

December 15, 2023–April 7, 2024

# Lena Henke: You and your vim

**Aspen Art Museum**

A new exhibition by New York–based artist Lena Henke (b. 1982) crowns the rooftop of the Aspen Art Museum. The central sculpture, a towering bronze outline of a woman, can be pushed and set in motion, circling like the searching needle of a compass. Its vibrant red hue stands in luminous contrast to the alpine backdrop.

Henke has long studied the relationship between figure and environment, initiating sculptural and psychological explorations of bodies as they relate to the built world. Previous works feature fantastical maps of cities, casts of body parts, and refuse from urban environments. Nature, too, finds its place in Henke's practice, which often alludes to landscape or equestrian iconography.

At the Aspen Art Museum, Henke's heroine confronts the American West, set before Aspen Mountain. The jocular female protagonist of *You and your vim* is a playful subversion of a drawing by French illustrator and author Tomi Ungerer. The figure is at once an obscure art historical reference, and also an avatar for Henke herself. "I like to activate sculptures," says Henke. "I'm interested in movement and weight and the connection to ground. That brings me from the white cube [of the gallery] to the outdoors and public spaces." Here, visitors are encouraged to rotate the sculpture, its stilettoed foot hovering just above the ground.

Four new *Combustions* (2023), works in oil on laser etched leather, hang from adjacent walls and windows of the rooftop architecture. They surround the sculpture like cardinal points, bridging the interior and exterior of the museum's rooftop. Each work portrays an image of feet wrapped in latex, bursting out of the picture plane as well as the material which struggles to contain them. These photographic images, burned into leather, are embellished with expressive mark-making in oil. Their titles nod to Alberto Burri's iconic *Combustione*, a body of work which similarly utilized heat. Within these explorations of place and personhood lies a negotiation of desire, dominance, and submission. Where does one fit? Who is in control?

The artist frames of the *Combustions* evoke trail map stands, aids in navigating nature. At the edge of the rooftop, an expansive mirror reflects the legs of visitors as they move around the terrace, retaining their gaze within its perimeter, disrupting the commanding view of the mountain slopes just behind. The exhibition's title implies an address to an unknown recipient. What is my vim? How is my enthusiasm understood? Within this gyre of provocation, Henke tempts us with momentum.

**Lena Henke** (b. 1982 in Warburg, Germany) lives and works in New York and Berlin. Solo exhibitions of her work have been mounted at Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen (accompanied by a comprehensive publication), Kunsthalle Zurich, Schirn Kunsthalle, Kunstverein Braunschweig, and White Flag projects. Most recently, as recipient of the Marta Award by the Wemhöner Foundation, Henke is the subject of a solo exhibition at the Marta Museum

Herford, accompanied by a new publication. Her work has also been shown in numerous institutions including the Whitney Museum of American Art, Kunstmuseum Luzern, Kunsthalle Bern, Hessel Museum of Art, the Sprengel Museum in Hannover, and MoCA Detroit. Her work has been featured in major international exhibitions including the Timisoara Contemporary Art Biennale, Romania, (2017); *Manifesta 11*, Zurich, Switzerland (2016); *The 9<sup>th</sup>; Berlin Biennale*,

Germany (2016); *Le Biennale de MONTREAL*, Montreal, Canada, (2016); at the *Triennale of Small Scale Sculpture* in Fellbach, Germany (2016); and *The New Museums Triennial*, New Museum, New York (2015). Henke's work is in the collections of ICA Miami, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Hessel Museum of Art, MKG Siegen, MAMCO Geneva, Kunsthalle Bern, and Kunsthalle Bielefeld among others.

## List of works

Clockwise from stairwell

### *THEMOVE (Aspen), 2023*

Patinated bronze

106 × 66 × 1 in

Unique

### *Combustions 12 (Aspen), 2023*

Oil on laser etched leather in artist frame

59 × 49 1/4 in

Unique

### *Combustions 13 (Aspen), 2023*

Oil on laser etched leather in artist frame

59 × 49 1/4 in

Unique

### *Combustions 14 (Aspen), 2023*

Oil on laser etched leather in artist frame

59 × 49 1/4 in

Unique

### *Combustions 15 (Aspen), 2023*

Oil on laser etched leather in artist frame

59 × 49 1/4 in

Unique

### *Untitled (Mirror Trail after Robert Smithson), 2023*

Mirror foil

Dimensions variable; site-specific to rooftop architecture

All works courtesy the artist and Bortolami, NY

## ABOUT THE ASPEN ART MUSEUM

Accredited by the American Alliance of Museums in 1979, the Aspen Art Museum is a thriving and globally engaged non-collecting contemporary art museum. Following the 2014 opening of the museum's facility designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Shigeru Ban, the AAM enjoys increased attendance, renewed civic interaction, and international media attention. In July 2017, the AAM was one of ten institutions to receive the United States' National Medal for Museum and Library Services for its educational outreach to rural communities in Colorado's Roaring Fork Valley and its fostering of learning partnerships with civic and cultural partners within a 100-mile radius of the museum's Aspen location.

Aspen Art Museum  
637 East Hyman Avenue  
Aspen, Colorado 81611

[aspenartmuseum.org](http://aspenartmuseum.org)  
(970) 925-8050

Hours  
Tuesday–Sunday, 10 AM–6 PM  
Closed Mondays

Admission to the AAM is free courtesy of Amy and John Phelan.

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Lena Henke: *You and your vim* is organized by Simone Krug, Curator, and Daniel Merritt, Director of Curatorial Affairs.

From the Museum, Henke would like to thank Daniel Merritt, Simone Krug, Nicola Lees, Eric Angus, Christine Egaña Navin, Vince Hart, Mike Montesillo, Courtney Kenny, Roper Moreno, Joey Domalik, and Erin Morrison. She would also like to thank Stefania Bortolami, Evan Reiser, Emil Sandström, and Claire Bergeal.

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