

Parasol unit

foundation for contemporary art 14 Wharf Road

London N1 7RW | T +44 (0)20 7490 7373

www.parasol-unit.org | info@parasol-unit.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Heidi Bucher

19 September – 9 December 2018

(Preview: Tuesday 18 September, 6–8 p.m.)



Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art is delighted to present a major survey exhibition of works by Swiss artist **Heidi Bucher** (1926–1993). Showing for the first time in a UK public institution 25 years after her death, this exhibition brings together a significant body of her enigmatic latex works made during the last two decades of her artistic life and includes screenings of films that document her at work.

The visceral qualities of Heidi Bucher's intriguing works bear testimony to her deep sensitivity and suggest numerous associative meanings. Well known for her latex casts of room interiors, objects, clothing and the human body, which she herself referred to as *Häutungen* (skinnings), Bucher's process invariably preserved a haunting imprint of an architectural surface or an object which was simultaneously both a physical encapsulation of and a liberation from the memories these things held for her. To create her skinnings, Bucher first covered her chosen surface with gauze, pressed liquid latex into it, then when it was almost dry she peeled it off. Bucher dealt with the body and architecture in the same manner, an indication that these concepts are fully intertwined within her work. Her complex working technique was often physically demanding and carried out with great vigour and conviction.

Displayed in the Parasol unit ground-floor gallery is a series of Bucher's large-scale latex skinnings, suspended from the ceiling, hung on the walls, or simply placed on the floor. Bucher's first *Raumhaut* (room skin), *Borg*, 1976, stands on the floor, a dark and fleshy replica of the cold-store structure of a former butcher's shop in Switzerland, which she used as her studio. In contrast, a later interior moulding of a former psychiatric sanatorium, *Kleines Glasportal, Bellevue Kreuzlingen* (Small glass portal, Bellevue Kreuzlingen), 1988, has light passing ethereally through its rubbery translucent windows and seems loaded with psychological connotations. These strange, elusive skins present a paradoxical combination of forms that are sturdy yet fragile, transitory yet perpetual, solid yet flexible.

Being intrigued by the idea of space, whether that occupied by an object, body or architectural interior, the process of skinning allowed Bucher to excavate memories from deep within herself. A mantra she often repeated, *Räume sind Hüllen, sind Häute* (Spaces are shells, are skins), suggests that she considered all such elements, including memory, as spaces. Whether physical or metaphysical, spaces were of the greatest interest to Bucher when they existed in a state of flux. Concepts of temporality and transience manifest within her themes, as in her use of dragonfly images and, for instance, the water in *Die Quelle* (The source), 1987. In this sculpture, which stands on the outdoor terrace of Parasol unit, a vase appears to be floating high in the air with a cascade of latex 'water' flowing from its spout.

Bucher's fascination with the complex relationship between the body and its context is evident in her experimental film *Bodyshells, Venice Beach*, 1972. Its performers move slowly across the beach in over-sized foam costumes, like creatures from another planet. This work returns to the idea of a house as a shell or even a protective cocoon.

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The film is showing in a small room off the ground floor gallery, along with a selection of films documenting her skinning process.

In contrast to the physicality of her large-scale works, the first-floor gallery contains works on a smaller scale which nonetheless continue to explore ideas of fragility and impermanence. The elegant and minimalist structures of Bucher's Glue House series, *Weissleimhaus*, from 1976–1983, appear to be ghostly renderings or the miniaturised shells of houses. Bucher, captivated by notions of ephemerality, transformation and metamorphosis, captures these ideas in several of her works, such as her latex costume-object *Libellenkleid*, 1976, and *Der Schlüpfakt der Parkettlibelle* (The hatching of the parquet dragonfly), 1983. Shiny with the sheer luminescence of mother-of-pearl pigments, the surface of these works is akin to the delicate wings of a dragonfly. In a process similar to Bucher's skinning, the dragonfly larva sheds its skin to reveal an enchanting dragonfly, which may live only a few days. Many dichotomies exist within Bucher's oeuvre and despite her use of vulnerable and impermanent materials there is both clear and implied energy evident in their creation.

Curated by **Ziba Ardalan**, Founder/Director of Parasol unit, the exhibition is accompanied by a tailored programme of educational events and a comprehensive publication.

Parasol unit appreciates the generous support of **Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne**, **Henry Moore Foundation**, **Pro Helvetia**, **Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation** and **Swiss Cultural Fund UK**.

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For further information or visual material please contact: Head of Press, Marketing + Events – Kirsteen Cairns
kirsteen@parasol-unit.org

Notes for Editors

Artist Biography

Heidi Bucher was born Adelheid Hildegard Müller in 1926, in Winterthur, Switzerland. Following her studies at Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Applied Art) in Zurich, she spent almost the entire year of 1950 in London and some time later, in 1956, she moved to New York. During her next four years there, she met numerous members of the city's artistic community, including the photographer, Hans Namuth and the Dutch painter, Karel Appel.

This was followed by a decade in Switzerland, during which Bucher further developed her artistic works, and in 1969 she and her young family moved first to Toronto, then to California. In 1972, in Los Angeles, Bucher made her renowned performative work, *Bodyshells*, and was invited to exhibit it at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. While there she met American installation artist, Edward Kienholz, with whom she established a life-long friendship, and he had a strong influence on Bucher's artistic practice.

The last two decades of her career were spent in Switzerland and Lanzarote in the Canary Islands, creating and perfecting her renowned series of latex casts, *Häutungen* (skinnings). However, after her death in 1993 Bucher's name and work fell into obscurity, until 2004 when they were rediscovered and given a solo exhibition at the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst (Migros Museum for Contemporary Art) in Zurich.

Image credits:

Left: Heidi Bucher, *Die Quelle* (The source), 1987. Vase, metal, textile, casein, colour, 350 x 1500 cm (137¾ x 590½ in).

Middle: Heidi Bucher, *Kleines Glasportal, Bellevue Kreuzlingen* (Small glass portal, Bellevue Kreuzlingen), 1988. Textile, latex, approx. 340 x 465 cm (133¾ x 183 in). **Right:** Heidi Bucher, *Der Schlüpfakt der Parkettlibelle* (The hatching of the parquet dragonfly), 1983. Undergarment, latex, mother-of-pearl pigment, 147 x 90 cm (57¾ x 35½ in) open; 147 x 64 cm (57¾ x 25¼ in) hanging. All images courtesy of The Estate of Heidi Bucher.