

English

Olaf Holzapfel

Der Mantel

2024 Zurich Art Prize

Curated by Sabine Schaschl
May 30 to September 8, 2024

In 2024, the Zurich Art Prize, awarded annually by Museum Haus Konstruktiv and Zurich Insurance Company Ltd, goes to Olaf Holzapfel (b. 1967 in Dresden, lives and works in Berlin and Brandenburg). He is the 17th winner of the renowned award. Worth a total of CHF 100,000, the prize consists of an CHF 80,000 budget for the production of a solo exhibition at Museum Haus Konstruktiv and CHF 20,000 in prize money.

In his multi-layered oeuvre, Olaf Holzapfel deals with the conception and materiality of spaces. After the 2000s, during which he particularly focused on megalopolises and their relationship with virtual space, observing a kinship between urban structures' grids and the internet's digital grids, his interest increasingly shifted toward the physically material, toward nature and its resources. Since then, Holzapfel has been searching for ways to artistically dissolve dualities, such as those of city and landscape, interior and exterior spaces, or virtual and real visual spaces, and to describe them as something fluid.

The flowing and the boundary-breaking are motifs that Holzapfel has been exploring for several years in his 'interstitial spaces'. These are spatial constructs that are neither open nor closed, but something in between. They include temporary shelters and tents, as well as sophisticated framework structures or round constructions that resemble sacral buildings. Holzapfel creates the spaces using natural materials that he has found and investigated on extensive travels across Europe and far beyond its borders, such as plant fibers, reeds, hay, straw, wicker and wood. Intensive engagement with raw materials and the regions in which they are found is central to Holzapfel's oeuvre. The properties of each material determine the techniques that can be used to create an artwork – for which purpose, Holzapfel maintains a close intercultural exchange with other artists and craftspeople locally. The works are developed and realized through constant dialogue between all participants, in a collective process of visual composition.

Holzapfel's interest in natural materials, vernacular techniques and interstitial spaces is clearly conveyed in the exhibition *Der Mantel* (The Overcoat) at Museum Haus Konstruktiv. On the first floor, the artist presents a room-filling setting, comprising a large wooden framework structure, a U-shaped spatial sculpture made of bound reeds and straw, and five tubes of woven wicker lying on the floor. Holzapfel developed *Alphabet* (as the



Exhibition view, 2024, Museum Haus Konstruktiv.

framework structure is called) together with carpenters from the region Harz, based on local construction methods. As a load-bearing structure, a framework consists of components such as rails, beams, sills, struts, braces and more. In *Alphabet*, Holzapfel arranges these to form a separate entity, thus transferring a traditional craft technique to contemporary art, and showing how nature, culture, tradition and modernity enrich each other.

Opposite the open wooden structure is the semi-closed spatial sculpture *Mantel* (Overcoat). This U-shaped enclosure, which offers shelter, has a more intimate feel, particularly due to its reed material, which muffles noise, and can intensify the visitor's physical and sensory experience.

On the second floor, Olaf Holzapfel exhibits relatively recent works from his *Straw Pictures* and *Hay Pictures* series. Here too, fluid transitions can be discerned, an oscillation between image and object, between surface and space. Holzapfel creates the *Straw Pictures* in his studio, using straw that he has dyed himself, whereby the length of the stalks determines the geometric composition in each picture. For his densely woven *Hay Pictures*, on the other hand, he gets residents of rural regions to make ropes up to eight meters long by twisting together dried blades of grass, wild flowers and herbs, using a method that has been passed down orally through generations. Holzapfel also calls these works *Light Pictures*, as hay and straw symbolize light and sun in many agrarian cultures, for example in the Alpine region or in Japan.



Exhibition view, 2024, Museum Haus Konstruktiv.
Photo: Stefan Altenburger

The Zurich Art Prize jury was particularly enthusiastic about Olaf Holzapfel's adept handling of a wide range of very different media and spaces. His works, realized in a rich formal language, raise substantial questions, for instance about production mechanisms or the relationship between culture and nature, without losing any of their poetic lightness. His groups of works, developed over several years, captivate with a continuity that resists the fast pace of our times in an enchanting way.

Olaf Holzapfel initially set out to study architecture, before going on to study painting at the Dresden University of Fine Arts from 1996 to 2001. He was in Ralf Kerbach's master class from 2001 to 2003. In 2001, he received the Hegenbarth Scholarship and, in the same year, traveled to the National Institute of Design (NID) in Ahmedabad, India, where he spent several months as a research student under Singanapalli Balaram. In 2002, this was followed by an artist-in-residence stay at Columbia University in New York. In 2014, he was awarded the Gerhard Altenbourg Prize.

Holzapfel can look back on numerous international solo and group exhibitions. He had solo shows, for instance, in 2021 at Museo de Arte Contemporáneo in Salta, Argentina, as well as at Bündner Kunstmuseum in Chur, in 2019 at Museo Nacional de Arte Decorativo in Buenos Aires, in 2018 at the Schoenthal Monastery Sculpture Park near Langenbruck, and in 2015 at the Mishkan Museum of Art in Ein Harod, Israel. His permanent installations can be seen in public spaces, for example *Harfen* (Harps, 2022) at Nassfeldalm in Bad Gastein, *Der Geflochtene Garten* (The Woven Garden, 2022) at the Museum of European Cultures (MEK) in Dahlem, Berlin, *Arena* (2020) in Plot 3 at Kunsthaus Dresden, and *Drei Häuser* (Three Houses, 2018) in front of Kunsthalle Mannheim. Holzapfel's works were also shown at *documenta 14* in 2017 and at the *54th Biennale di Venezia* in 2011.

ZURICH ART PRIZE

The Zurich Art Prize was set up in 2007 by Museum Haus Konstruktiv together with Zurich Insurance Company Ltd, patron partner of the museum, and now has a strong international presence. Each year, an independent artist is honored, who operates at the interfaces where the cultural heritage of constructivist-concrete and conceptual art, on one hand, meets contemporary trends on the other. Since 2018, the prize donated by Zurich Insurance Company Ltd has consisted of an CHF 80,000 budget for the production of a solo exhibition at Museum Haus Konstruktiv and CHF 20,000 in prize money for the artist.

NOMINATION PROCEDURE

Each year, Sabine Schaschl, director of Museum Haus Konstruktiv, invites six curators or other art experts to each nominate one artist, who has already made an impression as a visible force on the international art scene, and who demonstrates an intellectual extrapolation of the constructivist-concrete and conceptual heritage within contemporary art. The nominations for this year's award came from: Sebastian Baden, director of Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt; Stefanie Gschwend, director of Kunstmuseum/Kunsthalle Appenzell; Leevi Haapala, director of Kiasma, Helsinki; Claire Hoffmann, curator at Centre culturel suisse (CCS), Paris; Genoveva Rückert-Sommerauer, contemporary art curator at OÖ Landes-Kultur GmbH; and Ruben Steinum, director of the Office for Contemporary Art Norway (OCA).

SHORTLIST

Alongside Olaf Holzapfel, the following were also nominated for the 2024 Zurich Art Prize: Caline Aoun (b. 1983 in Beirut, Lebanon), Judith Fegerl (b. 1977 in Vienna, Austria), Tarik Kiswanson (b. 1986 in Halmstad, Sweden), Camilla Løw (b. 1976 in Oslo, Norway) and Caroline Monnet (b. 1985 in Ottawa, Canada).

JURY

The composition of the jury for the 2024 Zurich Art Prize was as follows: Sabine Schaschl, director of Museum Haus Konstruktiv (chairperson); Tobia Bezzola, director of Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana in Lugano; Carin Gantenbein, head of professional liability at Zurich Insurance Company Ltd in Zurich; Friedemann Malsch, former director of Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein in Vaduz; Matthias Mühling, director of Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich; and Stella Rollig, general director and scientific director at the museum Belvedere, Vienna.

PREVIOUS PRIZE-WINNERS

2023: Damián Ortega (b. 1967 in Mexico City)
2022: Kapwani Kiwanga (b. 1978 in Hamilton, Canada)
2021: Sonia Kacem (b. 1985 in Geneva, Switzerland)
2020: Amalia Pica (b. 1978 in Neuquén, Argentina)
2019: Leonor Antunes (b. 1972 in Lisbon, Portugal)
2018: Robin Rhode (b. 1976 in Cape Town, South Africa)
2017: Marguerite Humeau (b. 1986 in Cholet, France)
2016: Nairy Baghramian (b. 1971 in Isfahan, Iran)
2015: Latifa Echakhch (b. 1974 in Morocco)
2014: Haroon Mirza (b. 1977 in London, UK)
2013: Adrián Villar Rojas (b. 1980 in Rosario, Argentina)
2012: Mariana Castillo Deball (b. 1975 in Mexico City)
2011: Mai-Thu Perret (b. 1976 in Geneva, Switzerland)
2010: Ryan Gander (b. 1976 in Chester, UK)
2009: Tino Sehgal (b. 1976 in London, UK)
2007: Carsten Nicolai (b. 1965 in Karl-Marx-Stadt, now Chemnitz, Germany)

The Zurich Art Prize is part of Zurich Insurance Company Ltd's commitment to culture.

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