

# Building Modern Bodies: The Art of Bodybuilding

21.11.2015–07.02.2016

This is not an art exhibition. It is an exhibition that deals with art indirectly—specifically, with the transformation of the human body into a work of art in bodybuilding. Since the late 19th century, bodybuilding has represented the artistic and aesthetic face of modern body culture. Since bodybuilders do not strive to achieve strength in itself, but the image of strength, pictures play an important role in their craft. By forming their bodies as sculptors once did with blocks of marble, they give the modern ideal of self-optimization a concrete form: sculpo, ergo sum. As self-sculptures, they not only embody the artist and the artwork in one, but also museums and restorers. While sports and fitness have no place in an art museum, bodybuilding is predestined for this place.

The wall facing the visitor features some of the originators of modern-day bodybuilding. For instance, there is the gymnastics movement of the early 19th century around Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, known as the father of gymnastics. [4] This school advocated an ideologically instrumental, functional understanding of the body: it sought to harden German culture like a muscle. Curiously, elements from this era have come back into fashion today: people exercise with full beards like Jahn's, functionality takes precedence over aesthetic beauty, and long-forgotten exercises are being integrated into "functional training." Thus, history may well become the future. The gymnastics movement was joined by a more individualistic, liberal, aestheticist, and consumerist body culture with athletes such as Eugen Sandow [6, 8] and Bernarr MacFadden [3, 8] around 1900, along with obscure offshoots such as the in some cases National-Socialist nudists and sun-worshippers around Hans Surén [19, 7, 8] as well as various strident variety showmen. [7] The bodybuilding trend attracted an increasing amount of attention—and even unmistakably influenced Sascha Schneider's bizarre Karl May illustrations, in which the Native American hero Winnetou appears to have a gym membership. [5] Sandow, who lived in London, was instrumental in establishing bodybuilding as an art with his classicist-inspired posing cures. [6] With him, the aesthetics of strength emancipated itself from the show of strength and led into postmodern body culture.

To the right hand side, Ewa Kasperek highlights a high point of the latter with two video works (2015). Bodybuilding experienced a boom in the 1970s and '80s. Arnold Schwarzenegger [1, 9] and Lisa Lyon [10] attained global fame and emphasized the artistic aspects of bodybuilding in numerous statements. No wonder artists such as Andy Warhol were interested in these sculptors of the body. [1, 11] Kasperek's loops (2015) from the films *Pumping Iron I* (1977) and *Pumping Iron II* (1985), which made bodybuilding acceptable among intellectuals, showcase essential characteristics of the subculture, such as self-referentiality, seemingly endless repetitions, posing, and self-presentation. [9] Rico & Michael take a similar approach to Kasperek in their film *Total Body* (2010/2015): repetition and presentation, presentation and repetition. [2] The duo's photographs (2015), on the other hand, represent the culmination of the dissolution of traditional gender roles that began to emerge in *Pumping Iron I* and *II*: Hard-bodied women penetrated into the male domain of weightlifting without sacrificing their feminine attributes, while men cultivated monumental pectorals and a hairless bikini line. [13]

On the back wall, Kathy Acker's essay *Against Ordinary Language: The Language of the Body* (1992) shows that bodybuilding theories were not only developed by non-bodybuilders, but also by bodybuilders themselves. [15] Anke Haarmann's video essay on the Praxology of Bodybuilding (2000) also attests to bodybuilders' ability of self-reflection. [20] Lea Rasovszky's drawings (2012–2014), by contrast, demonstrate a new uneasiness in 21st-century body culture. [14] While bodybuilding was successful in the pop culture of the post-war period as an amusing spectacle of high and low in line with Leslie A. Fiedler's phrase "Cross the Border, Close the Gap," today it tends to be pathologized and exoticized. The focus is on the eerie, monstrous aspects. Muscle dysmorphia, narcissism, and doping dominate the discourse. With her works, Rasovszky makes this change tangible—and thus also the fossilization of pop culture in general.

## Opening Hours

Tue / Wed / Fri 11 am–6 pm, Thu 11 am–8 pm, Sat / Sun 10 am–5 pm, Mon closed

Please also consult the up-to-date information on our website [www.kunsthallezurich.ch](http://www.kunsthallezurich.ch)

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To the left, Martin Schoeller and Ana Hofmann show bodybuilding in a more neutral light. Schoeller portrays female hardcore bodybuilders in the same way as he does celebrities, businesspeople, and politicians. In his photographs (2007–2008) he shows them not as exotic freaks, but as extreme yet dignified contemporaries. [17] Hofmann's collaboration with the bodybuilder Toni Bellaroba resulted in two films that deal with the central importance of the mirror and diet in bodybuilding (2015). [18] The strict control and regulation of diet as well as the strict control and regulation of one's self-image can be seen as secularized forms of asceticism. The monastic ritual becomes The Holy Pump.

Speaking of which, visitors are welcome to use the weightlifting area in the middle of the room. Here, those who not only want to consume art, but to become a work of art themselves receive both the opportunity and the inspiration to do so.

—Jörg Scheller

## Theory & Programs

Art enlivened and enacted is crucial to Jörg Scheller's exhibition *Building Modern Bodies*. On the opening night, performances by professional bodybuilders give insight into their competitive posing. An evening of lectures by sport scholars and scientists as well as several private trainings with the curator seek to explore the physical potencies at stake. Another sports highlight are regular yoga classes in the exhibition. A series of guided tours emphasizes the thematic intersections of this exhibition with the two parallel projects, led for adults by the respective producers of the shows, and for families and school classes by our new team of art educators.

### Performance

With Toni Bellaroba, Franziska Leuthold, and Florian Wolf (Bodybuilder)

- Fri, 20.11., 7:30-8:00pm

Family Workshop

With Lorenz Hegi and Seline Fülcher (Art Educators)

- Sun, 29.11., 3:00-5:00pm (in German)

### Lectures

With Beat Geser (President of the Swiss Bodybuilding and Fitness Association) and guests from various fields of science

- Sat, 16.01., 3:00-4:30pm (in German)

### Guided tours

With Daniel Baumann (Director Kunsthalle Zürich), Flora Klein (Artist, Berlin), and Jörg Scheller (Curator of the exhibition), followed by private trainings with Jörg Scheller

- Thu, 10.12., 6:30-7:30pm (in German)

With Daniel Baumann, Jan Hofer (Artist, Zurich), and Jörg Scheller, followed by private trainings with Jörg Scheller

- Sun, 13.12., 3:00-4:00pm (in German)

With Daniel Baumann, Flora Klein, and Jörg Scheller, followed by Pop Up Yoga

- Thu, 07.01., 6:30-7:30pm (in German)

Free entry to all events.

### Workshops for school classes

With Lorenz Hegi and Seline Fülcher (Art Educators), 90 min.,  
booking on request: [kids@kunsthallezurich.ch](mailto:kids@kunsthallezurich.ch)

With kids and teens we explore the exhibition playfully. Please provide your 2-3 preferred dates, the name of the school, the size of your group, and your mobile number for the booking.

We are happy to arrange special guided tour and workshop requests, also in English:  
[info@kunsthallezurich.ch](mailto:info@kunsthallezurich.ch).

### Pop Up Yoga

With Deddou Burkhard

- Wed 16.12., 7:00-8:30pm Magical Yoga Alchemy Sex Dust (Workshop: POP UP YOGA & biomazing.ch), CHF 25
- Thu 07.01., 8:00-9:30pm Beginner Yoga, CHF 25
- Tue 12.01., 7:00-9:00pm Beginner Yoga, CHF 35
- Tue 26.01., 7:00-9:00pm Advanced Yoga, CHF 35
- Tue 02.02., 7:00-8:30pm Friend Yoga, CHF 25