

Kunstverein BRAUNSCHWEIG



Press Information

21.06.2025 – 05.10.2025

B. INGRID OLSON

A Feminine Thought

Press tour: Thu, June 19, 2025, 12 pm

Opening and summer party: Fri, June 20, 2025, 7 pm

Braunschweig, June 10, 2025. *A Feminine Thought* is the first institutional exhibition in Germany of the American artist **B. INGRID OLSON** (*1987 in Denver, lives and works in Chicago) and responds to the unique circular architecture in the ground floor of Villa Salve Hospes. *A Feminine Thought* shares its title with the sole large-scale work presented in the exhibition, which was created through Olson's engagement with the idea and concept of the "Gesamtkunstwerk".

The exhibition title refers to a work by Dieter Roth: *Ein weiblicher Gedanke I & II* (1971), an edition of two prints depicting a woman as a table.

In her exhibition, the artist explores the objectification and reification of the female body by not controlling the spatial situation in the Kunstverein but approaching it sensorially and from a psychological perspective.

At the same time, the exhibitions **SINE HANSEN** *Sine Hansen* and **NOAH BARKER & PAUL LEVACK, TOM BURR, SAM COTTINGTON, DANAEO** *Four Outdoor Scenes* are opening.

Exhibition text

B. Ingrid Olson's practice responds to the specific histories and buildings of the places where she exhibits. She addresses architectural space through a psychological understanding of it, suggesting that spatial experience is subjective. Our bodily perception of the things around us is affected by moods, feelings, and mental states; the artist has said that "the eyes are one sense, but a person's body unites all the senses, creating a sixth sense."

Olson's solo exhibition *A Feminine Thought* at the Kunstverein Braunschweig shares its title with the single sprawling artwork on display. The artist visited the Kunstverein for the first time in December last year. During this short stay, she already spoke about the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or *Total Work*. Her preoccupation with this type of work first arose during a yearlong exhibition that took place in Reykjavik in 2023, titled *Cast of Mind*, in which the artist showed a slightly modified replica of a worktable from her studio. The table was repeatedly reconfigured during the exhibition, with the panels that served as the tabletop variously loosely stacked and unassembled, moved around, fixed in a single plane on the base of the table, and finally detached and removed again. Olson gave this work the title *Total Work*, without having knowledge of the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

During that same year, back in Chicago, Olson had a studio visit with the German art historian Christine Mehring, who teaches art history at the University of Chicago. Mehring spoke about the theories surrounding the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in connection with Olson's *Total Work*. After this encounter, Olson began to research the idea in more depth, eventually describing it in her own words as "a work of art or other constructed experience that combines as many kinds of art as possible into a coherent whole. Popularized (and problematized) by the composer Richard Wagner, the principles of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* are often embodied by architecture, with practitioners such as Le Corbusier, Eliel Saarinen and Frank Lloyd Wright controlling every element of their buildings."

The impetus for the in-depth and critical examination of the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* came from the special structure of the ground floor of the Salve Hospes: a sequence of rooms that merge seamlessly into one another and thus form a self-contained, circular architecture. Olson responded to this with a site-responsive floor installation made up of over 500 tabletops. The legless slabs – each measuring between 3 x 3 cm and 122 x 76 cm – serve as an index for every artwork the artist has ever made. They function as a support surface, while also representing the long trail of nearly two decades of artistic production. The installation of the tabletops follows the circular logic of the spatial sequence, hugging the interior walls of the institution.

On the black laminate boards, Olson exhibits an array of forms made of ceramics, aluminum, plastic, and plaster, as well as layered photographic collages, paintings, and drawings. In her recumbent assemblages she combines different found objects and transformed materials, including multiple kinds of metal,



antique fabrics, leather, concave mirrors, packing materials, and commercially produced hardware. Many of the ceramic objects were created using found polystyrene packaging, which the artist mostly collected over a period of time from a garbage room near her studio. Without knowing what kinds of objects were once stored in this packaging, the artist associates their recesses with various body parts, projecting human physiognomies onto its surfaces. Elsewhere, the allusion to the human body becomes even clearer, such as when she depicts individual heads or parts of heads. Other ceramics are more abstract, resembling biomorphic architectural models.

In the exhibition, the photographic collages also transition to the vertical plane, punctuating the windows throughout the gallery. In creating them, she photographs her own body in her studio – from unusual camera angles, and with props that allow for both gendered allusions and androgynous play. Reflections, cropping, layering, and blurring deliberately undermine any clear spatial positioning. For the Braunschweig exhibition, the artist had all of the windows in the ground floor of the villa covered with a privacy film that, thanks to its frosted glass effect, only allows the light from outside to pass through, while blocking the view. Olson then affixed the photographic collages to the fogged window surfaces with aluminum tape.

This intervention in the interior alone fundamentally changes how the space is experienced. In architecture, windows have dual functions – they allow light in, but they also create a power dynamic related to public and private spaces by allowing simultaneous views into and out of interior spaces. An unobstructed window (with no curtains, or shutters) reveals both what is happening inside to those outside and also reveals what is happening outside to occupants of the structure. In *A Feminine Thought*, however, this principle is deliberately undermined: the treated window surfaces block the view, letting in only diffuse light. The artist describes this effect as a kind of fog – a slightly uncanny irritation that directs the gaze inward and throws visitors back to their own bodies and thoughts.

Further sensory impressions affect how visitors experience the exhibition: a sound component and two specially developed olfactory elements, which the artist herself describes as “the almost imperceptible but perhaps unsettling understanding that there is a presence other than your own that you cannot see. Natural, irregular, unconscious movements, the way a body ticks or itches or is simply in a room while you are lost in thought or experience.” One of the scents could be described as fungal and loamy. The second scent uses the musk that beavers secrete to mark their territory – a smell that could perhaps be described as metallic, but also bodily.

The exhibition title refers to a work by Dieter Roth: *Ein weiblicher Gedanke I & II (A Feminine Thought)*, an edition of two prints. On one, a woman is transformed step-by-step into a table; on the other, the transformation takes place in reverse order. Olson reacts to this objectification and reification of the female body and counters it by complicating rather than controlling the spatial situation. Even if the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* is historically linked to a targeted guidance of the audience’s experience, the artist is not interested in prescribing any particular perception. Rather, she points out that every experience remains subjective – shaped by an individual’s temperament and personal perspective. Olson’s sensitivity to psychological states and the psychologization of space is fed, among other things, by her examination of the historical neglect of both the physical and mental health of women. This is contrasted with the conscious visualization of a deep-rooted, almost hysterical impulse to produce and reproduce in her work.

A Feminine Thought is an open-ended work that depicts a thought process as being *in-process*. The artwork-as-exhibition is partitioned by the nine rooms it occupies and cannot be grasped in a single moment, but rather experienced as a time-based work. Many of the objects presented appear as drafts or models – snapshots of a state that can still develop further. The installation questions whether the elements of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* do actually have to illustrate a unified, controlled concept – one that is geared towards aesthetic order, wholeness, and unity – or whether it can instead be understood as a pluralistic, fragmentary, contradictory system.

Cathrin Mayer, Director and exhibition curator



Biography

B. Ingrid Olson (*1987, Denver) lives and works in Chicago. Olson most recently had exhibitions at XYZcollective, Tokyo and Keijiban, Kanazawa and was featured in the 2024 Whitney Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Other solo exhibitions include the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University, Cambridge; Secession, Vienna; fluent, Santander, Spain; and a yearlong exhibition at i8 Grandi, Reykjavik. Her work has been included in group shows at institutions including Jeu de Paume, Paris; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Aspen Art Museum; Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Renaissance Society, Chicago; Buffalo AKG Art Museum (formerly the Albright-Knox Art Gallery) and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. In 2025, she was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship.

Selected Program

Guided Tour with B. INGRID OLSON

Saturday, June 21, 2025, 11 am
Free of charge, plus admission
In English

Director's Tour with CATHRIN MEYER

Thu, July 17, 2025, 6 pm
Free of charge, plus admission
In German

Director's Tour with CATHRIN MEYER

Thu, September 25, 2025, 6 pm
Free of charge, plus admission
In German

Talk with KRISTIAN VISTRUP MADSEN and CATHRIN MAYER

Sat, September 27, 2025, 3 pm
Free of charge, plus admission
In English

KRISTIAN VISTRUP MADSEN is a writer, art critic and curator based in Berlin. His art criticism has been published in magazines such as Artforum, Harpers, The White Review, Spike and Kunstkritik. Together with **CATHRIN MAYER**, he will discuss **B. INGRID OLSON**'s work in relation to his exploration of mood in contemporary art. In an article published last year, Vistrup Madsen observed a significant shift in contemporary art, where the emphasis has moved from conceptual frameworks and critical discourse to the experiential and emotional resonance of artworks.

Further information and the complete program at: kunstvereinbraunschweig.de/program

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B. INGRID OLSON
A Feminine Thought

Exhibition dates: 21.06. – 05.10.2025

Curator: Cathrin Mayer

Venue: Kunstverein Braunschweig e. V., Lessingplatz 12, 38100 Braunschweig

Opening hours: Tue – Fri 12 pm–6 pm, Thu 12 pm– 8 pm, Sat, Sun 11 am–6 pm

Admission: Regular € 5, Discount € 3

Visitor service: T 49 (0)531 49 556, Mail: info@kunstvereinbraunschweig.de

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We would like to thank: i8 Gallery, Reykjavík

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#AFeminineThought

Further information about the exhibition: <https://kunstvereinbraunschweig.de/exhibitions/b-ingrid-olson/>



Image Preview



B. Ingrid Olson, Excerpt from *A Feminine Thought*, 2007–2025, © B. Ingrid Olson, Photo: B. Ingrid Olson / Studio.



B. Ingrid Olson, Courtesy the artist and i8 Gallery, Reykjavík, Iceland.

Exhibition views will be available from June 23, 2025, in the press section of our website:
<https://kunstvereinbraunschweig.de/en/information/press/>

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