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Bächli, Silvia, *Ohne Titel*, 2008/09, Gouache auf Papier, 44 x 62 cm, Privatbesitz

Documentation level

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Name

Bächli, Silvia

Dates of birth and death

* 16.3.1956 Wettingen

Municipality of origin (CH)

Baden (AG)

Nationality

CH

Brief biography

Zeichnerin

Fields of activity

Kreidezeichnung, Zeichnung, Fotografie, Tuschezeichnung, Installation, Gouache, Mischtechnik

Lexicon article

Certified primary school teacher. Moved to Basel in 1976, trained as a drawing teacher at the Basel School of Design (1976–1980). From 1977–78, she attended the Ecole Supérieure d'Arts Visuels in Geneva. Sojourn in Rome in 1981. Regular participation in solo and group exhibitions since 1981, also with her life partner, the artist [Eric Hattan](#). As of 1985, besides Basel, Paris became her second place of residence and work. In the late 1980s, Jean-Christophe Ammann, curator of the Kunsthalle Basel, and Dieter Koeplin, conservator at the *Kupferstichkabinett* (Department of Prints and Drawings in Basel, displayed an interest in Bächli's work. In 1987, solo exhibition at the Kunsthalle Basel, and in 1989 at the Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel. 1992–2006 Professorship at the Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Karlsruhe.

Various Swiss and international awards, including the *Förderungsbeitrag des Aargauer Kuratoriums* in 1980, the

Kiefer Hablitzel Scholarship in 1982, and the Swiss Federal Art Scholarship in 1982 and 1984. From 1983–84, residency in the studio of the Canton of Aargau at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris; 1990, Manor-Kunstpreis Aarau; 1991, Prix Breguet d'Art Contemporain (Geneva); 1998, Prix d'art contemporain de la Banque cantonale de Genève; 2003, Prix Meret Oppenheim; 2007, Hans Thoma Prize and Prix du dessin de la Fondation Daniel et Florence Guerlain. Several trips to Iceland; a longer stay in 2008 resulted in photographic works created jointly with Eric Hattan (*Blindhaedir. East Iceland*, 2010; *Schnee bis im Mai, Snow till May*, 2011). Silvia Bächli represented Switzerland together with [Fabrice Gygi](#) at the *Venice Biennale* in 2009.

Silvia Bächli's work displays a remarkable continuity. Since the beginning of her artistic career she has concentrated primarily on drawing, particularly favouring ink, Indian ink, wax crayons and black gouache. With these economical means – black in various media and paper – she develops a spectrum of nuances ranging from almost transparent grey to deep black, from washed brush drawings to thickly painted surfaces. Bächli explores nuances and shades of colour as well as the expressive quality of line. The medium of drawing is well suited to the artist's spontaneous way of working.

At the beginning of the 1980s, she worked with A4-format notebooks similar to diaries, but gave these up in 1982 to work predominantly in smaller and medium-sized formats. Since the late 1990s, she has painted on relatively thick paper in a 200 × 150 cm format that requires all her physical strength, especially when she draws the lines across the sheet in one continuous movement.

Around 1988, apart from drawings, Silvia Bächli created so-called *shadow installations*: with the aid of halogen lamps, the artist lit everyday objects and kitchen utensils arranged on the floor, which threw large, sinister shadows on the wall. At the same time, the shadows of the viewers moving in the room were an integral part of the installation.

Bächli finds inspiration for her pictorial world, which she captures in countless variations, in her immediate surroundings: ordinary everyday objects, articles of clothing, familiar spaces, views of streets or houses. She records situations, atmospheres and sensory impressions, or the implied positions and movements of figures, focusing frequently on details of bodies or objects. These object-related motifs run parallel to non-representational compositions. The artist liberated herself increasingly from observations or experiences, and allowed her intuition to take the lead: simple brushstrokes, playful, ornamentally tangled and interwoven lines were confronted with strict, almost geometric, reticular structures, such as those shown in the

group of works entitled *Linien* (Lines, 2001–2004). Nevertheless, Bächli's drawings evade a precise description. Her fragmented, implied pictorial world offers space for associations. This openness is also apparent in the way she selects and displays her works on the wall: the spontaneous act of drawing is followed by critical assessment. For the artist, the sorting and arrangement of the drawings into multipartite, rhythmically organised ensembles is a reflexive confrontation with her own work.

Since her stay in Paris in the early 1980s, Bächli has presented her drawings as multipartite, non-linear arrangements of single sheets combined to form a whole. The individual sheets are not displayed in rows, but at different heights and at different distances from each other – with the occasional addition of photographs. The wall provides a surface on which the drawings develop their own field of energy. The artist seeks what she considers to be the right combinations between tension and equilibrium, playing with the balance of the arrangement. She pays attention to distance and pauses: spaces are the fundamental elements of musical and poetical organisation.

This unconventional form of presentation enables Bächli to place different themes and motifs in relation to one another, and to connect the implied life situations and states with each other. The viewers are also involved in the specific form of dialogue that the individual sheets conduct among themselves; the viewers are invited to move within the room, to distance themselves from the work as a whole and then to step very close to an individual drawing.

Silvia Bächli's participation at the Venice Biennale in 2009 confirmed her significance in an international context as an important representative of the art of drawing. In the Swiss Pavilion in Venice she presented installations in a large space, arranging her drawings in table display cases in the smaller room. The at once simplified and laconic visual language of her spatial installations is strikingly restrained. In this context, she refers to the Danish poet Inger Christensen (1935–2009), author of the long poem published in 1969 entitled *det (das)* and the volume of poetry *Alphabet* (1981). Silvia Bächli finds an affinity with her own plain yet playful universe in Christensen's associative combinations.

Works: Aarau, Aargauer Kunsthaus; Basel, Öffentliche Kunstsammlung, Kupferstichkabinett; Kunstmuseum Bern; Kunstmuseum Bonn; Frankfurt am Main, Museum für Moderne Kunst; Geneva, Musée d'art moderne et contemporain (Mamco); Hamburg, Kunsthalle; Karlsruhe, Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste; Paris, Centre Pompidou; Porto, Museu Serralves; Kunstmuseum St. Gallen; Strasbourg, Musée d'art moderne et contemporain.

Simonetta Nosedà, 2010, updated 2013
Translation: Toby Alleyne-Gee

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- Jamaica Kincaid: *Silvia Bächli. Tide*. [New York]: Peter Freeman, 2011

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Website

<http://www.silviabaechli.ch>

Direct link

<http://www.sikart.ch/kuenstlerinnen.aspx?id=4002552&lng=en>

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