

Klodin Erb

A different kind of furs

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Istituto Svizzero

Category

Art, Exhibition

istitutsvizzero.it

Istituto Svizzero presents the first retrospective in Italy on renowned painter Klodin Erb. Encompassing almost 90 works, some of which specifically produced for the exhibition, *A different kind of furs* celebrates one of the most influential current Swiss artists. Presenting large-scale paintings, collages, sculptures, textiles, and video works dated between 1999 and 2023, the exhibition traces Klodin Erbs' artistic practice through a non-chronological perspective but rather exploring visual connections between all works. Since the late '90s, Klodin Erb's practice revolves around the medium of painting in a free and experimental form, combining current and timeless topics to generate playful and fantastic worlds, often questioning definitions of gender and identity. Her practice also emerges outside the canvases and explores the boundaries of painting through different formats and materials. For this show, the artist particularly reflects on the concept of fur and its associations. In a lively and ironic way, she uses artificial furs sewn onto canvases, painted furs, and wigs to offer a reflection on (stereotyped) forms of gender identities but also as symbols that break these very norms. Influenced by popular and web culture as well as art history, Klodin Erb's *A different kind of furs* provides an unprecedented and in-depth overview on the artist's vivid universe.

Klodin Erb (b. 1963, Winterthur, CH) is a Swiss painter. She lives and works in Zurich and is a lecturer at the Department of Design & Art at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts. Her works are represented in the collections of various museums, including the Kunstmuseum Bern; Kunstmuseum Winterthur; Museum zu Allerheiligen Schaffhausen; Kunsthaus Pasquart, Biel/Bienne, as well as many private collections. Recently she had important solo exhibitions at the Kunsthaus Pasquart, Biel/Bienne; Gluri Suter Huus, Wettingen; Helvetia Art Foyer, Basel; and was included in group exhibitions, amongst others *Die Augen der Bilder – Porträts von Fragonard bis Dumas*, Museum Langmatt, Baden; *Docking Station*, Aargauer Kunsthaus, Aarau; *Un(certain) ground. Aktuelle Malerei in der Schweiz*, Kunsthaus Pasquart, Biel/Bienne; *After Bob Ross: Beauty is everywhere*, Museum im Bellpark, Kriens.

Art Education

In the context of Klodin Erb's exhibition *A different kind of furs*, Istituto Svizzero offers free guided tours and creative workshops for children ages 6 to 12 and their families. The first phase consists of an animated visit (40 min), a participatory journey in which children will be encouraged to interpret the works through short exercises. The children will continue in the practical phase of the workshop (40 min), in which the ideas and techniques used by Klodin Erb will be explored through moments of active exercise. The children will create graphic-pictorial works that will be the result of a new personal vision and a reading of their experience.

Workshops' calendar

Saturday, April 15 H11:00-12:30
Saturday, May 20 H11:00-12:30
Saturday, June 10 H11:00-12:30

For bookings, please email:
education@istitutosvizzero.it.

Reservations are required by the morning of the day before the meeting.

The workshops are organized in collaboration with the contemporary art research center IUNO and coordinated by educator and art critic Francesca Campi.

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Text by Gioia Dal Molin

(Head Curator Istituto Svizzero)

With the sunlight warming the back of the neck, we first catch sight of Klodin Erb's large, actually huge, painting, *Losing Head and Heart* (2020). A glowing planet floats above a fantastic landscape of waves and flowers. There is a kind of opening into the planet's interior, and I think of magma and fire. 'Losing Head and Heart' indeed, or perhaps 'Head over Heels'.

With the exhibition *A different kind of furs* at Istituto Svizzero in Rome, the artist Klodin Erb entices us to immerse ourselves in her wondrous world. The four large paintings in the first exhibition room—besides *Losing Head and Heart* they include *Close to Me*, *Am Busen der Zeit* (At the Bosom of Time), and *Erden Eier kommen selten alleine* (Earth Eggs Seldom Come Alone)—were all created in the last three years. The titles of the works spark daring associations.

I think of closeness and tenderness and nature and sex. I see beetles with blue wings dancing, wrapped around each other, fantastical plants growing rampant, pink-coloured winds, red eggs, and blue-violet colour gradients. Klodin's painted figures, colours, and skies merge with the ceiling painting in the hall—the beetles greet the putti. As a child, Klodin tells me, she was fascinated by the baroque ceiling paintings in the churches she visited. I think of a line from Deborah Levy's wonderful novel *Landscape Swallowed*, in which the protagonist asks in many voices how she can think, write, and speak as a woman: «What use is the heart turned inwards? [...] It must gallop outwards into the wilderness and perhaps even die there»¹. Exactly: 'Losing Head and Heart'.

This exhibition offers a comprehensive insight into the artistic oeuvre of Klodin Erb. The earliest pieces on view date from 1999 and the most recent ones were completed by the artist as recently as February this year. There is no chronological narrative or 'development'; instead, multiple cross-connections emerge between all of her works as motifs keep reappearing, fluidly mutating, galloping. Since the early 2000s (actually since the early 1990s—but more on that later), Klodin Erb has been painting, or rather, exploring painting as a medium. In fact, she paints all the time, just not always with brushes on canvases. Maybe that's what drives her: painting further, thinking further, painting with passion beyond the edges,

being curious, remaining open and enthusiastic. Her visual landscapes are informed by her interest in the motifs, genres, and themes of art history and her exploration of landscape painting, still lifes, and portraiture. The artist paints on large, even huge, but also small canvases, on translucent Japanese paper, on wood. Her pictorial inventions oscillate between figuration and abstraction. She paints directly onto the surface without making preliminary sketches. Though she works with a precise thematic idea, the painting itself emerges intuitively, she explains. «For me, painting is a continuous process of thinking and realisation».

In 1993, Klodin Erb graduates from Zürcher Hochschule der Künste. The Zurich art world is dominated by men and formally reduced conceptual art. That was «somehow unsatisfying» after a while, she tells me in a Zoom interview in January, so she burned all the work «subito after graduation». She goes on to create sets and costumes for her friends' bands and co-develops feminist performances with a collective called *mit*. Her affinity for textiles eventually takes her back to painting. In the late-1990s, she creates works made of coloured fabric under the title *Plant's Life* (all 1999—on view in the adjacent giardino d'inverno, the winter garden). These are followed in the early 2000s by *Second Nature* (2001/02), a series of fabric works which, for her, is a way of painting with textiles. Textiles are also present in the second large exhibition room. And fur. But this is a different kind of fur: coloured fur, faux fur, and fur proliferating between the legs. Klodin developed the series *venusinfurs I–VIII* (2022/23) for the exhibition in Rome. It comprises eight large-format canvases painted with fantastic, wild, colourful motifs. The canvases are not stretched but hang from self-supporting structures, creating a labyrinthine dance in a space that may have once served as a ballroom. The title recalls not only the 1967 song of the same name by The Velvet Underground but also the novella *Venus in Furs* (1870) by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, who throughout his life campaigned for women's rights and the acceptance of relationships outside heteronormative norms. Klodin Erb plays light-heartedly with these associations. I see feet and legs in distorted, unexpected perspectives, emerging from flower calyxes or floating in an orange-violet sky (my head is spinning—what is my position as a viewer?). Fur grows between the legs, or a lemon sits between them, and a wig drapes over the toes. A globe shines

yellow against a pink horizon. Two fingers plunge deep into a pomegranate (I think of the sex scene with the peach in the film *Call Me by Your Name*²). As she explains, Klodin reflects on «human potency and creative power»—also in the painterly sense. How long we will keep our current bodies, senses, sensations (sexual), and desires and how these things will change in the near future is another question that occupies her. The collages from the series *Essen, Sex und Kleider* (Food, Sex and Clothes, since 2021) consist of found image fragments from magazines and are a way for the artist to think visually, especially while she is painting the large canvases.

For the small boudoir-like space, the artist developed a painted screen—*Viaggi stellari e fasi lunari* (Stellar Travel and Moon Phases, 2023). The colour gradients pick up the tones in the room while evoking a sky filled with lush clouds (a traditional motif in painting) as well as a magical, galactic night sky. Round peepholes lend a voyeuristic moment to what should be an object that obscures, and the draped fur jacket seems to have been forgotten by Contessa Carolina Maraini-Sommaruga (the former lady of the house, who bequeathed the villa to the Swiss Confederation in the 1940s). Klodin already created paravents in the 1990s; she described the fabric-covered objects she created back then as ‘walk-in pictures’, which is just as true of the new paravent. In the same room, *Second Nature 8* (2001/02) also bears witness to Klodin Erb’s early experiments with textiles—with floral printed fabric from Switzerland, Italy, Damascus, the USA and elsewhere. In the somewhat hidden glass bar in the same room—which was once a room for the women; I imagine it as a place where they drank, smoked, and discussed—Klodin installed her video work *The Show* (2005). For this video, she edited the images from her painting series *Glanz und Gloria*—photographic models copied from fashion magazines—to the rhythm of Dub music. She thus continues the idea of the paintings in a digital format, the montage implying the act of quickly leafing through a magazine. The portraits of women whiz by ever more rapidly, blending into one another. For Klodin, this work is linked to reflections on ideals of beauty and gender stereotypes, and is closely tied to her current reflections on diversity and the fluidity of gender itself. In the giardino d’inverno, sunlight falls on the painting *Königin der Nacht* (Queen of the Night, 2013) from the series *Serendipity*. Klodin tells me it is ‘a birth’—

its legs sticking out of a red-pink flower chalice. Opposite hang two works from the series *Kräfte und Säfte* (Forces and Juices, 2021). Their intertwined, root-like turnips are reminiscent of people. In the next room, *The Sweet Lemon Ballad* (2016), Klodin’s first animated film tells the story of a wayward lemon that falls out of a painting, constantly reinventing itself, dying about seven times in the process, and landing once in Meret Oppenheim’s (painted) fur cup. For the video work, Klodin animated paintings from her more than 50-part series of the same name. For Klodin, *The Sweet Lemon Ballad* is not only a dive into the motifs of art history but, above all, a reflection on her identity as a painter. And she means it literally: Klodin appears in the video wearing a lemon costume. The series of *Glossy Idols* (2022) are painted wooden panels whose form she modelled on ambiguous-looking prehistoric steles. In her universe, they become goddesses whose shiny surfaces evoke the glossy screens of our smartphones: the *Goddess of Sun, Sex and Stories*, the *Goddess of Water, Tears and Apricots*, and the *Goddess of Rabbits, Stars and Black Holes*. In the next room, 32 portraits from the nearly 200-part portrait series *Orlando* (2013-21) look down on me like an ancestral gallery. The work is inspired by Virginia Woolf’s eponymous novel from 1928: the story of Orlando, a person who lives for almost 500 years, travelling through time and gender identities. Here, too, Klodin’s interest in the fluid processes of transformation, translation, and alienation become evident. She samples or alienates motifs from art history (I see adapted versions of Braques’ Cubism, or a vegetable-and-fruit head by Arcimboldo) and juggles allusions to pop culture (for example, a character from the movie *Avatar*).

The magnificent stairwell at Villa Maraini holds further textile-based works: *Drunken Angel (Air)*, *Drunken Angel (Water)*, *Drunken Angel (Earth)*, and *Drunken Angel (Fire)*—these works are also entirely new, created especially for the exhibition. The angels are embroidered with wool thread on fabric, reminiscent of the putti in the ceiling and wall paintings, while the patterned fabrics echo the colours of the marble columns. For Klodin, the angels are also guardian angels (though they are somewhat wobbly at the moment). Finally, the video *Johnny Woodhead & The Nightmärlies* (2022) is installed on the staircase. Using photographs, real and animated figures, filmed scenes, found film clips, flying emojis, and scraps of her own and other people’s paintings, Klodin Erb lets

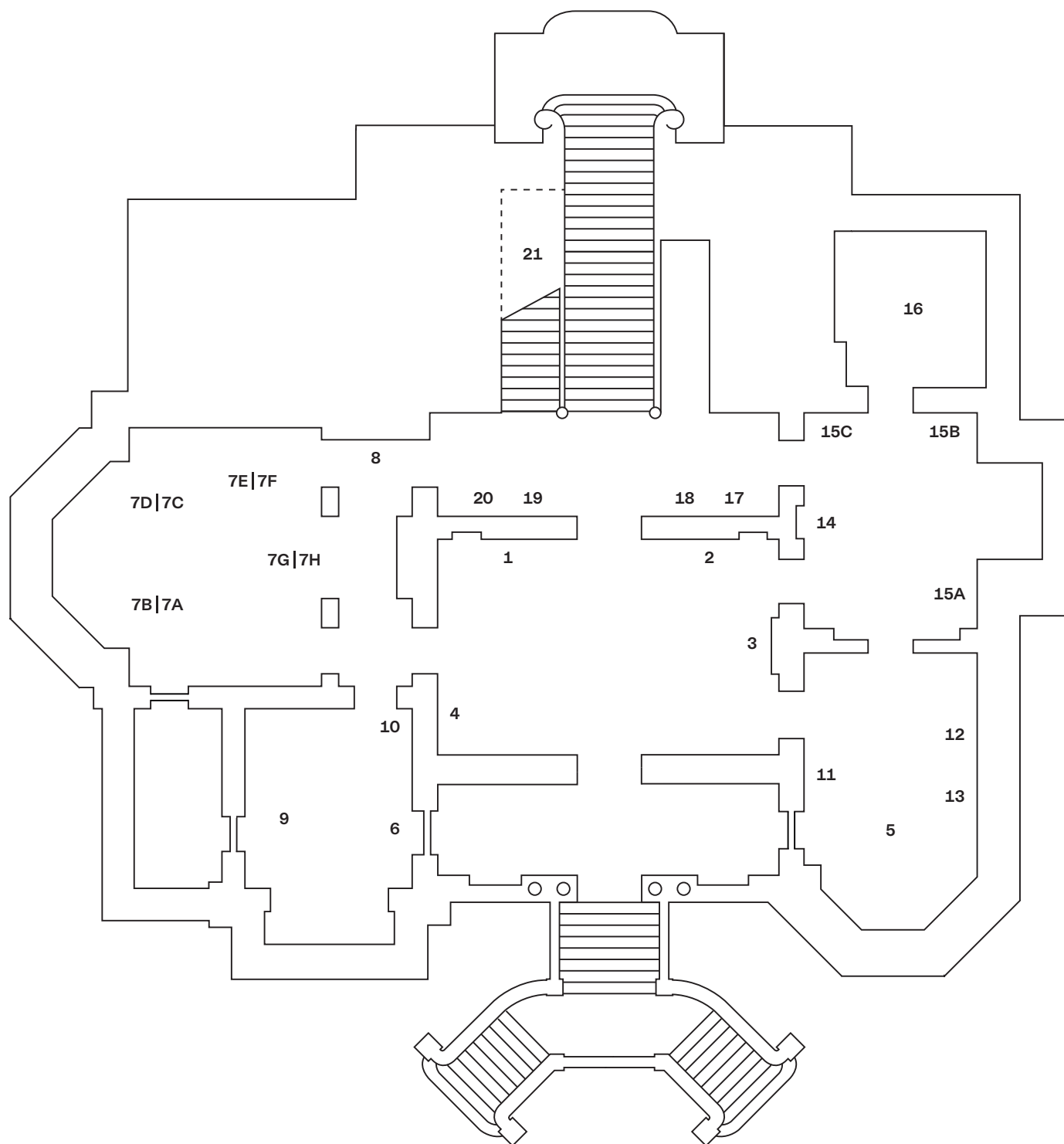
the figure with the wooden Shrovetide mask head take a wild ride along highways, through space, and through her fantasy-filled visual world. All this is accompanied by the song *Mr. Sandman* by the 1950s American female band, The Chordettes—sung by Klodin herself! I look to my left, suspecting that Contessa Maraini, the former landlady, winks at me from above³, and I imagine what it would be like to climb into the fantastic world of Klodin's paintings, to be tickled by the fur, and let my head and heart gallop.

1. Deborah Levy, *Swallowing Geography*, first published in 1993 (New York: Penguin, 2004), Kindle edition.
2. *Call Me by Your Name*, directed by Luca Guadagnino, 2017.
3. Vittorio Matteo Corcos, *Ritratto della Contessa Carolina Sommaruga Maraini* (Portrait of the Countess Carolina Sommaruga Maraini), oil on canvas, 1901.

Acknowledgements:
Lullin + Ferrari, Zurich
Art Collection of the Canton of Zurich
Susanne Annette Flühler-Pégard
and other private lenders

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1
Losing Head and Heart, 2020
Ink, pigments, oil, acrylic,
acrylic spray paint and acrylic
paste on canvas
195 x 240 cm
Courtesy of Susanne Annette
Flühler-Pégard

2
Close to Me, 2020/2021
Ink, oil, acrylic and acrylic spray
paint on canvas
195 x 240 cm
Private collection

3
Am Busen der Zeit
(*At the bosom of time*), 2020
Acrylic, oil, ink, acrylic spray paint
on canvas
195 x 240 cm
Courtesy of Klodin Erb and
Lullin + Ferrari, Zurich

4
Erden Eier kommen selten alleine
(*Earth eggs seldom come alone*),
2020
Acrylic, oil, ink and acrylic spray
paint on canvas
200 x 157 cm
Courtesy of Klodin Erb and
Lullin + Ferrari, Zurich

5
Plant's Life series, 1999
Mixed media
Various dimensions
Courtesy of Klodin Erb and
Lullin + Ferrari, Zurich

6
Second Nature 8, 2001/2002
Sewed fabrics
80 x 60 x 7 cm
Courtesy of Klodin Erb and
Lullin + Ferrari, Zurich

7
venusinfurs I-VIII series,
2022/2023

7A
Quallenblüten und Strümpfe
(*Jellyfish flowers and stockings*)
Oil, acrylic and acrylic spray
paint on canvas, fabric frame
ca. 365 x 240 cm

7B
Der Aufstand der Sabinerinnen
(*The Revolt of the Sabine Women*)
Oil, acrylic and acrylic spray
paint on canvas, fabric frame
ca. 365 x 240 cm

7C
Saftpressen (Juicers)
Oil, acrylic and acrylic spray
paint on canvas, fabric frame
ca. 365 x 240 cm

7D
Rosa Nebel (Pink Mist)
Oil, acrylic and acrylic spray
paint on canvas, fabric frame
ca. 365 x 240 cm

7E
Himmelfahrt Jasons
(*Ascension of Jason*)
Oil, acrylic and acrylic spray
paint on canvas, fabric frame
ca. 365 x 240 cm

7F
Die Quelle der Erschöpfung
(*The source of exhaustion*)
Oil, acrylic and acrylic spray
paint on canvas, fabric frame
ca. 365 x 240 cm

7G
Schleier, Kette
und Fuchsschwänzchen
(*Veil, chain and foxtail*)
Oil, acrylic and acrylic spray
paint on canvas, fabric frame
ca. 365 x 240 cm

7H
Planetarium
Oil, acrylic and acrylic spray
paint on canvas, fabric frame
ca. 365 x 240 cm
Courtesy of Klodin Erb and
Lullin + Ferrari, Zurich

8
Essen, Sex und Kleider
(*Food, sex and clothes*) series,
2021 – ongoing
Collage, framed
41.1 x 33.1 cm (framed)
Courtesy of Klodin Erb and
Lullin + Ferrari, Zurich

9
Viaggi stellari e Fasi lunari
(*Stellar Travels and Lunar Phases*),
2023
Enamel and synthetic resin spray
on wood, metal, fur jacket
181.5 x 284 x 9 cm
Courtesy of Klodin Erb and
Lullin + Ferrari, Zurich

10
The Show, 2005
Video with sound, 4'35"
Courtesy of Klodin Erb and
Lullin + Ferrari, Zurich

11
*Königin der Nacht/
Queen of the Night*
(*Serendipity series*), 2013
Oil on canvas
136 x 110 cm
Courtesy of Klodin Erb and
Lullin + Ferrari, Zurich

12
Kräfte und Säfte #13
(*Powers and juices*), 2021
Dispersion, oil, spray paint,
pigments (afterglow paint) on
Japan paper on stretcher frame
58 x 47 cm
Courtesy of Klodin Erb and
Lullin + Ferrari, Zurich

13
Kräfte und Säfte #12
(*Powers and juices*), 2021
Dispersion, oil, spray paint on
Japan paper on stretcher frame
56 x 50 cm
Courtesy of Klodin Erb and
Lullin + Ferrari, Zurich

14
The Sweet Lemon Ballad, 2016
Video with sound, 13'13"
Courtesy of Klodin Erb and
Lullin + Ferrari, Zurich

15
Glossy idols series, 2022

15A
Goddess of Sun, Sex and Stories
(*from the series Glossy Idols*),
Spray paint and enamel on wood
(polygon)
191 x 89 cm
Courtesy of Klodin Erb and
Lullin + Ferrari, Zurich

15B
Goddess of Water, Tears
and Apricots (from the series
Glossy Idols),
Spray paint and enamel on wood
(polygon)
207 x 96 cm
Courtesy of Klodin Erb and
Lullin + Ferrari, Zurich

15C
Goddess of Rabbits, Stars
and Black Holes (from the series
Glossy Idols),
Spray paint and enamel on wood
(polygon)
179 x 111 cm
Courtesy of Klodin Erb and
Lullin + Ferrari, Zurich

16
Orlando series, 2013-2021
Oil, acrylic, fluorescent color
on canvas
40 x 30 cm
Courtesy of Klodin Erb and
Lullin + Ferrari, Zurich;
Art Collection of the Canton
of Zurich; private collections

17
Drunken Angel (Air), 2023
Sewed fabrics,
embroidered with wool
220 x 117 cm
Courtesy of Klodin Erb and
Lullin + Ferrari, Zurich

18
Drunken Angel (Water), 2023
Sewed fabrics,
embroidered with wool
220 x 104 cm
Courtesy of Klodin Erb and
Lullin + Ferrari, Zurich

19
Drunken Angel (Earth), 2023
Sewed fabrics,
embroidered with wool
220 x 104 cm
Courtesy of Klodin Erb
and Lullin + Ferrari, Zurich

20
Drunken Angel (Fire), 2023
Sewed fabrics,
embroidered with wool
220 x 117 cm
Courtesy of Klodin Erb
and Lullin + Ferrari, Zurich

21
Johnny Woodhead
& The Nightmärliens, 2022
Video with sound, 7'48"
Performance & voice: Klodin Erb
Sound design:
Roland Widmer (zentralton)
Edit & animation:
Susanne Hofer (flimmern)
© Klodin Erb
Courtesy of Klodin Erb and
Lullin + Ferrari, Zurich