

SOFÍA DURRIEU  
«NN -|- ME»

February 8 - April 6, 2025

Curated by Irene Grillo (Curator GSfK)

The GEBERT FOUNDATION FOR CULTURE\* is pleased to present the first institutional solo exhibition of Sofía Durrieu in Switzerland (b. 1980, Buenos Aires; lives in Basel, Switzerland and Buenos Aires, Argentina). The thematic focus of her work is the human body as a place of the intuitive, emotional and spiritual and as a bridge to it. Her artworks tell of unknown aspects of our lives and open new ways for experiencing them. In the exhibition with the enigmatic title «NN-|-ME», the artist approaches the dark sides of our personality with new works and invites visitors to follow her in this anything but indelicate process.

In the first part of the exhibition, we encounter objects and interactive sculptures influenced by the aesthetics of war. Both the cold, metallic materiality and the explicit symbolism of the objects create a tense, rigid and altogether gloomy atmosphere. *Hedgehogs*, *VTAC Barricade* and *JRSY Barricade* (all 2025) are reminiscent of tank barriers, protective structures and portable firing systems. Their construction method, including the numbering of the components, refer to the language of prefabricated construction models. The deliberately visible scratches on the surfaces are traces and evidence of the production process and are reminiscent of the hardness, rawness and resistance of the material and the work required to shape it. By conveying various forms of defensive postures and formally referring to shielding strategies, the works testify to an aggressive, antagonistic, almost warlike dynamic. This finds a cruel and tangible counterpart in current world events, but is deliberately redirected by Durrieu to be linked with our relationship to the unconscious.

In terms of content, these first works - some of which can be activated by the viewer following instructions directly engraved into the piece - leave little room for interpretation, while offering material for reflection. They embody a form of rational thinking characterised by polarised positions and clear demarcations that do not allow for any nuances. The *Rulers*, (2025), hanging on a wall in the centre of the exhibition space, underscore the calculating nature of this way of thinking. On closer inspection, however, the units of measurement of the instruments are not definite mathematical quantities, but rather individual mental states and gradients of values.

The second part of the exhibition, in which things appear more diffuse and nuanced, forms a counterpoint to this harsh introduction. The transition is led by two works: *Cliffhangers* (2024) and *Impossible fountain of me* (2025). As the title suggests, the first work can be associated with climbing holds due to its appearance. Discreetly installed along a long wall, the small white bronze objects convey a palpable sense of urgency. They encourage the visitors to adopt the positions suggested by the holds in order to move from right to left, from a closed to an open position. This work presents an interesting reversal of the concept of sculpture and the approach to it. The artist does not produce a volume but defines frames and conditions within which the audience can move. It is the bodies of the visitors that create the volumes that are actually expected of objects in the traditional understanding of sculpture.

*Impossible fountain of me* is a slender, metallic distribution structure that literally leads around the corner and draws attention to an enigmatic situation. Two funnels feed a pipeline-like construction that serves as a conduit for the slow and almost imperceptible flow of a liquid. At the end of a linear, richly branched path, the liquid drips into the eye of a bronze mask. Floating on a dark tub, it stares, like Narcissus in Greek mythology, at the impenetrable surface where the liquid collects. This work has a strong metaphorical character that points to hidden psychological processes as well as alchemical experiments and contrasts with the clarity of the works in the first part of the exhibition.

A soft carpet on the floor creates a clear caesura in the exhibition dramaturgy and provides a more intimate atmosphere that invites visitors to pause for a moment. The works shown here are rather calm and contemplative and are characterised by mysteriousness and ambiguity. They invite us to turn our gaze inwards, to those unconscious, shadowy sides that nevertheless shape our existence as individuals and our interaction with others.

It is the conflicts within the individual to which the artist devotes her attention. According to the analytical psychology of C. G. Jung, the root of all conflicts lies in a fundamental non-acceptance of certain parts and characteristics of oneself. They are repressed into the 'shadows' because we do not like them as part of ourselves or because we do not want to acknowledge them. From there, however, they continue to influence people's behaviour, feelings and thoughts. According to the Swiss psychoanalyst, recognising the dark sides of the personality as real is the only way to resolve conflicts.

The works shown in the second part of the exhibition are a first attempt to penetrate the 'shadow'. Since its moral evaluation depends on the respective frame of reference, the primary concern here is not to confront evil, even though evil can certainly be part of the 'shadow'. Rather, Durrieu's artworks point to the possibilities of connecting with the

repressed sides, regardless of which aspects are hidden there. The coexistence of different, even opposing sensations is illustrated right at the beginning of the exhibition by a series of bronze sculptures (*Thermometer of Passions: To Want and to Want*, 2024). Two pairs of arms depict in turn desire as an urge for possession, dominance and power, and desire as an invitation to serenity.

The work *Hand Mirrors* (2025) shows that there are not only negative but also positive aspects that want or need to be recognised and accepted. On several mirrors, Durrieu has engraved the names of sins and virtues with which the viewer is directly confronted. The mirror is a symbolic image of human self-reflection. It has many functions, from critical introspection to self-affirmation. The work evokes the voice of Snow White's wicked stepmother. Her infamous sentence "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?" contains both the search for confirmation and the fear of rejection. Unlike in the fairy tale, however, here the slightly distorting, mirror-like surface does not become the scene of the realisation or the execution of what one is, but leads to its acceptance.

The need for a unifying approach in dealing with the foreign and the other runs like a red thread through the entire second part of the exhibition. This approach becomes manifest both in the interactive sculpture *Unshieldmachine* (2025), which pierces a wall and connects the two different parts of the exhibition, as well as in images of beings that do not belong to the human world. The work *Unshieldmachine* focuses on feelings of vulnerability and the need for preservation. The artist works with the motif of the shield, which is known to be understood both as protection and as a weapon. This work, together with the work mentioned at the beginning, *JRSY Barricade*, is very representative of Durrieu's way of working. Her objects are often reminiscent of machines, medical devices and even instruments of torture; they appear biomorphic and technoid at the same time and trigger contradictory feelings between fascination and foreignness, while aiming for an experience of re-sensitization.

*The Fly* (2024) depicts a spider weaving its web in different directions from a shadowy corner. Its abdomen becomes the link between the various elements of the exhibition and stands for a new form of communication, both internally and externally. The open mouth of a terrifying deep-sea fish (*Jaws (Lotus)*, 2025), with a golden tooth hidden in the middle, can be understood as an encouragement to look for the gold in the shadows, the lotus in the mud.

Similarly, *Deepear* (2025), a small-scale sculpture combining anthropomorphic and animal aspects, suggests an integrative and searching process. Two human ears form a shell with a pearl in the middle. While *Unshieldmachine* and *The Fly* symbolise the relational moment of introspection, the other pieces rather represent the work within oneself.

Like the exhibition, its title is made up of two opposing elements: the placeholder 'NN', which stands for the (as yet) unknown name of a person, and the English pronoun 'ME', which, depending on the interpretation, refers either to the artist or to the respective audience. While 'NN' evokes a sense of uncertainty and anonymity, 'ME' addresses the recipients themselves. They are invited to get actively involved, to "jump into their own shadow" and experience the exhibition from their own -and hopefully from *the other's*- perspective.

*Petite Sacrée Géometrie* (2025) makes the urgency of a change of perspective physically tangible. A metal carpet - protruding from the corner of a wall and illuminated from below by a light bulb - arouses curiosity to look beneath the surface, behind the obvious and familiar. True to the motto of artist Antoni Muntadas "Warning: Perception Requires Involvement", viewers have to bend their knees quite a bit to take a closer look at the colourful, geometric sculpture underneath. Only from this awkward and unusual position for an exhibition space can a crouching figure be discovered, whose appearance triggers feelings that oscillate between humor and fear.

A certain amount of effort is also required to read the poem that Durrieu wrote and then engraved on ten metal plates. *Reflective feelings (Poem)* (2025) can only be read from a particular perspective, which varies depending on the lighting conditions. This takes us back to the beginning of the exhibition, or even before that, to the invitation card for the exhibition: printed in semi-transparent, shimmering ink on white paper, it contains an instruction for action that is very easy to overlook due to the special nature of the card. However, the enigmatic title in black cannot be ignored: «NN -|-ME» can be understood as an onomatopoeic word creation which, when pronounced quickly and without a pause, sounds like the English word 'enemy' and thus gives a foretaste of the thematic focus of the exhibition. The title links the foreign and the self and encourages visitors to look for that foreign within themselves.

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