

JENS KOTHE

ANIMAL BEAUTY





MARIA T

Text by Svetlana Chernyshova

Jens Kothe (born 1985 in Bochum) is a German artist who lives and works in Germany.

In his work Kothe focusses on questions of physicality, intimacy and materiality. His objects, assemblages and installations refer to elements of the everyday life and produce spatial situations and surroundings which create atmospheres of privacy and familiarity.

His work also explores the uncanny interplay between bodily presence and absence.

Education

Jens Kothe studied from 2012 to 2017 at the Kunstakademie Duesseldorf with Andreas Gursky. He completed his studies in 2017 at the Kunstakademie Duesseldorf as a Master's student (Meisterschüler) of Andreas Gursky.

Before he joined the Academy of Fine Arts, Kothe first studied architecture from 2007 to 2009.

In 2009 he began his apprenticeship at the Staatliche Bildhauerschule Oberammergau, which he completed in 2012.

Work

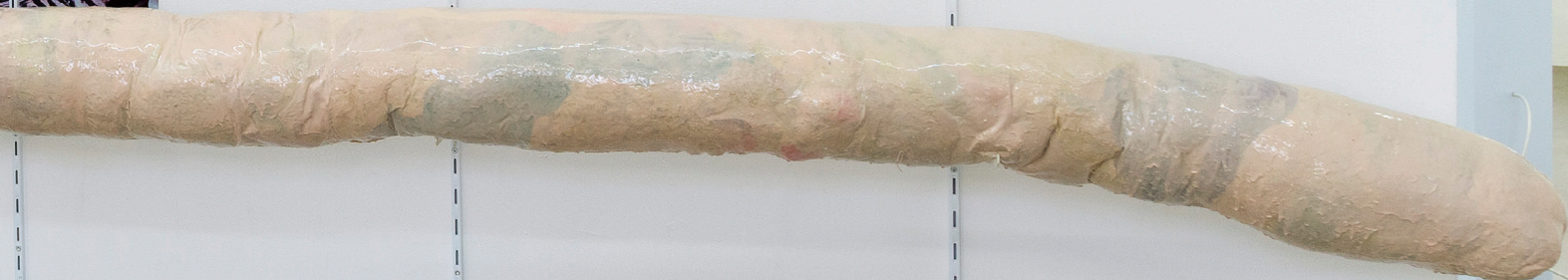
Kothe's artistic works are not easily classified. For example, his 'wall objects', as Kothe often describes them, are characterized by the fact that they are both sculpture and image.

Jens Kothe works with a wide range of materials, ranging from wood, concrete, glass and tiles to silicone and textiles. Physical qualities of materials as well as the moods they evoke together play a special role in Kothe's work.

Kothe's use of upholstery suggests furniture and interior design, so that his objects build tension between functionality and material aesthetics. The situations and environments created by Kothe work intensely with questions of intuitive effect and perception, thereby creating associations that arise both at the level of the subject and the material. The work also activates a 'haptic look', encouraging the desire for a haptic experience through visibly tangible materiality.

His precision and clarity as well as the use of subdued colors and materials evoke something close and intimate. In doing so, they raise the topic of the private experience and point to something commonplace in everyday life - slightly distant and intimate at the same time. In a subtle way, the works thematize corporeality and pick up moments of the voyeuristic, for in most of the artist's works the body is present as a latent reference, as a fragment. The photographic elements in Kothe's work represent both (body) image and object itself (as in his work 'Entering the Plinth', for example) and therefore address the body not only through the mode of presentation, but also through a direct material-aesthetic approach.









JENS KOTHE

ELEMENT SYSTEM

Many call the process of globalization levelling. A mode in which universality between different cultures can arise – for instance in the form of a standardized measure. While the majority of the world's population oriented themselves to their own, national and regional units of measurement until the end of the 18th century, this soon changed with the definition of the meter and thus had a lasting influence on the world trade. In the middle of the French Revolution, astronomers Jean Delambre and Pierre Méchain were therefore sent out to measure the earth and to derive a new unit of measurement from the data: exactly the ten millionth part between the North Pole and the equator was to define the meter. Shortly after the meter was introduced as an international measure of length, however, it turned out that the astronomers had made a mistake in their calculations. They missed the exact distance between the equator and the North Pole by 0.2 millimetres. It is therefore hardly surprising that architect Le Corbusier considered the meter unsuitable and instead developed his own unit of measurement, namely the Modulor. While he accused the meter of arbitrariness, the Modulor was supposed to be oriented towards human proportions and thus have a decisive influence on the architecture and cities in which we live.

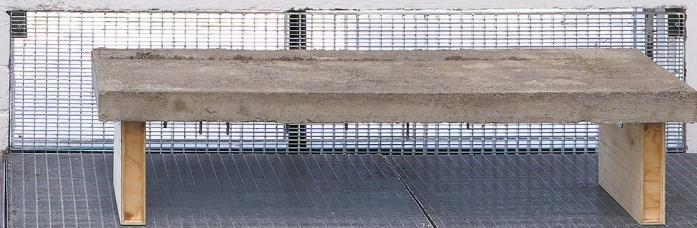
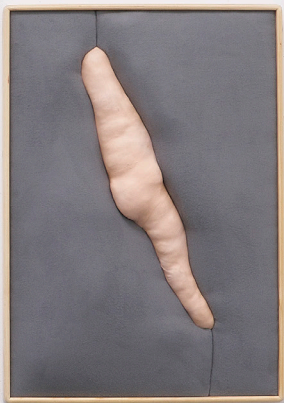
Jens Kothe's exhibition 'Element System' at Berthold Pott Gallery is characterized exactly by this duality between body and norm. Although there is no attempt to establish a unit of measurement, Kothe has developed a modular system for the exhibition that could very well function as such. O.T. Elemsys I (2019) consists of twelve units of light nettle fabric, each with the same volume. In the gallery, the individual modules are stacked on top of each other using a suspension device, so their horizontal orientation stretches into the vertical and is thus reminiscent of panels. While this arrangement refers to the spatial dimensions of the gallery space, the installation as such is versatile. The system on which this work is based recalls modular architectural construction methods, which were mainly used in 20th century social housing models due to their flexibility and efficiency. The best-known example leads back to Le Corbusier with the Unité d'Habitation, which he gave in series production for several major European cities. But Le Corbusier's strict systematic approach is not necessarily the common denominator with Kothe's works – it is rather the reference to the human body.

With his interior-like works, Kothe constantly triggers a tactile desire in the viewer. Stronger than in Elemsys I, this can be seen in the benches that occupy the entire exhibition space. But in contrast to the original from the museum, which invites the viewer to rest, benches (2019) rejects the tired body. It may only be explored with the eyes. Heavy mortar seats, in which cut-outs of varying sizes have been made, weigh on two delicate wooden legs. Kothe has fitted various upholstered latex forms into these, recalling enlargements of skin particles or even entire skin flaps. While the clear visual reference to the human body is captivating here, the integrated cotton wool and artificial furs in bench IV (2019) provoke an even stronger desire for a tactile experience. In addition, a yellow net is stretched over the cotton padding. Similar to a mesh shirt, which emphasizes the muscles of the torso instead of concealing them, the use of the mesh structure here also enforces the volume of the sculpture.

It is precisely this combination of different material qualities that creates a tension in "Element System" which oscillates between hardness and softness, between the organic and the industrial, locating the human body in the midst of these contrasts. But this state also bears the potential to be more than the struggle between these two opposing forces: "Consider: There is no division of humanity into strong and weak halves, protective/protected, dominant/submissive, owner/chattel, active/passive. In fact, the whole tendency to dualism that pervades human thinking may be found to be lessened, changed."¹ Ursula Le Guin proposes a complete abolition of man-made dualisms, and perhaps this is what it takes to really know what the measure and shape of things are. Until then, Jens Kothe has developed a practice that probably comes closest to Justus Köhncke's idea of 'soft fences': a levelling of antagonisms.











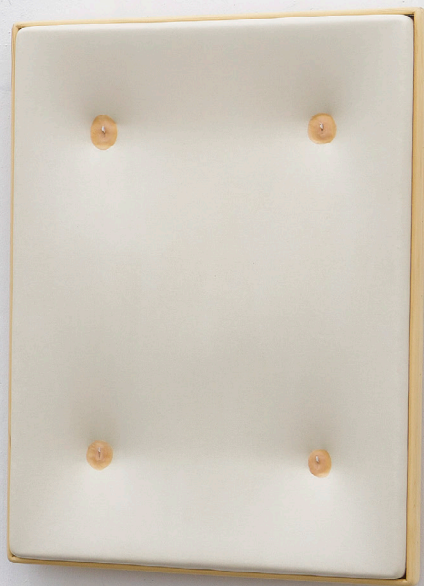
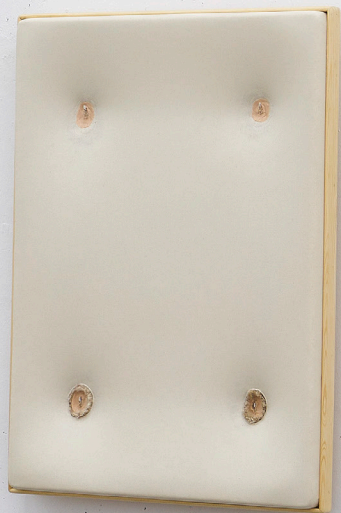


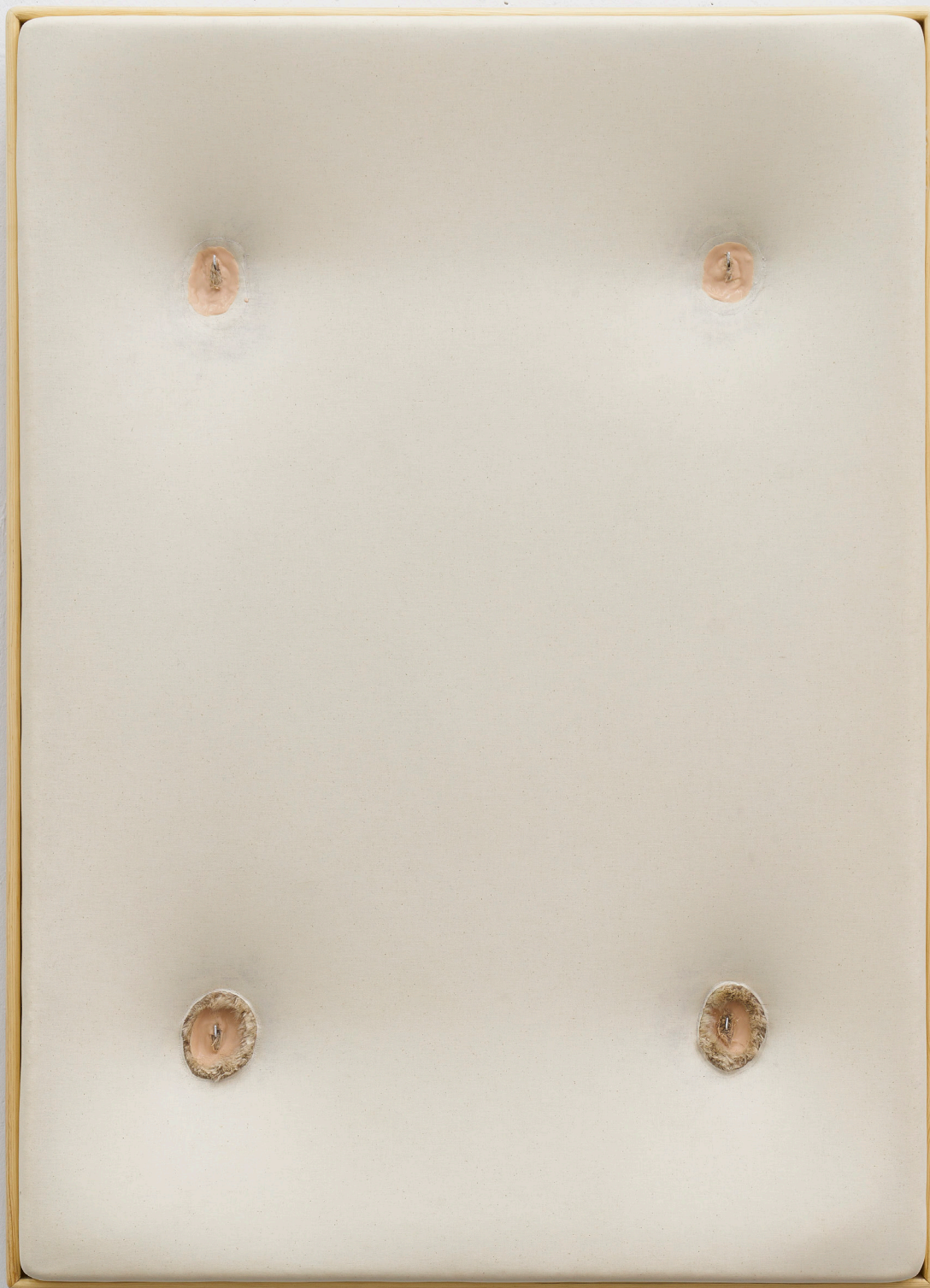




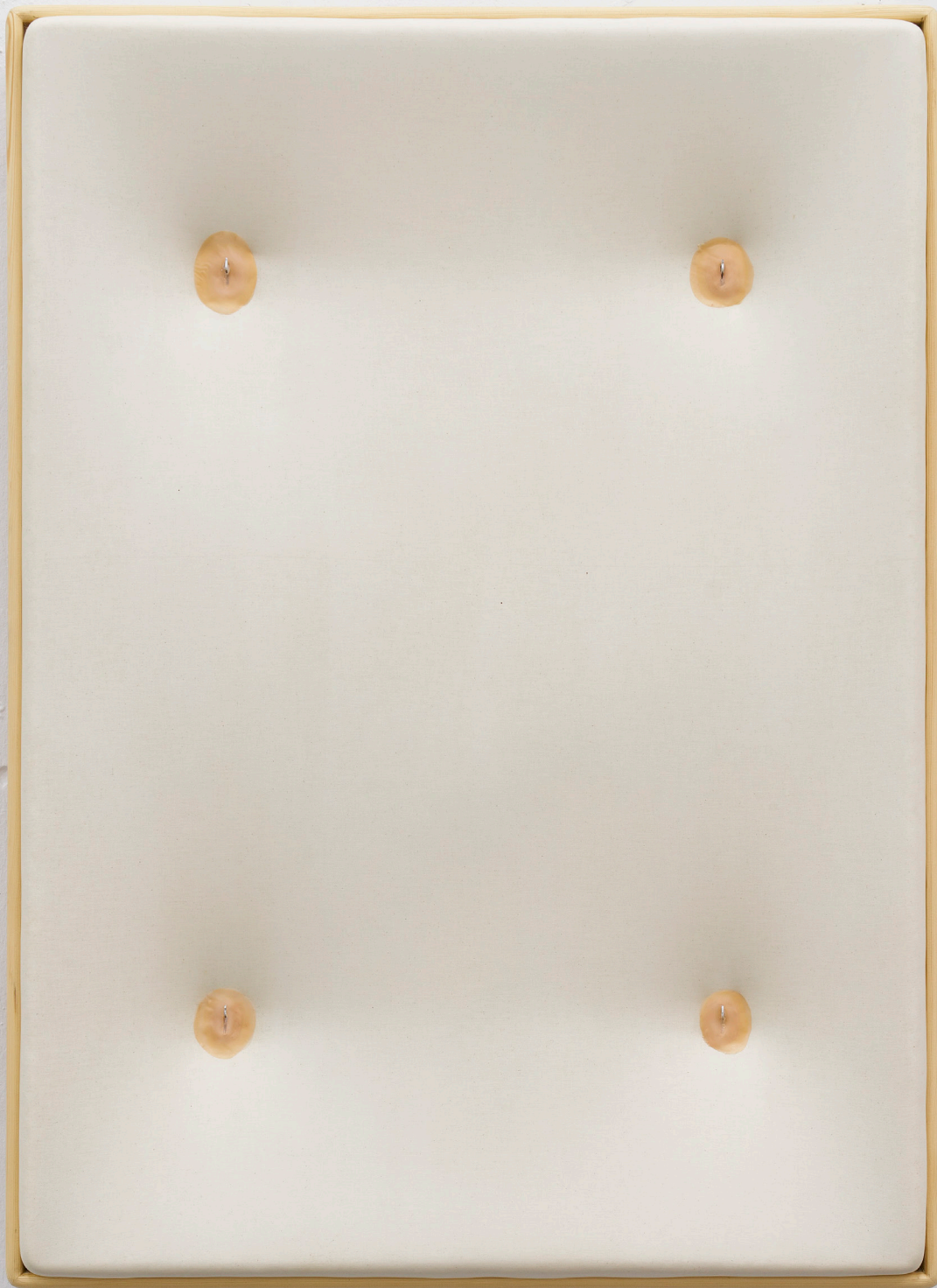


























01-03 *animal beauty*, 2020
wood: Kiefer and Ulme, plywood, cotton, staples, foam, wadding,
acryl, glue, screws, textile, tubes, resin,
silicon, pigments, Element System, Inkjet Print, paste

490 x 200 x 80 cm // Canapé 200 x 110 x 75 cm
Print 121 x 98 cm

part of *drink liquid*
at Kunsthaus Essen, Germany

- 04 *O.T./ wall object XXV.I - IV*, 2019
cushion, upholstery, construction wood, screws, staples,
fabric, silicon
25 x 30 x 8 cm

- 05 *jacked crease of an elbow completely covered with latex III*, 2019
silicon, latex, molton, construction wood, screws, staples,
80 x 68 x 8 cm

- 06 *O.T. / Elemsys I*, 2019
cushion, fabric, wood construction, transparent varnish, silicon,
latex,
synthetic resin, steel, nails, screws, staples, full dimension with
12 panels:
355 x 252 x 20 cm
(panel combination from 2 pieces upwards possible)

- 07 *O.T. / Elemsys IV*, 2019
cushion, fabric, wood construction, transparent
varnish, silicon, latex,
synthetic resin, steel, nails, screws, staples,
125 x 100 x 10 cm

- 08 *O.T. / Elemsys III*, 2019
cushion, fabric, wood construction, transparent
varnish, silicon, latex,
synthetic resin, steel, nails, screws, staples,
125 x 100 x 10 cm

- 09 *O.T. bench II (bruised membranes in mortar)*, 2019
mortar, steel, wood construction
151 x 55 x 48 cm

- 10 *O.T. bench II (bruised membranes in mortar)*, 2019
mortar, steel, wood construction
151 x 55 x 48 cm

- 11 *O.T. bench I (bruised membranes in mortar)*, 2019
mortar, steel, net fabric, rabbit fur imitation,
construction wood, screws, staples,
151 x 55 x 48 cm

ELEMENT SYSTEM, 2019
solo exhibition at Berthold Pott, Cologne