

Loredana Sperini***True Blue*****24 September 2016 – 8 January 2017**

Loredana Sperini, who grew up in Lichtensteig in the Toggenburg region of Switzerland and now lives in Zurich, made a name for herself with small-scale portraits of friends in which she brought the process of artistic appropriation into the medium of embroidery. Her first embroidered pictorial works were made by hand, with a needle and black thread, in meticulous craftsmanship and meditative concentration. These time-consuming embroideries were based on pencil drawings of portrait photographs. Her engagement with textile materials was followed by wall-sized encaustic paintings and large-scale works with mirrors. Schematic creatures gazed out with grotesque faces, while viewers saw themselves reflected in a fragmented, distorted mirror. To overcome the two-dimensionality of the surface, Sperini experimented with wax. She began to apply black and white wax in layers with a paintbrush and palette knife and created relief-like murals. By contrast, in the exhibition *Human Capsules* (2012) in the art area of the Lokremise, miniature porcelain figures made up part of an installation that integrated apparently harmless figurines into a concise sculptural overall form that at second glance revealed the depths of human existence. The solo exhibition at the Kunstmuseum St. Gallen begins with small sculptures and reliefs; it brings together examples of existing series by the artist with new works realized especially for the exhibition—both large-scale installations and multipart sculptures and objects.

Room 1

A zig-zag-shaped shelf that runs along the left wall of the exhibition hall holds numerous small sculptures. The shiny black surface reflects the objects. The sculptures are distinguished by amorphous, figural, and abstract forms. They are made of wax, ceramic, cement, and bronze, and illustrate the experimental, searching approach to a wide variety of materials and combinations of materials. Beginning with the early sculptures realized with found and freely combined porcelain fragments, the artist created works that in some cases were based on bodily fragments such as faces and limbs. Modeled after real people, the fragments were cast in negative molds with various materials. The structure of the skin is realistically portrayed with pores, veins, and wrinkles. Their fragmentary character points to things in the past, destruction, but also suggests an unfinished, sketch-like quality. A curved lip is gently held by a bronze hand, fragments of fingers fan out over the blue-dyed back of a foot, two arms with multiple hands spread out like wings ready to take off, a Janus-faced fragment of a face with closed eyelids and a polyhedron-shaped nose on the opposite side reveals a closed mouth.

In the mid-1960s, a generation of artists began to react to the reduced, strict structures of Minimalism with what was called anti-form or eccentric abstraction. A dissolution of form strengthened individual expression. The oeuvres of Eva Hesse (1936–70) and Louise Bourgeois (1911–2010) represent important reference points for younger artists. While Louise Bourgeois

delved into her biography, sought out past experiences, and experimented with traditional and new synthetic materials, in her work Eva Hesse explored the tension between rough and soft structural forms. Loredana Sperini finds parallels or symbols in the immediate present which provide her with an authentic and direct sensory experience. All three artists share the fact that they seek out and arrive at very personal, poetic, physical objects that relate to the body.

Loredana Sperini has continued this search with a series of wax concrete objects for which she received the art prize from the Ortsbürgergemeinde St. Gallen at the 2015 exhibition *Heimspiel*, and this series is one of the most surprising in regard to her combinations of materials. In *Untitled* (2015–16), the pigment and the finely crystalline material of wax are combined with the durable material of cement to create abstract wall-based objects in fascinating colors.

Room 2

For her exhibition at the Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, Loredana Sperini has made further advances into real space. Upon entering the second exhibition space, visitors find themselves surrounded by an arrangement of sculptures that recalls an interior. A festoon stretching from one pillar to the next in three arches exudes a supposedly festive mood, except for the innumerable black-dyed ceramic fingers interrupted by a short segment with golden bronze fingers, arranged in a row as ornaments. The mood shifts from cheerful to somewhat unsettling. Upon walking around a bent mattress cast in cement and wax lying on the floor, the viewer perceives two projecting limbs, legs and feet, which extend over the edge of the mattress. A delicate metal table holds a box-like object inside of which a sleeping woman lies, consisting only of a face and a contorted arm, hands, and individual fingers. The object cast in wax and cement shows the typical arrangement of bodily fragments and combinations of materials. A cube-like bronze sculpture with a punctured surface also shows human features and a cascade of stairs fanning out on its minimalist and hermetic front turned away from the viewer and recalls a surrealistically interpreted sculpture. A four-part metal screen structures the interior and yet allows the viewer to peer through its delicately stretched yarn structure. A heavy bronze table with isolated fragments of fingers on its surface rounds out the arrangement of furniture.

On the walls, for each sculpture there is a relief that creates a link to the corresponding three-dimensional work: an encaustic painting on wood that was originally used to shape the aforementioned wax concrete objects, a cement and bronze relief based on textile collages made of used and found items, as well as a wax concrete relief and an encaustic painting whose colors and shapes are reminiscent of geometric Constructivist or Abstract Expressionist painting.

Room 3

The last room brings together works based on memories and dreams. Fragments of dreams and memories flow into the large-scale sculpture made of branching metal rods on which round wooden frames in various sizes hang. The artist embroidered the interiors of some of the wooden frames with cotton yarn in pink, turquoise, blue, and white on thin fabric, and in

others she wove ornamental and geometric shapes. Figurative and abstract variations of patterns, some of which show painterly qualities, symbolize dreamlike motifs that resist any narrative interpretation and encourage individual perception.

The medium and the technique as well as the embroidery frame, needle, and thread point to the early hand-embroidered works that led to the artist's breakthrough. The pink window foils bathe the sculpture in a diffuse pink light, and the subtle colors evoke a faraway dream world.

In a narrow, tall metal frame whose gabled roof recalls a house and symbolizes protection and safety, six heads made of wax, cement, pigments, and other materials are arranged vertically. The heads rest on stone pillows and their closed eyelids suggest sleeping figures. Colored, in some cases abstract shapes decorate the faces painted like clowns.

Loredana Sperini's working processes are experimental and technically sophisticated in their implementation, and the results are surprising for their special, aesthetic appeal. Her imagery, which oscillates between abstraction and figuration and occasionally calls to mind grotesques, touches on essential themes of art such as physicality and transience and thus opens up a supporting conceptual level.

Nadia Veronese