

*Shell*

Heidi Bucher, Olivia Erlanger & Nicola L.

February 16 - April 16, 2022

Del Vaz Projects

Del Vaz Projects is pleased to present *Shell*, an exhibition of works by Heidi Bucher (1926–1993), Olivia Erlanger (b. 1990), and Nicola L. (1932–2018), three artists who create home-garment-body metaphors, and often use a literal or allegorical shell to illustrate this constellation. *Shell* opens on Wednesday, February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022, from 12 to 6PM, and a screening of the artists' videos as well as a publication launch takes place on Saturday, April 16<sup>th</sup>, the closing day of the exhibition.

Despite their opposing qualities—hard versus soft, impenetrable versus porous, stiff versus malleable—Heidi Bucher, Olivia Erlanger, and Nicola L. reveal an interplay of shell and skin. The artworks in the exhibition permit us to enter the flesh of an area, feeling a room as a husk that can encase us, and its walls as membrane we can penetrate. Each work here offers potential ignition for daydream and transformation, reflecting how, to quote Gaston Bachelard, “to change space is to change being.” Through their shared interest in how space is defined in the physical realm, and, more important, in the imagination, each artist builds under the guise of poet-architects.

Throughout her life, Heidi Bucher repeated the words “Rooms are shells, they are skins. Peel off one skin after the other, discard it...,” suggesting an eternal metamorphosis of both the figure and the arena it inhabits. As early as 1974, and already back in Switzerland, she reworked her wearable sculptures *Bodyshells* (1972), manipulating them into a series of delicate and uninhabited forms. Emptied of its wearer, Bucher dressed the foam cases in garments and swaths of fabric. The *Bodyshell* on view here (*Untitled*, 1978-1981), presented for the first time since its initial presentation at LACMA in 1972, dons a women’s blouse with the sleeves outstretched, evoking the vestiges of a sheath from which a dragonfly emerges. The new image became a leitmotif for her, as she later fashioned *herself* as the insect using costumes and skinning-performances.

Architecture and memory meld in Bucher’s *16 Der Parkettboden des Herrenzimmer in Wülflingen, Winterthur* (1979). In her methodical “skinnings,” she would apply gauze and latex onto the walls, floors, and furniture in historically charged locations and pull off the layers when they were nearly dry. In 1978, she revisited her childhood home to complete what is arguably the most visceral and personal of her scaffolded skinnings: that of her father’s office. In Swiss upper-middle class society, the *Herrenzimmer*, or the Gentlemen’s Study, was a den reserved only for the men of the family, and where Bucher’s father displayed his collection of hunting weapons. The artist, it seems, was determined to confront the social divisions of nineteenth-century bourgeois engineering, beginning with a softening of this male-dominated, patriarchal territory. A year later, she returned to the *Herrenzimmer* again, this time dissecting the parquet floor into 46 identical tile-skins, number 16 of which is on view here.

In Olivia Erlanger’s newest work, *Act I* (2022), she erects a dollhouse, cut open at a cross section, split and encased within a large eyelid and plexiglass lens. The rooms in *Act I* are unfurnished, letting us in on a moment of reverie and insight by revealing the most elusive parts of the house along a single corridor: a half-opened door, empty corners, and a staircase. The liminal, nondescript chambers

and thresholds in *Act I* are places of passage, meditation, and contemplation, providing an intimate and shadowy shell for the body to rest, intensely and absolutely. In viewing this piece, we enter it, occupy it, perform in it, and perhaps embody it, ultimately tainting it of its emptiness.

Two planet sculptures by Erlanger, *1.3521*, *103.8198* and *39.31037776068422*, *-123.79876400034462* (both 2022) project an exaggerated suburban topography. Each planet is cast in silicone, coating the patriarchal specters of the suburban neighborhood, which symbolizes a sort of prison for the female gender, in a sensual, erotic, and flesh-like matter. In this respect, the spheres touch upon the similarities between the architectures of the physique, dwelling, and suburb, mimicking their communal anatomy of pathways, circuits, and systems. At the same time, Erlanger's planets capture the unwelcoming inhumanity of modern houses and suburbs. Like models of the solar system, they allow us to grasp the vast and complex societal and cultural structures of our world, and how we have come to inhabit them like a shell, and to wear them, like skin.

From 1966 to 1969, Nicola L. traveled between New York, Paris, Ibiza, and Antwerp, producing canvases with appendages sewn onto their surfaces, each one painted a specific color and labeled as a different natural element—sky, earth, sun, sea, etc. They became known as *Pénétrables*, a term coined by art critic Pierre Restany in his 1968 description of entering one as “a journey that’s an organic ritual of penetration and osmosis.” Nicola went on to produce dozens of *Pénétrables*, using canvas, cotton, or vinyl and playing with size and scale, at times providing a shell for the entire body or just for the head. Featured in this exhibition is a full-body *Pénétrable* titled *Cloud* (1974–78), as well as an untitled green canvas mask, or head *Pénétrable*, from the late nineties. With these wearable paintings, Nicola hands her viewers a second skin, a mechanism to bridge the material and metaphysical; to merge with a *Cloud* is to domesticate limitless space and inhabit endless time.

When contextualized within a contemporary lens, Nicola's *Pénétrables* not only address the discourse around racial inequality and discrimination of the period in which she made them—and which persist today—but also seemed to have set the stage for a nonbinary or genderqueer future. Apart from her gendered functional works, which allude to the subjectification of the female form, Nicola's *Pénétrables* prompt us to shed our individual identities in exchange for a share of a collective skin.

*Shell* is an invitation into these living and breathing constructions, offering a new perspective on the corporeal relationship to space. Whether home, costume, or body, for these three artists, the shell represents a dialectic between memory and fantasy from which a boundless number of possibilities arise. The oscillation between these opposites, however, is frictionless, varying constantly in degrees along an infinite axis: open, half-open, barely open, and closed; porous, semi-porous and impassable; singular, collective and whole.



*Shell* (Heidi Bucher, Olivia Erlanger & Nicola L.) at Del Vaz Projects. Installation View.



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Nicola L., *Untitled*, c. late 1990s  
Oil on canvas  
18 x 21 1/2 in. (45.7 x 54.6 cm)





Nicola L., *Untitled*, c. late 1990s  
Oil on canvas  
18 x 21 1/2 in. (45.7 x 54.6 cm)



Heidi Bucher, *Untitled*, 1978-1981  
Textile, glue, mother-of-pearl and other pigments on foam  
40 1/8 x 40 1/8 in. (102.0 x 102.0 cm)



Heidi Bucher, *Untitled*, 1978-1981 (alternate view)



Heidi Bucher, *Untitled*, 1978-1987 (detail)





Olivia Erlanger, *1.3521, 103.8198*, 2022  
Silicone, aluminum, LED lights, transformer, cables  
26 x 14 x 24 in. (66.04 x 35.56 x 60.96 cm)



Olivia Erlanger, *39.31037776068422, -123.79876400034462*, 2022

Silicone, aluminum, LED lights, transformer, cables

16 x 14 x 28 in. (40.64 x 45.72 x 71.12 cm)



Nicola L., *Cloud*, 1974-78  
Ink, cotton, wood  
63 x 35 in. (160 x 88.9 cm)





Nicola L., *Cloud*, 1974-78 (detail)



Olivia Erlanger, *Act I*, 2022

Basswood, MDF, foam, paint, sconces, LED lights, and battery  
44 x 46 x 18 in. (111.76 x 116.84 x 45.72)



Olivia Erlanger, *Act I*, 2022 (alternate view)



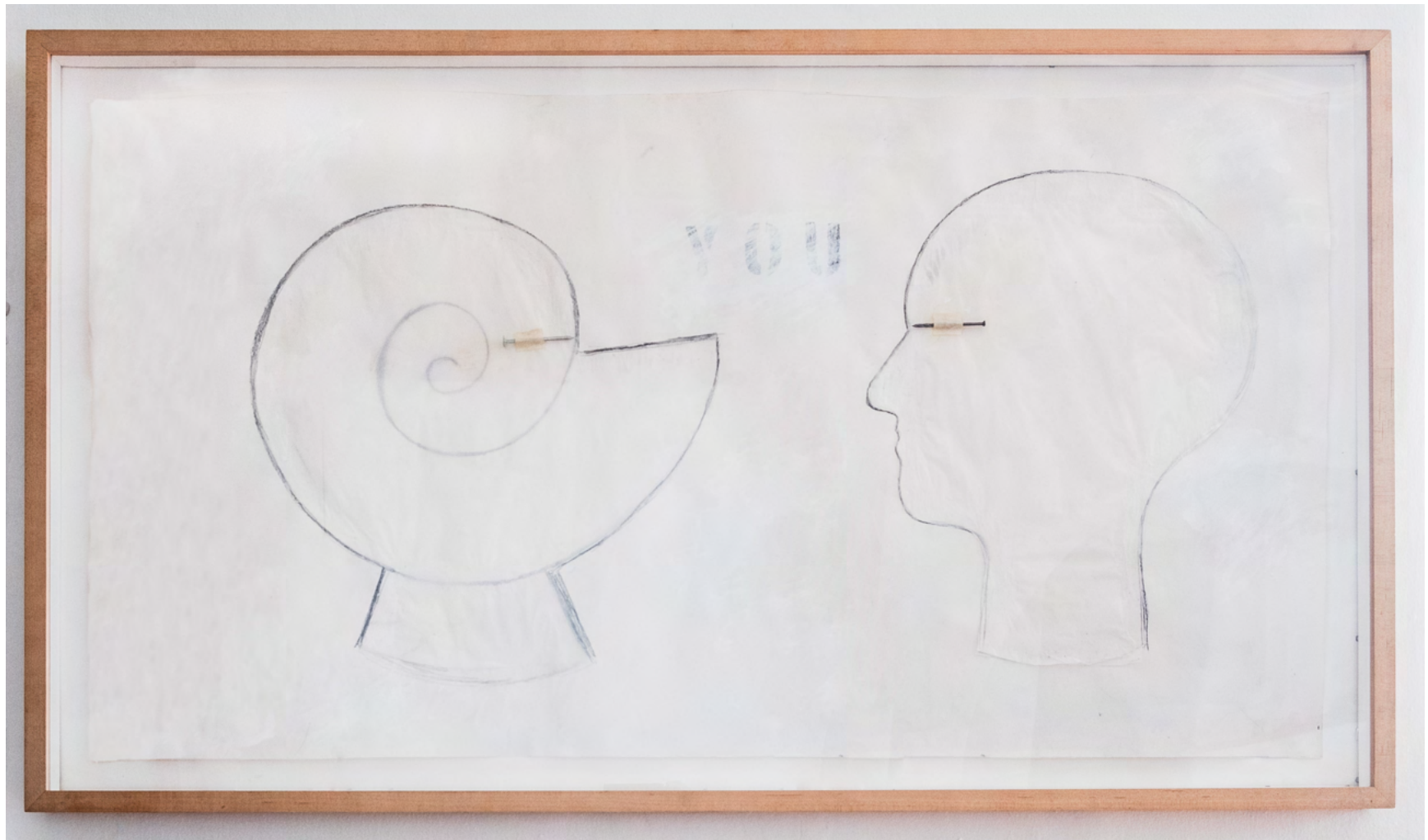
Olivia Erlanger, *Act I*, 2022 (detail)



Heidi Bucher, *16 Der Parkettboden des Herrenzimmer in Wülflingen, Winterthur, 1979*  
Latex, textile and mother of pearl  
22 1/8 x 29 1/2 in. (56 x 75 cm) (framed)



Heidi Bucher, 16 *Der Parkettboden des Herrenzimmer in Wülflingen, Winterthur, 1979*  
(detail)



Nicola L., *You*, 1995  
Collage, paint, graphite, nails on tracing paper  
27 1/2 x 45 ins. framed (69.8 x 114.3 cm)

**Heidi Bucher** (b. 1926, Winterthur, Switzerland; d. 1993, Brunnen, Switzerland) is best remembered for her innovative use of latex and exploration of the physical boundaries between the body and its surroundings. Solo presentations of her work have been organized at Haus der Kunst, Munich (2021); The Approach, London (2019); Lehmann Maupin, New York (2019); Parasol Unit, London (2018); the Swiss Institute of Contemporary Art, New York (2014); Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris (2013); Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zürich (2004); Kunstmuseum Thurgau, Warth-Weiningen, Switzerland (1993); the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) (1972); Musée d'Art Contemporain, Montréal (1971), and the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, New York (1971), among others. Recent group shows include "Reconstruction," Karma International, Zürich (2021); "Earth: Keith Arnatt, Heidi Bucher, James Capper," Alma Zevi Venice (2021); "Unconscious Landscape. Works from the Ursula Hauser Collection," Hauser & Wirth, Somerset, United Kingdom (2019); "GIGANTISME — ART & INDUSTRIE," Fonds régional d'art contemporain du Nord-Pas de Calais, Dunkirk, France (2019); "Entropy, I write your name," Le Magasin, Grenoble, France (2019); "The Psyche as Political Arena," Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, Germany (2019); "In the Shadow of Forward Motion," Zabłudowicz Collection, London (2019); "An Intricate Weave," Nottingham Contemporary, Nottingham, United Kingdom (2018); "The Everywhere Studio," The Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami (2017); "Women House," Monnaie de Paris and the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C. (2017); "Viva Arte Viva," 57th Venice Biennale (2017); "No Place Like Home," the Israel Museum, Jerusalem (2017); "Room," Warwick Arts Centre, Warwick, United Kingdom (2017); and "Artists and Architecture, Variable Dimensions," Pavillon de l'Arsenal, Paris (2015). Bucher's work is featured in numerous international public and private collections, including the Centre Pompidou, Paris.; the Israel Museum, Jerusalem; KADIST art foundation, Paris and San Francisco; Kunstmuseum Winterthur, Winterthur, Switzerland; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zürich; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Musée Jenisch Vevey, Switzerland; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; and the Zabłudowicz Collection, London.

**Olivia Erlanger** (b. 1990, New York) lives and works in Los Angeles. Her first institutional solo exhibition will be held at Kunstverein Gartenhaus, Vienna, later this year. The artist will be also included in an upcoming show at Museum X, Beijing. Recent solo shows include "Home is a Body," Soft Opening, London (2020); "Split-level Paradise," Bel Ami, Los Angeles (2020); and "Ida," Motherculture, Los Angeles (2018). Recent group shows include "Liquid Life," Kistefos Museum, Jevnaker, Norway (2021); "Psychosomatic," Various Small Fires, Los Angeles (2021); "In Situ," Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York (2021); "Winterfest," Aspen Art Museum (2020); "Haunted Haus," Swiss Institute, New York (2020); "DIS Presents: What do people do all day?," Kunsthalle Charlottenborg, Copenhagen (2020); "No Space, Just a Place," Daelim Museum, Seoul (2020) and "For a dreamer of houses," Dallas Museum of Art. Olivia Erlanger and Luis Ortega Goveia co-wrote *Garage* (MIT Press, 2018), a secret history of the attached garage as a space of creativity, from its invention by Frank Lloyd Wright to its use by start-ups and garage bands. Her next book, *Appliance*, is scheduled for release in 2023.

**Nicola L.** (b. 1932, Mazagan, Morocco; d. 2018, Los Angeles) developed a multidisciplinary practice that playfully merged the principles of art and design. Her work will be shown in an upcoming solo presentation at Alison Jacques Gallery, London (2022); and her recent solo shows include SculptureCenter, New York; Elga Wimmer PCC, New York; and the Liverpool Biennial. Selected group exhibitions have been at the Hammer Museum and the Huntington Library, Art Museum and Botanical Gardens, Los Angeles; Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain (MAMAC), Nice, France; Friedman Benda, New York; Elga Wimmer PCC, New York; Arsenal Contemporary, New York; Palazzo Pisani, Piano Nobile, Venice Biennial; Hauser & Wirth, New York; Tate Modern, London; Beaux-arts Buxerolles, France; and SECCA. Winston-Salem, North Carolina.



Del Vaz Projects  
259 19th Street  
Santa Monica, CA 90402  
310.999.3060  
[info@delvazprojects.com](mailto:info@delvazprojects.com)