

LIESL RAFF: COATS



2 September – 29 October 2022

[Coat 1-4, 2022]

[Arm 1-5, 2022]

[Liaisons, 2020]

Fluid rubber is poured out onto the floor in metre-long sheets, forming a barrier within the studio. The material spreads out and presses itself against the rubber underlay and into its microscopic scratches, encompasses and binds dust particles and hairs as well as ropes that will later serve its hanging. The drying sheets mark out a route through the studio, storage spaces and tools can no longer be reached, other work processes must wait while the material hardens and establishes contact.

Liesl Raff processes and transforms materials, in order to delineate contact zones. Latex has been a constitutive part of her works for some years now; thereby becoming a mediator. As a liquid, though also when solidified, latex is especially adept at making contact; it becomes a second skin that morphs according to everything on which it is placed. In her new series of works [Coat 1-4, 2022], this second skin becomes a body in itself. Bulges and folds interplay with the carrier's structure, the poles and ropes, to give this body mass and volume. The latex cases become actors that relate to everything around them, shielding themselves, or incorporating and embracing their surroundings. They are inscribed with the logic of banners as they are employed at rallies and demonstrations. Both protective shield and communicative surface, behind them one can gather or hide, occupy space and communicate outward. Latex also invites physical contact, and it delineates relationships, connections, conditions. It is adaptable. [Liaisons, 2020] is a direct encounter between latex and rope, which together form tentacular whips or lassos. They wrap around a vertical structure and branch anti-phallically in every direction. They were once described as "shape-shifters," and "feminist tricksters" who are as "they please, when they please, despite our expectations of what they should be."

Liesl Raff forms, works and lives with her materials, until their contradictory qualities become apparent and amorphous seduction and crystalline resistance turn into their respective opposites. Time and again, new materials – like leather, most recently – take up a role in her practice. While latex has a supple flexibility and immediately adapts to new bodies, leather is slower to make contact. Its working requires strength, it does not form the contours itself. The body must remain in constant contact with the material in order to shape it; leather adapts slowly and then retains its shape.

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Steel pipes covered with ink-dyed leather [Arm 1-5, 2022] jut out of the wall. They are handles to cling to. Supports that can also thrust. Protective skins that soften the blow and reinforce the strike. They invite and dominate. With this, [Arm 1-5, 2022] does not stand in opposition to [Coat 1-4, 2022], nor does the vegetal to the animal. Both the formal and material opposites reinforce each other in their ambivalence and describe variations in forms of contact, which not only reveal much about the material's character but also give form to the unconscious relationships that we have with materials.

Leon Hösl, English Translation: Miriam Stoney, Wien, August 2022

Image: Liesl Raff, *Liaisons*, 2021, latex, rope, metal, dimensions variable, detail