

Press release

»Stella Hamberg. Corpus«

Exhibition 9 May 2021 – 27 February 2022

»Molten metal is like gazing briefly into the light of the sun« **Stella Hamberg**

In the light-flooded exhibition rooms, larger-than-life bronze figures are casting their shadows. Powerfully, the heavy sculptures by Stella Hamberg (b. 1975, living and working in Berlin and Brandenburg) are facing the visitors. The body is a core element in the sculptor's works. They speak of movements, her own ones and those of the artist's hand that brought them to life. The focus is on the struggle to depict the human figure and its form as well as existential questions.

The sculptor **Stella Hamberg** is a true exception in current three-dimensional art. While her fellow artists work in performative or deconstructive ways, she refrains from using new materials or from crossing the boundaries of media. **The most comprehensive museum show to date presents 23 of her works ranging from 2007 to 2021, with which the sculptor confidently follows classical traditions in sculpture. At the same time, however, she develops her own contemporary artistic signature in the interplay of antiquity, the Middle Ages and modernity.**

»The museum is now expanding this year's motto 'Fantastisch Plastisch' (Splendidly Sculptural) with a contemporary position«, **Dr Ariane Fellbach-Stein, Member of the Board of the Landes-Stiftung**, explains, *»The young sculptor works against the trend by using the classic material of bronze. Not only that, she's got courage! It's simply brilliant how in her works she stands up to the great sculptors – from Praxiteles to Michelangelo and Rodin.«*

Owing to the strong contrasts between the predominantly dark sculptures and the bright white walls of the new Richard Meier building, the eye never tires of discovering new forms and traces of the artistic creative process. **The heterogeneous bodies in Hamberg's oeuvre trigger a kind of feedback within us as viewers.** For the body is both a requirement and the best possible instrument for perceiving one's own corporeality and creatureliness. By endowing her figures with an immediate presence, the artist also gives us – the digitally fragmented human beings of the 21st century – a part of our body back.

»»Corpus« invites us to visual wanderings. On the surfaces one can read how Stella Hamberg brings the figures to life. The process of becoming and fading is written into them. By encountering the mostly human figures and their bodies, we simultaneously question our own existence«, **Director Dr Oliver Kornhoff** explains.

The exhibition brings together larger-than-life sculptures weighing tons, as well as small-format groups of works. The surfaces of the sculptures are as rich in variety as in their subjects: sometimes shiny black, sometimes dull and with coloured patination. More recent works, however, surprise us with smoothly polished alabaster plaster in radiant white. That's why **Curator Jutta Mattern** stages the exhibition as a celebration of light, shadow and contours: *»In order to put these powerful sculptures in the best light, in the truest sense of the word, we have removed the fixtures on our top exhibition floor after many years and*

opened the skylights. In the light-flooded building by Richard Meier, the figures take on a unique presence.«

For Stella Hamberg artistic technique and practice play an important role. **Following the classical tradition, she casts most of her sculptures in bronze. Preceding work processes, where soft source materials such as clay or plaster were used, remain visible in many of the works.** The specific way of surface treatment is usually determined at the time of her first composition ideas, as **Stella Hamberg** reveals: »*There are certain rules to begin with. Every idea of an image is connected with a principal idea of the surface. So it is clear beforehand whether the modelling should be rather smooth or rather gestural and whether and how much texture may be included. Then it is decided which source material I will use. The concrete surface as well as the detailed shape only reveals itself during the work process.*«

While the bodies of the sculptures *Trance*, *Trance 2* and *3* with their smooth and neatly polished surfaces exude a certain introversion and perfection, we also encounter different figures with rough, wild surfaces. *Berserk II*, for example, which can be marvelled at on a plinth in the rear outdoor area of the new museum building, does not only bristle with power due to its pose. Rather, it is due to the visible traces of the creation process in the form of furrows and indentations that it seems almost monstrous. The surface appears raw and coarse, just like the nature of the legendary berserks. **The figure and the creative process equally present themselves in an expressive, powerful manner. The artist's clearly noticeable exertion acts as an amplifier of the sculptural expressiveness.**

Vis-à-vis Hamberg's sculptures, we the viewers are thrown back upon our own physical existence. They demonstrate how every experience of art is first and foremost a physical experience. In the encounter with the sculpture, one's own body becomes a fundamental prerequisite for the reception of that very art. In the process of viewing them, we are visually touching Hamberg's works by recreating the tactile surface structure before our mind's eye. The juxtaposition of our own moving bodies and the rigid sculptures thus creates a magical moment.

The figure, *On Perishing and the Absolute Impossibility of Dying – The Companion*, created in 2008, invokes precisely these **questions about the animate and inanimate**. As if by an invisible hand, the warrior-like figure peels itself out of the mire. Here, too, Hamberg's mutability becomes apparent: in the armour of the companion, the artistic processes on the wild surfaces become readable, the colour-changing patina reinforces the impression of the figure being in the process of becoming. The *companion's* skin, on the other hand, is smoothly polished. His right hand pulls threads out of the mire. At the same time, the masterfully shaped left hand points back to the ground from which all human life arises and returns to it in the end.

In several works, figurative and abstract elements come together, merging into ghostly chimaeras. Silent and at the same time agitated by its surface, *grosser Schatten* (*vast shadow*) appears on the terrace of the museum. While the organic abstract forms are proliferating, figurative elements reveal themselves on two sides of the sculpture. Like a kind of Janus face, a bearded head emerges on the left, while a wild animal head becomes visible on the right. Here, the figurative and the abstract, the old and the new, as well as the human and the beastly become blurred.

The sculpture *das ist das* (that is that) has a threatening effect that evokes associations with the old masters' depictions of the hell-mouth, such as those by Hieronymus Bosch. Here once more it is Hamberg's energy that inscribes itself in the sculpture. Although *das ist das* seems grotesque, also here there are references to familiar shapes: like a shark's mouth, the rows of teeth threaten to devour us. A wonderful mind game on the genesis of the sculpture could be played here: If one imagines placing *das ist das* below the *Gates of Hell* by the grandmaster of modern sculpture, Auguste Rodin, both sculptors' positions would complement each other wonderfully. **The triologue between Stella Hamberg, Auguste Rodin and Hans Arp, on display from the end of June, will reveal further surprising kinships and connections.**

In the exhibition »Corpus«, our eyes never tire of discovering familiar and new forms in Hamberg's sculptures. The powerful figures call on us to focus our attention on our (own) human bodies again.

Stella Hamberg | Biography

Stella Hamberg, born in 1975, studied sculpture with Prof. Martin Honert in Dresden. Before that, she trained as a stone sculptor. Since graduating as a master student in 2005, she has lived and worked in Brandenburg and Berlin. In 2006, she was awarded the Karl Schmidt Rottluff Scholarship. Furthermore, in 2018, Hamberg won the Marianne Werefkin Prize awarded by the Verein der Berliner Künstlerinnen 1867 e.V. (Association of Berlin Women Artists 1867). Works by Stella Hamberg have been on show at the Albertinum in Dresden and in the Sculpture Garden of the Villa Schöningen. In 2011, the Mönchehaus Museum Goslar presented Stella Hamberg in her first institutional solo exhibition, which was followed by others, including Kunstverein Ulm, Kunstraum Potsdam and Galerie EIGEN+ART in Leipzig and Berlin. The exhibition at the Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck is the artist's most comprehensive solo show to date.

Catalogue

To accompany the exhibition, a catalogue (ed. Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck) will be published by Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König in German and English with a foreword by Oliver Kornhoff and a text by Birta Gudjonsdottir, as well as an interview between curator Jutta Mattern and sculptor Stella Hamberg. As the catalogue will contain installation photos of the exhibition, it will not be published until the end of June 2021, at a price of 39.90 euros. **Pre-orders are now possible at: koll@arpmuseum.org**