

# TIES AND KNOTS AND BANDAGES

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Céline Ducrot, Vanessa Safavi, Franziska Koch

*Taking care of others. Taking care of oneself.*

*Alone. Together. Together alone.*

*Part of a whole.*

The notion of “care” in its individual and collective function has re-manifested in the wake of recent sanitary, economic, and social crises. Rooted in many ancient cultures – from medicinal gardens, hammams to Eastern movements that seek deeper connections between the body and mind – the rituals that are now referred to as practices of “self-care” and “self-improvement” have become symbols of commodity capitalism. The industrial revolution of the 19th century has among others engendered the shift towards individualism. Looking after oneself became a mandatory duty in Western societies – covering up the pains of 24h neoliberal systems with foundation and rouge. Accelerated by the rise of media and popular culture as well as technological progress, wellness and leisure cultures have expanded into states of commodity since the 50s. Today, these are still perceived as signs of economic, social, and cultural sophistication, and have become the reflections of a fractured and unequal society.

Therefore, in the context of overproduction, anxiety, burn-outs, saturation, the demand for more *self-care* but also *collective care* have increased. Author Audre Lorde suggests in her text “A Burst of Light”, “*caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it’s self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare*”. Lorde makes the distinction between the individualisation of care as an attribute to one’s personal well-being, and care as a means of survival, a practice of deeper introspection for the sake of mutuality and reciprocity. The latter acts on a more abstract level, it is a tool of knowledge, necessary to overcome injustice and position oneself in the framework of communal effort. This dichotomy lies at the core of the exhibition TIES AND KNOTS AND BANDAGES.

Céline Ducrot uses the unforgivingly sharp yet misty technique of airbrushing to create worlds where *safe space* prevails. Seemingly common exchanges between anonymous bodies and ghosts inhabit her canvases. They perform speculative rituals in intimate settings, somewhere safe from the exterior, where the guard is down, powerful in their defencelessness, naked. Surfacing out of layers of protection, free of their metal armours, the power of these bodies lies not in their strength but in their fragility, accepting vulnerability.

Being the visible part of the body, the skin serves more than just as an envelope. It is a site of negotiation between one's internal self and all that which is external. It is the place where identity is defined. An envelope, a shield and a vessel, a permeating layer, engaging and responding. In her “Cyborg Manifesto”, Donna Haraway asks: “Why should our bodies end at the skin?” which inherently suggests a reality of a self beyond the armour, a collective body. As opposed to an accumulation of individual identities, Céline Ducrot creates a symbiotic

structure that emerges from the multiplicity of identities that come together to shape a collective way of experiencing the world. Out of the mist, bodies bend towards each other in search of solace and compassion. Their movements, stopped in time, suggest moments of caring encounters that build a common resilience. The world that Céline Ducrot builds suggests that self-care can also be a social practice, or simply a state of mind, as opposed to an instrument of oppression.

The greasy, opaque, and shiny surface of Vanessa Safavi's sculptures evokes a sense of attraction. The new trio of sculptures from the VACUUM Series sits in space like unidentifiable domestic objects. Made of silicone, the soft sculptures are reminiscent of sex toys or vacuum cleaner design prototypes. Taking inspiration from sci-fi films and 60s Italian design, Vanessa Safavi digs into the intersections of design, bodies, and materiality. The artist's work deals with the social and cultural constructs of different materialities but also their historical associations and the bond they create with one's body. The elastic, wobbly and carnal aspect of the sculptures leaves the viewers to speculate on their meanings and functions.

In HOLDING SUBSTITUTE the same material twists and wraps around a steel bar. The straps hold the folds together, tight and attached, yet loose. An erotic connotation that opens the idea of pleasure and self-pleasure, among others. In some S&M practices, the sexual fetish and sense of pleasure are found among the ties, the bondages that squeeze and constrain the body until final release. Sensual, sticky, humid. A libidinal appeal to the texture rises in the rubber materials.

After the silicone: the latex – a natural or artificial polymer material, known for its elongation and resistant abilities and suggested symbolism. In the video VELVET, a line of production for latex gloves is featured. The factory called PRIMUS GLOVES in India stages the ambiguities of a globalised system of production and high-end mechanical technologies. Oscillating between slowness, repetition and obsession, the video seems to point to the tension between endless cyclic movements and the hand as a human feature becoming the slave of the machine. Vanessa Safavi is interested in the perpetual optimisation of technologies and how these shape our lives.

Franziska Koch's 4-channel sound composition introduces a socially engaged and relational practice of listening. Conceived as a love letter to her best friend, the composition insists on a language of care. It is the result of a practice that Franziska Koch made for herself and her friend to come together and quiet down from hyper-productivity and share slow moments of non-verbal comfort and tenderness. It became a space of one activity: making ceramic flutes. A space also devoted to understanding a material beyond one's complete control; learning from YouTube tutorials; moulding the clay; giving form to an instrument and wondering how it would sound. The flute-based composition is inspired by the soundtrack of the Chinese TV show "Word of Honor", in which the protagonist plays the flute to heal, strengthen and comfort his sick lover. Referring to a quote from the author bell hooks that suggests "communities of care are sustained by rituals of regard" Franziska Koch invites visitors to tune in, not to empathise, but to be present and engage in an emotional and political act.

Care as an antidote to violence. Seen as an act of reciprocity and a practice of introspection, care enables ways to challenge the dictatorship of viral capitalism ruled by growth through destruction, productivity through extraction, progress through extinction, and profit through exhaustion. It frees up possibilities for collectively imagining, practising, feeling, thinking, and dreaming of modes of coexistence.

Between tension and relaxation, TIES AND KNOTS AND BANDAGES reflects upon the questions of individual and collective well-being, projecting the body as a container for personal histories, physical or emotional trauma, and cultural heritage.

Take care.

– Text by Kristina Grigorjeva and Camille Regli

**Céline Ducrot** (1992, lives and works in Biel/Bienne) is a multidisciplinary artist working at the intersection of visual art and illustration. She mostly works with airbrush - a technique that requires no direct contact between the brush and the paper or wood surface, giving a dense velvety texture and a mysterious almost digital dimension. In her work, Céline deals with the topics of well-being, technologies of the self, tension, and release. Her figures often inhabit landscapes of relaxation, where rituals, personal and collective intimacy unveil. Céline graduated from the Academy of visual arts in Leipzig and has exhibited among others in Thun, Basel, Prague, and Biel/Bienne. As an illustrator she has worked for various publications and institutions such as die Zeit, Various Artists Magazine, Pro Helvetia and WOZ. Her work has been awarded at the Swiss Design Awards 2018 and Prix Anderfuhren 2018 and was nominated for the Swiss Design Award in 2022.

In her work, **Vanessa Safavi** (1980, lives and works in Berlin and Fribourg) refers to the human body with lyricism, inventing new forms with unorthodox techniques. She questions the sculptural possibilities of representing the body today and questions our relationship to gender, illness and sexuality. The artist works with a variety of materials with a predominance for all types of rubber, often alluding to post-minimalist practices. She also pays tribute to cultural references from Antiquity and other cultural heritages. Using conceptual systems of language and personal narratives, Safavi explores and inquires about the contemporary identity of the body in relation to the constant optimization of technologies and their cultural impacts in our hyper-organized society. Safavi studied at HEAD-Geneva and ECAL in Lausanne. Her exhibitions include the Fondation d'Entreprise Ricard in Paris and FRI-ART Kunsthalle in 2019, Fürstenbergischen Sammlungen Donaueschingen, The Breeder, Athens (2018), ChertLüdde, Berlin (2017), Kunstverein Grafschaft, Bentheim (2016), MOTINTERNATIONAL, Brussels (2015), Kunsthalle São Paulo, Sao Paulo (2014).

**Franziska Koch** (1966, lives and works in Zurich) is an artist, sound practitioner, teacher and event organizer. She is interested in multi-layered, interwoven practices, theories, methods, co-existences and technologies. Her artistic practices include experimental exhibition formats, sound performances, various forms of improvisations, experimental DJ sets, spatial narratives and listening workshops based on relational and collective experiences. She is also known as No I Don't and performs and releases in various collaborations. She is co-founder of the sound platform OOR (<https://oor-rec.ch/archive/>). Together with Aio Frei and Ahmet Köken, they form the artistic-curatorial team of OOR Saloon and share the desire to live experimental sound practices politically, queerly and emotionally. She teaches in BA Fine Arts at the ZHdK.