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Bucher, Heidi, *Betty aus Toronto*, 1975, Perlmutter auf Naturgummi, 111 x 96 cm (Objektmass), Kunst Museum Winterthur. Beim Stadthaus, 1340, seit 1981

#### Documentation level

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#### Name

**Bucher, Heidi**

#### Other version/s of name

Müller, Adelheid Hildegard

#### Dates of birth and death

\* 23.2.1926 Winterthur, † 11.12.1993 Brunnen

#### Municipality of origin (CH)

Malters (LU), Zürich

#### Nationality

CH

#### Brief biography

Plastikerin und Aktionskünstlerin

#### Fields of activity

Performance, Malerei, Objektkunst, Collage, Fotografie, Film, Konzeptkunst, Plastik

#### Lexicon article

Heidi Bucher grew up in an upper-middle class family home in Winterthur-Wülflingen. After beginning a dressmaking apprenticeship, from 1944–1947 she studied in the fashion class at the School for the Applied Arts in Zurich (with [Max Bill](#), [Elsi Giaouque](#) and [Johannes Itten](#)). Travel and periods studying abroad follow (in London, Paris, the South of France and Sicily among other places) and a studio in Zurich. She is a friend of Dada expert Hans Bolliger, frequents the legendary Club Bel Etage. Between 1956 and 1958 she spends time in New York, where she works at World House Galleries and gets to know Hans Namuth and Karel Appel.

Her silk collages are exhibited at the Galerie d'Art Moderne, Basel (1956–1957) and World House Galleries, New York (1958). In 1961 she marries Carl Bucher; births of sons Indigo (b. 1961) and [Mayo](#) (b. 1963). The artist family lives in Zurich, actively involved with the art scene around Fritz and Erika Billeter (art historians), Bruno Bischofberger (gallerist), [Max Bill](#) and curator Willy Rotzler. 1963 solo exhibition at the Galerie im Weissen Haus, Winterthur. 1967–1970 collaborations with Carl Bucher. Thanks to a grant from the Conseil des Arts du Canada, in 1970 the family moves to Canada (Montreal and Toronto) and to the USA in 1972–1973 (Hollywood Hills and Santa Barbara, CA). The artist couple enjoy great success with their joint exhibitions, among others at the Museum of Arts and Crafts, New York, in 1971. In California, they both carry out experimentation with materials and start a life-long friendship with artist Edward Kienholz. Exhibitions at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1972, and the Esther Bear Gallery, Santa Barbara, 1973. In 1973 return to Switzerland, separation from Carl Bucher. In Zurich Bucher moves into an apartment with a studio in a former butcher shop. Solo exhibitions (selected): Galerie Maeght, Zurich (1977, 1979–1980 and 1981), Kunstmuseum Winterthur (1983) and Kunstmuseum des Kantons Thurgau, Kartause Ittingen (1993–1994). Takes part in exhibitions nationally and internationally, including *Weich und plastisch. Soft-Art*, Kunsthaus Zurich (1979–1980). From 1983–1993 Bucher lives and works in Teguisé, Lanzarote, and in Winterthur. At the beginning of 1994 the artist is posthumously granted the City of Winterthur's cultural recognition award. After her death, her work slips from public view. A retrospective at the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst (2004–2005) in Zurich is followed by solo exhibitions at the Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris (2013), the Swiss Institute, New York (2014), the Parasol unit for contemporary art, London (2018) as well as international group exhibitions including *Viva Arte Viva*, *Biennale di Venezia* (2017).

Bucher's early work from the late 1940s and '50s involves a versatile repertoire of techniques and subjects: fashion drawings; illustrations – including for the Tages-Anzeiger newspaper; linear drawings; watercolour; and oil painting. In addition to portraits, interiors and still lifes her landscape and architectural drawings bear witness to numerous travels. From the mid-1950s Bucher moves increasingly towards abstraction. The virtuoso designs of her colourful silk collages, with their abstract-organic language of form, are reminiscent of works by Hans Arp, clearly articulating her interest in questions of space. From the late 1960s onwards, Bucher extends her work beyond traditional pictorial media into three-dimensional space. From 1967 she develops, with Carl Bucher, *Landings to Wear*: wearable, bright foam sculptures that are based on Carl Bucher's Pop Art-style *Landings*.

Time spent in Southern California at the beginning of the 1970s proves to be particularly fruitful. Like many artists in search of new forms of expression, Bucher experiments with novel materials such as polyurethane foam and phosphorescing vinyl and for the first time uses pure mother of pearl pigment, which lends her 'soft sculptures' their characteristic lustre. With the wearable *Body Wrappings* and *Bodyshells*, in which she performs together with her family, the relationship between the body and its casing becomes the central subject of her work. Once back in Switzerland, this subject takes on an existential dimension. In her 'embalmings' Bucher dips objects taken from her domestic surroundings, such as worn clothes, pillows, blankets and other textiles likewise linked to personal memories, in latex and casein glue. Akin to Eva Hesse or Robert Overby she tests new artistic methods using latex, deliberately deploying the fragile, flexible material's qualities. Bucher finds a characteristic poetic, sensory, almost surreal visual language that will mark her work henceforth in the combination of textiles and the iridescent, lustrous mother of pearl pigment.

The artist expands her engagement with the intimate interface between the body and its surroundings as well as with history/memory and identity/gender almost contemporaneously into architectural space. Furniture, windows and doors and even entire rooms of abandoned buildings are clad in gauze in a 'skinning process' developed specifically for the purpose, then embalmed in liquid latex and treated with mother of pearl pigment. These latex objects are dried, which is a full-body process, as is the removal of the skins from the given surfaces. The impressions Bucher produces in this manner are regarded as the artist's most important works. The working method, which proceeds like a ritual, is generally carried out together with an assistant. The first skinning is from her studio (*Borg* [castle], 1974–1978). Skinning actions follow in her parental home (*Herrenzimmer* [study room], 1977–1979) and her grandparents' home (*Ahnenhaus* [ancestral home], 1980–1982). The site-specific process is increasingly extended beyond interiors with personal earlier significance to historical, institutional spaces, nationally and internationally. (Among these a church in New York, 1979–1980; a prison in Le Landeron, 1983; the Hotel Grande Albergo in Brissago, 1987; the Sanatorium Bellevue in Kreuzlingen, 1988; Villa Bleuler in Zurich, 1991.) Numerous photographs and films bear witness to the performative approach and transformation of the architectural spaces as well as the installation of the monumental 'skin spaces' in urban spaces and in nature. The artist herself describes the act of ripping off as a means of detachment from the past, from conventions and other constraints, comparing the process to a dragonfly sloughing off its larval skin before it flies away from it. In addition to recurrent symbols including fish and shells, dragonflies and their metamorphosis in particular appear repeatedly in emblematic form. Flowing water is equally a symbol of life, transition and renewal used as the subject of numerous sculptural works and gouaches in the mid 1980s.

Today Bucher's oeuvre is understood in particular in relation to the radical change in art since the 1960s – in the context of post-minimalist and feminist art practices as well as in comparison with works from Gordon Matta-Clark and Rachel Whiteread, for example. This counteracts the understanding of her work during her lifetime, which was

then read as closely relating to her personality. Bucher created a dazzling work at the meeting point of textiles, performance and architecture, with political and social dimensions which have only gained in relevance today. At the same time, the work that began at the School for the Applied Arts in Zurich is also connected to the avant-garde movements of the first half of the last century.

Works: Jerusalem, The Israel Museum; Kunstmuseum Luzern; New York, The Museum of Modern Art; New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum; New York, The Met Breuer | The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Paris, Centre Pompidou; Vevey, Musée Jenisch; Kunstmuseum Winterthur; Kunsthau Zurich; Zurich, Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst.

Julia Keller, 2019

Translation: Aoife Rosenmeyer

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### Website

<http://www.heidibucher.com>

### Direct link

<http://www.sikart.ch/kuenstlerinnen.aspx?id=4002214&lng=en>

### Last modification

17.11.2020

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AutorIn: Titel [Datum der Publikation], Quellenangabe, <URL>, Datum des Zugriffs. Beispiel: Oskar Bätschmann: Hodler, Ferdinand [2008, 2011], in: SIKART Lexikon zur Kunst in der Schweiz, <http://www.sikart.ch/kuenstlerinnen.aspx?id=4000055>, Zugriff vom 13.9.2012.