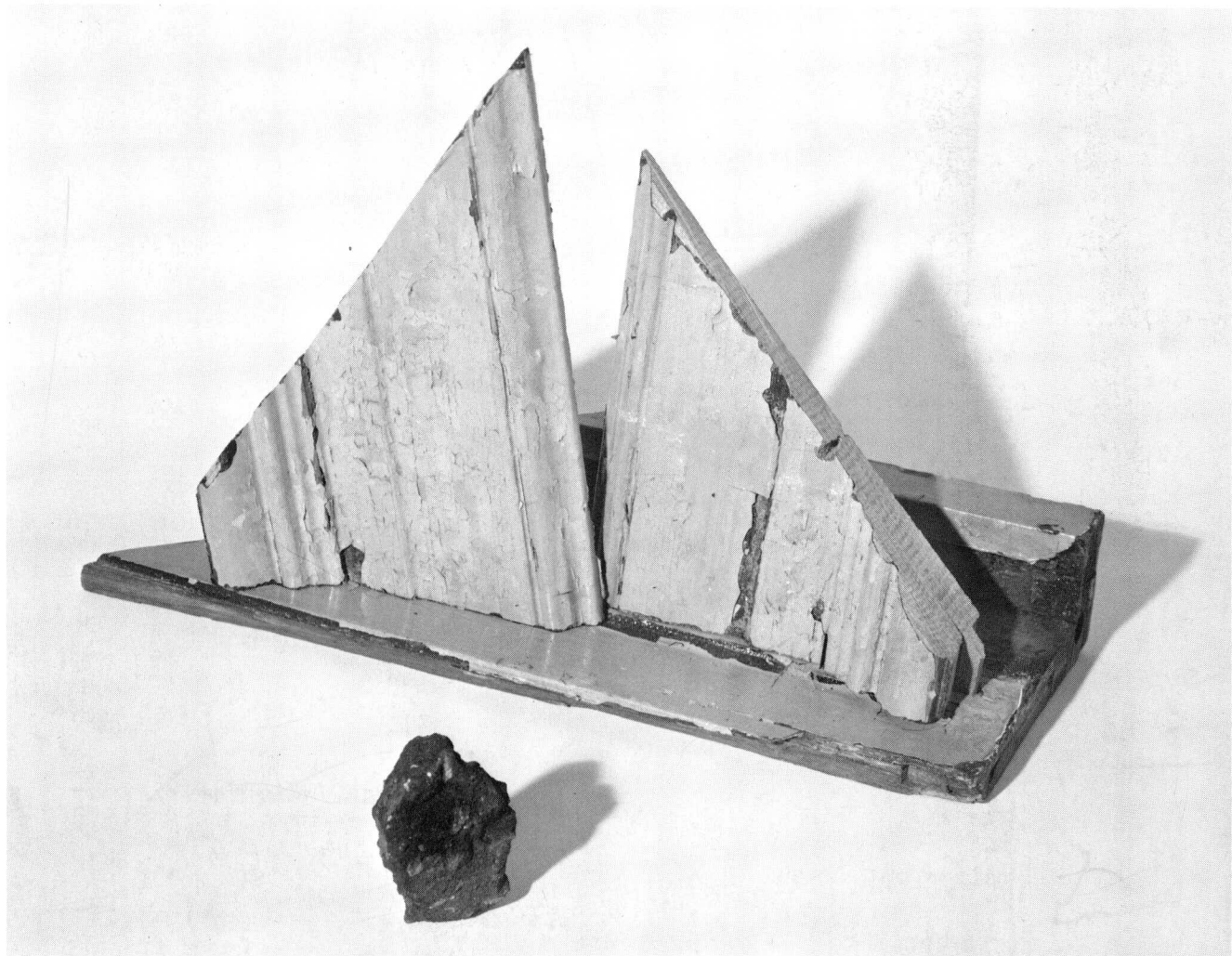


INSPIRED BY NEW YORK:

Mariann Gunder
Ycidi Langman



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Acknowledgments

The Swiss Institute periodically organizes exhibitions of works by Swiss artists living and working in New York. Each exhibition explores the themes and concerns expressed through the works of one or two artists.

“Inspired by New York: Mariann Grunder, Heidi Langauer” is one of the exhibitions in this series. Grunder’s and Langauer’s works are different, yet the situations in which they created their works are similar. Both artists recently came to New York for the first time, and worked briefly in this city. The body of work each artist executed during her short stay demonstrates a striking influence from the New York environment. Both Grunder and Langauer seem to have been startled by the racial and social diversity of New York. While Grunder tries to understand the nature of this society through her knowledge of the past and her thoughts over social discrepancies in our world, Langauer reflects on her own personal experiences. The juxtaposition of these two radically different approaches creates a peculiar tension in the exhibition and enhances the viewer’s awareness of the world around him.

This project was realized through close collaboration with Mariann Grunder and Heidi Langauer. I gratefully acknowledge their assistance. My special thanks go to Mariann Grunder, who was living in Switzerland during the preparation of the exhibition, and made every effort to secure its completion.

Z.W.



Mariann Grunder

Following her 1986 retrospective exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Bern, and in search of new stimulus, Mariann Grunder opted for a short stay in New York. New York's designation as the "melting pot" of diverse racial, philosophical and religious groups had been an object of fascination to Grunder for a long time. Besides, the co-existence of the old and the new or the past and the present, a vital and visible element in New York, had been equally manifest in Grunder's work.

One of the most remarkable examples of this is *Icarus*, a sculpture which Grunder created in the summer of 1986 in New York. According to Grunder, the Greek mythological figure, Icarus, illustrates best the aspirations and failures of modern civilization. Grunder had also explored this theme earlier in her career, but once in New York, where the frenetic and stimulating environment incites risk taking, Icarus' misadventure became especially alive for her. Besides, wouldn't the sight of each vertiginous skyscraper awaken in any first time

New York visitor Icarus' daring flight and his crash?

Grunder's New York studio was located across from the majestic former New York City Police Headquarters building on Centre Street. During her stay, the building's interior underwent significant renovation. From the debris of its destruction, she picked up some wooden laths and moldings to execute *Icarus*. Grunder's *Icarus* represents the aftermath of his crash. One of Icarus' wings stands on the ground. In its proximity, we see five small pieces of wood alluding to the remainder of his other wing. As for Icarus' body, it has been transformed into a black ball.

Grunder's second New York sojourn in the summer of 1987 resulted in numerous drawings on paper and on small stones, which she had found on the grounds of Battery Park. Grunder also executed two small and fascinating sculptures entitled *Before the Law* and *Access to the Law*. Both of these works refer to one of Franz Kafka's stories, "Before the Law," and are made of the

moldings which Grunder had collected the previous year from the debris of the police headquarters building.

In Kafka's "Before the Law," a man from the country comes to the doorkeeper of the Law and asks for admittance to the Law. The doorkeeper neither grants him admittance at that moment, nor excludes future possibilities. For years, the man waits in front of the door and periodically attempts to enter the Law. At each try, the doorkeeper refuses to grant him permission to enter. Only moments before the man dies, the key question comes to his mind: "Everyone strives to reach the Law," says the man, "so how does it happen that all these many years no one but myself has ever begged for admittance?" The doorkeeper answers: "No one else could ever be admitted here, since this gate was made only for you. I am now going to shut it." Only then does the man understand that he should not have waited for the doorkeeper's permission to enter the Law. He should have taken his freedom and entered the Law on his own.

To make *Before the Law*, Grunder positioned two trapezoidal wooden pieces like a pair of half-opened scissors. She then placed a small piece of asphalt, presumably representing a human figure, in front of this structure. Despite their small size, the half-opened laths with their dramatically slanted tops create an extraordinary sense of threat and exclusion.

Access to the Law is not threatening, but does compel the viewers to keep their distance despite its small size. To execute the piece, Grunder selected an elongated piece of wood and placed it vertically on a pedestal-like cube. As such the piece receives prominence. She then simulated a stairway by adjoining two small pieces of moldings and placed them at a distance, in front of the vertical piece. Conceptually, this stairway should ease the approach to the vertical piece on the pedestal—the Law, but in reality the separation between the two elements prevents access.

Through works such as *Before the Law* and *Access to the Law*, Grunder questions the fate of the

countless individuals whom she saw rushing through New York's streets every day, into the subway stations or intermingling in public places to justify their existence and to make a living. She questions their position within a large and complex society, where new currents constantly appear and cross each other; finally, by drawing parallels between Kafka's story and our modern society, Grunder questions the legitimacy of human acts and the possibility of contact and communication among people.

Grunder's two short and successive stays in New York permitted her to achieve a new language in sculpture. Her "pre-New York" work dealt predominantly with organic and geometric abstraction. New York's diverse facets of life prompted Grunder to crystallize her vast knowledge of the past and her concentrated reflection on modern society into some fascinating works of art.

Ziba de Weck
Guest Curator



Access to the Law, 1987
Wood and paint
16³/₄ × 12 × 14³/₈ inches

Heidi Langauer

In her work, Heidi Langauer incessantly questions the infallibility of set rules and established values. Her "pre-New York" work is introverted. It deals primarily with her own life—dramatic childhood memories of Austria in wartime and her hardships later in life. Langauer's works are representational. For the most part they depict starkly reduced human figures, assuming awkward positions. Other images, such as the wedge, the crown and the wing—symbols, respectively, for threat,

nobility and freedom—frequently accompany these human figures. The works which Langauer executed prior to her exposure to New York are painted predominantly in black and white, and sometimes in ocher and black. By using almost no color in her work, Langauer was able to focus intensely on its content, and thus to better express her message.

In July of 1987, Langauer commenced a 6-month sojourn in New York, which affected her work dramatically. At once it became extroverted, and she also

included subjects from street life and the media. At the same time, Langauer increasingly utilized colors to enhance the expressionist quality of her work.

Gi' me a Dime is a series of drawings depicting New York street beggars, executed in black and white. By repeatedly depicting beggars, Langauer expresses her disconcerting reaction to the present situation of New York's streets. As one can see from the images, these are not naturalistic portraits of the beggars, but rather Langauer's representations of their inner feelings. In all of them

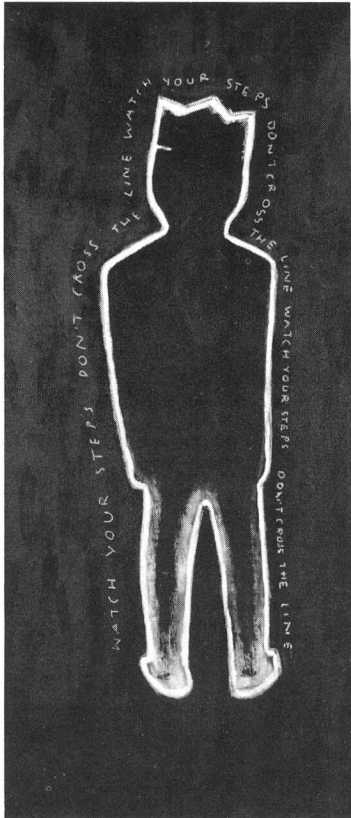
the beggars are reduced to distorted heads and awkward arm-like shapes. In one drawing, for example, the beggar's face contains only an eye at one extreme. In another work the neck turns into an arm and then reaches toward a container to collect donations. The beggars' coin-containers are also objects of fantasy. One of them contains a miniature image of a cheerful woman with outstretched arms—most probably an allusion to the beggar's ultimate dream.



Heidi Langauer with *Beggars*, 1987
Acrylic on paper, group of nine
works, each 17 × 14 inches



White Hand Holding Black Masks takes as its basis one of the beggars' portraits. Using this image, Langauer comments on some social and racial problems in the United States. A gigantic face with one large and staring eye fills the entire 63 × 56 inch canvas, leaving almost no room for anything else to exist. A white arm emerges from one side of the head, and pushes down two small black faces located on one corner of the large face. Beneath the two black heads, countless miniature black heads are squeezed into a pile.



One of Langauer's most successful works is *Watch Your Step*, a diptych she created in November, 1987. On one panel we see a crowned man painted in black, standing with his feet apart as if ready to walk. The sentence "watch your step(s), don't cross the line," a generic warning commonly used in the United States, is written three times around the outline of the man's body. On the other panel, we see a large and crowned feminine face with staring eyes. On the lower part of her face,



Langauer has painted two miniature human figures—one woman and one man—alienated from each other. The warning "watch your steps, don't cross the line" and the border line between the two panels—one painted in black and the other in orange—create a peculiar tension that operates on several levels. On the one hand, the work might comment on social class discrepancies prevailing in New York, but on the other hand it might refer to the present devastating anxiety engendered by AIDS.

The works which Langauer created in New York are testimony of her new outlook on the world. Although New York exerted a tremendous influence on Langauer, it did not compel her to depart from her artistic tenet, but rather provided her with an impulse to create a new vocabulary for self expression.

Ziba de Weck
Guest Curator

Watch Your Step, 1987
Acrylic on canvas in two parts
63 × 82 inches

BIOGRAPHIES

Mariann Grunder

Born in Bern, Switzerland, 1926. Completed requirements to become a teacher, 1946. The same year, Grunder spent a few months in Paris and decided to become a painter. In 1953, she undertook sculpture, which has become her primary medium of expression. Worked with sculptor W. Dubi in Switzerland, 1954–58. Built her studio in Rubigen, near Bern, 1958. Received “Kiefer-Hablitzel” fellowship, 1959–60; and “Louise Aeschlimann Foundation” fellowship, 1959–64. Spent 1960 in Paris, where she worked in Laszlo Szabo’s studio, and lived in Olga

Picabia’s apartment. First one-artist exhibition at the Schindler Gallery, Bern, 1964. The same year, Grunder spent a few months in Berlin. Started working with modular structures, 1969, and beginning 1974, she applied this method to stone. Worked and exhibited in Nola, Italy, 1985. In 1986 Grunder had a retrospective exhibition in the Kunstmuseum Bern. Spent the summers 1986 and 1987 in New York. Presently, Grunder lives and works in Rubigen.

Heidi Langauer

Born in Vienna, 1939. Emigrated to Switzerland, 1963. Langauer obtained her artistic training by attending evening classes at the Kunst Akademie, Vienna, and the Freie Kunstschule, Zurich. Langauer has frequently shown her work in the Helmhaus, Zurich; the Lobby Gallery, Kunsthau Zurich and the Kunsthau Aarau. She also has had several one-artist exhibitions in galleries such as Esther Hufschmid and Am Zuriberg, Zurich. Since 1986, Langauer has shown her work in Vienna and Linz, Austria and in Stuttgart, Germany. In 1987, Langauer was the recipient of the City of Zurich Fellowship—a 6-month stay in New York sponsored jointly by the City of Zurich and the Union Bank of Switzerland.

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Unless it is otherwise indicated, all works are in the collections of the artists. Dimensions are in inches; height precedes width precedes depth.

Mariann Grunder

Sculptures

Untitled, 1986
Granite and aluminum
 $4\frac{1}{2} \times 4 \times 3\frac{1}{2}$
Jack Tilton Gallery, New York

Untitled, 1986
Granite, $6\frac{1}{4} \times 5 \times 3$
Jack Tilton Gallery, New York

Untitled, 1986
Marble and aluminum
 $7 \times 7 \times 6$
Jack Tilton Gallery, New York

Icarus, 1986
Wood, rubber and paint
104, width and depth variable

Before the Law, 1987
Wood, paint and asphalt
 $10\frac{3}{8} \times 12 \times 15\frac{3}{16}$

Access to the Law, 1987
Wood and paint
 $16\frac{3}{4} \times 12 \times 14\frac{3}{8}$

Untitled, 1987
Schist, $5 \times 6\frac{3}{16} \times \frac{11}{16}$

Untitled, 1987
Schist, $4 \times 3 \times 1$

Untitled, 1987
Schist, $2\frac{3}{8} \times 3\frac{9}{16} \times 1$

Untitled, 1987
Schist, $3\frac{9}{16} \times 3\frac{3}{16} \times \frac{11}{16}$

Untitled, 1987
Schist, $5\frac{9}{16} \times 6\frac{3}{16} \times 1$

Untitled, 1987
Schist, $4\frac{3}{8} \times 5 \times \frac{1}{4}$

Untitled, 1987
Limestone, $2\frac{9}{16} \times 3\frac{3}{8} \times 1\frac{3}{16}$

Untitled, 1987
Limestone, $3\frac{3}{8} \times 4\frac{3}{4} \times 1\frac{1}{8}$

Drawings

Untitled, 1986
Group of two
Graphite on paper, 60×120

Paper Embossing, 1986
Paper, $14\frac{3}{8} \times 21\frac{3}{16}$

Sketch, 1986
Pencil on paper, $3\frac{1}{2} \times 4\frac{3}{4}$

Sketches, 1987
Group of four
Graphite on paper, Each $4\frac{3}{8} \times 5\frac{7}{8}$

Sketches, 1987
Group of three
Pencil on paper, Each $4\frac{3}{8} \times 5\frac{7}{8}$

Sketch, 1987
Graphite and pencil on paper
 $4\frac{3}{8} \times 5\frac{7}{8}$

Sketch, 1987
Graphite on paper, $4 \times 5\frac{3}{4}$

Untitled, 1986
Group of four
Graphite on paper, $12 \times 16\frac{1}{2}$

Untitled, 1987
Group of two
Graphite on paper, $14 \times 16\frac{3}{4}$

Heidi Langauer

Beggars, 1987
Group of nine
Acrylic on paper, Each 17×14

Watch Your Step, 1987
Acrylic on canvas, 63×82

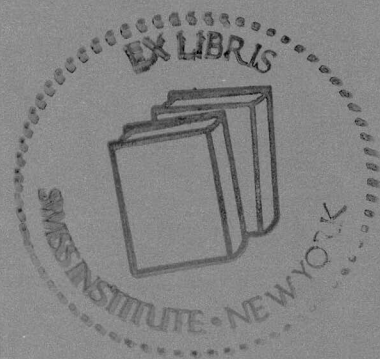
*White Hand Holding
Black Masks*, 1987
Acrylic on canvas, 63×56

The Face, 1987
Acrylic on canvas, 93×56

The Crowded Island, 1987
Acrylic and oil on canvas
 68×89

Swiss Institute
35 West 67th Street
New York, New York 10023
Phone (212) 496-1759

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