VAN DER GRINTEN GALERIE



Rikako Kawauchi

„Food, animals, organs, plants, bodies etc, everything outside me is everywhere in the air. I breathe them in, I breathe them out"

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The first solo show of Japanese artist Rikako Kawauchi at the Van der Grinten Galerie in 2022 was titled simply *'Lines'*. This unreservedly handed the viewer the key to reading the entire work group, invoking the red thread that was clearly visible in her drawings (pencil and aquarelle) as well as the three-dimensional pieces (wire coated with resin). The power of the line appeared in both the small format drawings and the large ones, over three meters tall, as an immediate, still pulsating extension of the physical energy that the artist felt and experienced during the actual creative act. The line as evidence of the existence of the body; the line as the end result: the body as the essential anchor of Kawauchi's artistic practice and reflection, in both formal and philosophical regard. In her own words: *"I believe that the line truly expresses the state of a person's body. As the condition of my own body is vague and uncertain, however, I have the sense that the line fixes my body and thoughts,*

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which are in flux, to a single point. Later, when I look at these things that have been fixed in this way, I feel that I am able to understand a little better how my own body and thoughts were at that time."

This time, for her second exhibition at our gallery, Kawauchi has chosen a very long title, a quote that paves the way for a thematic and conceptual reading of the works: *"Food, animals, organs, plants, bodies, etc.: everything outside me is everywhere in the air. I breathe them in, I breathe them out."* We are now showing her oil paintings for the first time, in tandem with a selection of the latest drawings on paper. In contrast to the clear, light and airy drawings, in which the forms float and breath in the often empty space of the pristine paper, Kawauchi's oil paintings display a strong physical presence: in the thick, fresh layers of colorful material that form the weighty, abstract foundation, the palette knife is used to carve out motives that nevertheless transport the same somatic energy as the thin, minimalistic lines drawn on paper. In this connection, Mika Kuraya, Director of the Yokohama Museum of Art, has this to say: *"… no matter what kind of drawing material is used to draw the lines on the ground, they will inevitably inscribe traces of the artist's body. In order to discover a sense of her own externalized body, however, Kawauchi demands that the traces of her body leave a stronger mark in the pictorial surface."*

The visual language found in the paintings picks up on many elements that the viewer can recognize from the drawings. However, we are also confronted with complex combinations in which a more pronounced blending of the elements of food, animals, human organs appears in more or less chaotic compositions. Here we find ourselves at the heart of the matters that occupy the artist: the interaction between the external and internal aspects of the body; the physiological means of ingestion and intake (eating, breathing) of the world that surrounds our "meat suit"; and the act of transformation and return (of bodily substances and energy). The ambiguity and blending of the motifs can be read as the representation of one specific thing (an organ) or another (plant). The symbolic variability and obsessive recurrence of these motifs echo, among other things, the mythology of certain ancient cultures, as interpreted by the great structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, whom Kawauchi cites emphatically as an influence for her work, for example in an interview with Mika Kuraya: "According to Lévi-Strauss, South-American and South African mythology are built on a certain consistency of hidden messages. The origins of human culture, moreover, are based on food and activities related to the body, such as digestion and excretion. This analysis resonated with my own thinking about food and the body.

Furthermore, Lévi-Strauss analyzes all kinds of motifs in mythology, such as tigers, palm trees, and other plants and animals, seeing them as repositories of abstract meanings and metaphores.”