art Basel in Basel (June 13-16, 2019) in the Feature and Statements sector, are not to be missed.

French artist **Germaine Richier** (1902-1959, France) was strongly influenced by the horrors of the Second World War. Having spent this period in exile in Switzerland, she came back to France and poured her heart into a vital practice. A contemporary of Alberto Giacometti, Fernand Léger, and Marino Marini, Richier was particularly adept at incorporating cornerstones of Existentialism, such as the concepts of absurdity and revolt, into her works. Her bronze sculptures often blend human, animal, and wholly abstract features. They simultaneously address the dehumanizing consequences of suffering, while radiating uncanny, dynamic energy. In Basel, a small yet exciting retrospective of Richier will be on view in **Vedovi**'s booth in the Feature sector.

Berenice Olmedo (born 1987, Mexico) has articulated her latest body of work around prosthetics and medical aids, objects that often fascinate and repulse in equal measure. For the wearers, they can be both a source of discomfort or relief; in Olmedo's series, presented in Basel by **Jan Kaps**, the former dominates. Olmedo's materials have often been used several times and bear the traces of their previous owners. Antiquated and ill-fitting, they address the inadequacy of treatments available in rural Mexican communities. By turning them into artworks, the artist shifts the meaning of these medical aids from deficient support entities to efficient allegories of political and social violence. Olmedo's fractured exoskeletons emphasize the imbalanced relationships that are being cemented between entities of power and differently abled individuals, forcing them into an unjust situation of dependency.



Left: Berenice Olmedo, *Efélide*, 2018. Right: Janis, 2018. Courtesy of the artist and Jan Kaps, Cologne.

Body parts and an affinity for discarded materials also occupy a central place in the oeuvre of **Tetsumi Kudo** (1935-1990, Japan). Kudo was born, raised, and educated in Japan; but as of the early 1960s, his career unfolded in France. There, the artist started using small cages, aquariums, and strangely withered organic elements to create both seductive and disquieting sculptural environments. In times marked by the constant threat of an imminent nuclear disaster, his post-human tableaux illustrate his futuristic vision for a society that he felt had maneuvered itself into an ecological and moral dead-end. 'This work moved me,' says **Christophe Gaillard**, whose eponymous gallery will show Kudo in Basel in the Feature sector. 'It is indeed with absolutely astonishing prescience, an icy acuity that this artist [...] has thought about our contemporary world and guessed its main issues.' More than 25 years after his death, Kudo's point of view seems more urgent than ever.

While Tetsumi Kudo thought about the future, **Katarzyna Przezwańska** (born 1984, Poland) is more interested in the past. Time and evolution are at the center of her practice, which specifically looks at the history of places and objects. The Polish artist creates models of prehistoric playgrounds, transforms fossils into glamorous sculptures, and recreates the antediluvian landscapes of European cities, among others. At the show, Przezwańska will present a single piece: **Dawid Radziszewski's** booth will be entirely occupied by a six-meter-

long, small-scale model of the the geological layers below the fairgrounds to a depth of 500 meters. This inverted version of Walter De Maria's *Vertical Earth Kilometer* will be topped by a model of the Statements sector in which the work appears, down to the miniature artworks in miniature booths.



Left: Tetsumi Kudo, *Sans titre*, 1972. Right: *Symbiose*, 1976. Courtesy of Galerie Christophe Gaillard, Paris.

Corporations' grip on our daily lives has long been the principal focus of **Carl Cheng's** (born 1942, United States) practice. In 1965, the American artist created the company John Doe Co., allowing him to produce artwork as the very type of entity he denounced. Cheng's work plays with corporate aesthetics: Many of his pieces resemble small machines with practical uses. Closer inspection, however, reveals their absurd or worrisome functions. *Erosion Machine No. 2* (1969), for example, 'is a microwave-oven-sized "nature machine" that uses water action to erode a series of "human rocks" in order to "model nature, its processes, and effects for a future environment that may be entirely controlled or completely made by humans",' says **Philip Martin**, whose gallery will bring Cheng's work to Basel. Martin adds he was 'hooked' when he first saw the piece: 'Cheng's long-standing interest in the politics of industry and the weird interactions between humans and the natural world is evident here. What more could I possibly want in an artwork?'

Capturing movement authentically has been high on many sculptors' agendas, and **Kris Lemsalu** (born 1985, Estonia) does it with joyful ease. The Estonian artist has been incorporating her keen interest in performance into gleaming ceramics and installations.

At **Temnikova & Kasela**'s booth in the Statements sector, she will present a work exploring the translation of emotions into form. Inspired by biographical elements, her new sculpture will feature a bed, recycled objects, and the ceramic body parts that have become one of her artistic signatures. Highbrow and lowbrow effortlessly blend in Lemsalu's practice. Before Art Basel, aficionados may be able to see the artist's work at the upcoming Venice Biennale, where she will take over her native country's pavilion. Oozing with humor and sensuality, her work is sure to strike a chord in either context.



Carl Cheng, *Erosion Machine No. 2*, 1969. Courtesy of the artist and Philip Martin Gallery, Los Angeles.

Discover more participants in this year's edition of Art Basel in Basel [**here**](#).

Top image: Kris Lemsalu, *Time After Time Is Our Time* (detail), 2019. Courtesy of the artist, Koppe Astner, Glasgow, and Temnikova & Kasela, Tallinn.