

LIVIE

RALPH BÜRGIN | FORUM

MARCH 28 – MAY 30, 2025

OPENING | THURSDAY, MARCH 27, 6-8PM

The term “*volute*” derives from the Latin word “*voluta*”, which means “*spiral curl*”. In art history, it refers to an ornament or building element with a spiral-shaped, often double-sided end curl, as is particularly characteristic of Ionic column capitals in ancient Greek architecture. These famous capital forms also appear frequently in Ralph Bürgin's current paintings. There, they mostly serve as pedestals for ancient-looking colossal heads, such as in the large-format painting “*Forum*” (2025) - which also provides the title for the exhibition. Or the columns form the foundation for a landscape with male nudes, as in the painting “*Isle of Men*” (2025).

One of the peculiarities of curls is that points that are spatially separated on a surface come closer together. Which perhaps also makes the volute an apt allegory for Ralph Bürgin's art in general. For in the pictures that the artist, born in Basel in 1980, produces with a thin, glazed application of paint, various motifs and references are superimposed in an admirably casual form of condensation. In this way, the painterly and the graphic, the heavy and the light, the lived and the dreamed, the living and the petrified, the historical and the contemporary flow smoothly together. New, strangely confusing, inviting and even seductively luminous constellations are generated.

Bürgin constructs his psychological arrangements like a scenographer. The play that unfolds before the audience's eyes seems to take place in a sphere of timelessness. A whole host of art-historical references run in the background. The eternal antagonism between culture and nature has taken a break and floats in Arcadian realms. The world in these pictures appears like a park landscape in which apples, skulls or campfires appear out of nowhere like surrealistic bonus points in a computer game. The word “*forum*” already hints at this complexity. In ancient Rome, it was used to describe a central location in the city, where market events, jurisdiction, political and religious representation coincided spatially. Bürgin's choice of title is evidently aimed at the diversity of forms of negotiation and the mutual dependence of different spheres.

In some pictures, for example “*La grande Terrasse*” (2024), there is even a kind of stage structure in the lower part of the picture - as if to emphasize the staged character of what is shown. “*My pictures go through a transformation process,*” explains the artist. “*They function like a stage on which figures, animals and objects can appear or disappear.*” The referential function of the supporting structure can therefore possibly be extended to the processual character of the artistic work. In the painting “*Marble Night*” (2024), an owl watches over a full moonlit and colorful twilight landscape, through which a path winds its way into the horizon, past architecture reminiscent of a fortified building or granary. In ancient Egypt, the animal was regarded as a bird of death, while in Greece it symbolized wisdom. But even without cultural codes, this bird is wonderful. Its soft plumage and the roughened edge of its wings allow the owl to fly almost silently as it disappears into the deep night.

— Kito Nedo

LIVIE

Ralph Bürgin

Born in 1980 in Basel, lives in Basel, Switzerland and works in his studio in France (Alsace).

Ralph Bürgin studied at the Academy of Art and Design in Zurich and Basel, where he graduated in 2018 with a Master in Fine Arts. Bürgin's practice investigates such wide-reaching and universal themes as the human condition and the interaction of mankind and nature.

Ralph Bürgin was awarded with the Alexander Clavel Stiftung award in Switzerland in 2023, and his works have been on view at Kunsthalle Zurich and Kunsthaus Baselland in 2023, as well as at Kunsthaus Pasquart in Biel in 2022.

Recent solo exhibitions include *The Great Escape* at Livie Gallery, Zurich, Switzerland, 2023 (with publication), *Watching a Peaceful River* at Galerie Barbara Seiler, Zurich, Switzerland, 2020, *La place* at Centre culturel suisse, Paris, France, 2019 and *Pieces and Shadows* at Kunstverein Diessenhofen, Switzerland, 2017. Ralph Bürgin's work has been included in numerous group exhibitions, including 2024 at Plymouth Rock, Zurich, Switzerland; 2023 at Alexander Clavel Stiftung (Kulturförderpreis), Kunsthalle Zurich and Kunsthaus Baselland, Switzerland; 2022 at Kunsthaus Pasquart; 2021 at Wilde Gallery, Geneva, Switzerland; 2018 at Kunsthaus Baselland, Muttenz, Switzerland; 2016 at Ping/Pong, Basel/Miami, Los Angeles, USA; 2014 in "Kunstkredit Basel-Stadt, Werkbeiträge 2013" at Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland.

In 2019, a publication was dedicated to the artist as part of the Cahier d'Artistes series published by the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia, with a text by Felicity Lunn. The artist has also realized several projects in public spaces, including *Gasträume 2020* in Zurich, curated by Christoph Doswald, and *I, You, You, Me, We* at Heuwaage in Basel, Switzerland in 2022, initiated by Kunstkredit Basel-Stadt in collaboration with the Department of Construction and Transport.

Opening hours: Tuesday to Friday | 11 am to 6 pm, Saturday | 12 – 5 pm, and by appointment

For more information and high-resolution images please contact us:

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