

Opening

Friday, April 11, 2025, 7 pm, KUNSTHALLE GIESSEN

Exhibition Duration

April 12 – July 20, 2025



Fig.: Cathrin Hoffmann, *Our Bodies Know*, 2025, oil on linen, 190 x 180 cm. Courtesy the artist and Public Gallery, London;
Céline Ducrot, *Filaments* (detail), 2024, Acryl on MDF board, 190 x 280 cm, Courtesy the artist and Kadel Willborn,
Düsseldorf.

Press View

Wednesday, April 9, 2025, 11 am

The artists will be present.

In spring 2025, KUNSTHALLE GIESSEN presents artists **Céline Ducrot** and **Cathrin Hoffmann**. In ***Hardest Kinds of Soft***, their works enter into a dialogue that sees them reflecting on humanity and corporeality in the (post-)digital age. Through juxtaposition, their paintings and sculptures explore new perspectives on the tensions of an increasingly virtual hyperreality. Both artists provide insight into their latest work and showcase new pieces created specifically for the exhibition. While Céline Ducrot examines wellness as an intersection between self-care and capitalist self-optimization, along with the ambivalences of human relationships and emotions, Cathrin Hoffmann explores the inseparability of mind and body, the concept of transhumanism, and human existence in the digital age.

Content

Céline Ducrot's paintings depict film-like scenes, yet their narratives remain fragmented and ephemeral. Young female protagonists appear frozen in scenes in which setting and gestures appear familiar, yet enigmatic in combination. This ambivalence is central to her work: proximity and distance, security and discomfort, trust and suspicion. Ducrot's figures navigate the tensions of contradictory emotions, such as intimacy and loneliness, a feeling of searching for connection yet never finding it. This impression derives, in part, to the omnipresence of new technologies, which populate Ducrot's worlds in the form of screens and smartphones.

Ducrot also explores individual self-care and collective rituals. She examines self-care in its original meaning as well as in its commercialized form within the wellness industry, where it is linked to productivity and self-optimization, carrying promises of happiness and healing. More recently, her interest has expanded to non-institutionalized spirituality. Practices such as astrology, tarot, or nature-based rituals are experiencing a digital renaissance, merging with new technologies to create hybrid belief systems. They offer strategies for coping with an uncertain present, enabling both self-realization and a sense of community. These ideas are reflected in Ducrot's visual worlds — subtle, ceremonial gestures suggest a search for deeper meaning, order, and belonging.

Cathrin Hoffmann creates hybrid-amorphous figures that appear mechanical and geometric yet fluid and grotesque. With these, she questions the ideal of the technologically optimized human and examines the effects of digital developments on our physical presence, as well as the interplay between body and mind. What role does the body play in an increasingly disembodied world? How does our relationship with our own materiality change when virtual spaces and AI shape our perception?

Hoffmann references modern art movements and translates them into the present to reveal

their blind spots. For example, she critically engages with the Futurists' enthusiasm for progress, which systematically excluded women. However, her figures do not serve as dystopian warnings but rather as ambivalent beings that embody strength and autonomy. They resist clear temporal or stylistic categorization, shifting between layers of reality. In this way, Hoffmann examines how the digital world influences our resonance and the tangible presence we experience in direct human connection.

Another central theme in her work is the deconstruction of the male gaze. By alluding to well-known works by male artists from the Renaissance and modern periods, Hoffmann challenges art historical narratives and grants her female figures agency. They are subjects with their own presence, not reduced to male projections. Nevertheless, her work is less about explicit feminism and more about a perspective shaped by her own experiences as a woman.

Artistic Process

Both Céline Ducrot and Cathrin Hoffmann are influenced by their backgrounds as graphic designers. Although Ducrot works with paint, she considers her process akin to drawing. She cuts stencils with a knife, which becomes her equivalent of a pencil. Central to her method is her precise airbrush technique: while the knife physically interacts with the material, the subsequent application of thin layers of paint through stencils avoids direct contact with the surface. The overall image is constructed step by step, as the artist focuses on one detail while much of the work remains covered. This technique lends her pieces an ultra-smooth, synthetic finish. Without visible brushstrokes, her work achieves an aesthetic between gaming worlds and detached sensuality. Her color palette—desaturated tones mixed with white and gray—enhances the artificiality, making skin appear metallic or cold. This creates a dynamic tension between familiarity and alienation.

Similarly, Hoffmann moves between painting and drawing. Her works begin as hand-drawn sketches, which she develops digitally before transferring them onto canvas in oil paint, with hair and wool, or into sculptures made of steel or plastic. In this way, digital and analog elements merge into a hybrid visual language that combines virtual and painterly aesthetics. In her recent works, Hoffmann has moved away from the flawless, synthetic surfaces of her earlier pieces, allowing traces of paint and material to remain visible. This makes her figures appear more fleshy and introduces a new tactility. From a distance, the digital aesthetic remains intact, but up close, a textured, sensually perceptible surface emerges. This deliberate contrast plays with perception and reality.

Juxtaposition

Both artists share themes of alienation and familiarity, surrealism and mystery. While Ducrot's scenes construct an alternative reality with its own rules, Hoffmann's figures exist in an imminent yet unreachable future. The exhibition title ***Hardest Kinds of Soft*** describes a tension present in both artistic approaches. As an oxymoron, it highlights the coexistence of hardness and vulnerability, softness and resistance. Hoffmann's bodily forms oscillate between grotesqueness and fragility, combining constructed elements with a subtle vulnerability, while Ducrot's works blend soft gradients with sharp contours and natural forms with synthetic structures. The contrast between "hard" and "soft" is not only formal but also metaphorical—it is a reflection on human relationships, the tension between organic and artificial, or the challenge of reconciling opposites. This duality is reflected in the female-coded figures, which oscillate between strength and vulnerability. The title thus connects both artistic positions and opens up diverse associative spaces.

Céline Ducrot (*1992 in Freiburg, Switzerland) lives in Biel/Bienne, Switzerland. She is a graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig and has exhibited at Kadel Willborn (Düsseldorf), The Hole (New York City), National Gallery Prague, and Kunsthau Biel. Her work has been recognized with the Swiss Design Award and the Prix Anderfuhren. As an illustrator, she has contributed to publications and institutions such as Die Zeit, FAZ Quarterly, and Pro Helvetia.

Cathrin Hoffmann (*1984 in Rotenburg, Wümme) is a German-Iranian artist based in Berlin. Trained as a graphic designer, she has exhibited at Nicodim Gallery (Los Angeles), Public Gallery (London), Haus am Lützowplatz (Berlin), Kunstmuseum Mülheim an der Ruhr, and X Museum (Beijing). She has held residencies at Palazzo Monti (Brescia) and PLOP (London), and her works are part of public collections in China, Spain, Australia, and Brazil.

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The City of Giessen

Special Thanks to
Kadel Willborn, Düsseldorf
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Fig.: Céline Ducrot, No Ordinary Machine, 2024, Acryl on MDF board, 190 × 280 cm. Courtesy the artist and Kadel Willborn, Düsseldorf

Visitor Information

All information regarding the opening, our accompanying program with event dates, and access details can be found online at:

www.kunsthalle-giessen.de | www.giessen.de

Accompanying Program

Guided tour by the curator (in German)

Dr. Nadia Ismail

Thursday, May 8, 6 pm

Art Buzz - Short guided tour and coffee for young culture fans (in German & English)

Saturday, June 28, 3 pm

Registration by June 26

kunsthalle@giessen.de, +49 641 306 1041

Participation fee: 2,50 €

Art and Coffee (in German)

Wednesday, July 9, 3 pm

Registration by July 7

kunsthalle@giessen.de, +49 641 306 1041

Participation fee: 2,50 €

Art education in individual conversation

Every Saturday, 2– 4 pm

Sunday Guided Tour (in German)

Sundays at 4 pm

April 13, May 11, June 15, July 20

Closing

Sunday, 20.07.2025, 5 pm

Artist Talk with

Céline Ducrot & Cathrin Hoffmann

in conversation with Dr. Nadia Ismail

Further Information

www.kunsthalle-giessen.de

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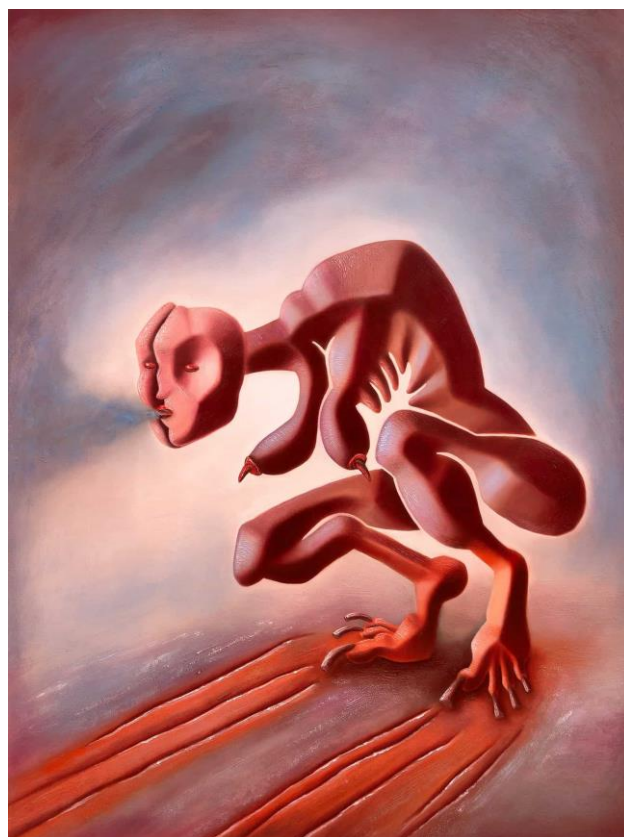


Fig.: Cathrin Hoffmann, Soft Slide on
Gravel Paths, 2024, Oil and quartz sand on canvas, 160 x 120 cm.
Courtesy the artist and Public Gallery, London.