

## HEIDI BUCHER

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Lunn reviews an exhibit of Heidi Bucher at Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst in Zurich.

ZURICH

HEIDI BUCHER

MIGROS MUSEUM FÜR GEGENWARTSKUNST

This retrospective was not only one of the most compelling exhibitions at the Migros under the directorship of Heike Munder but also a welcome surprise among the more predictable names showing at one museum after another. Unlike other episodes in Munder's ongoing reexamination of the art of the '70s, it introduced a body of work that was largely ignored at the time. Although the short period that Bucher lived in California in the early '70s led to exhibitions at, for example, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, her soft sculptures and process-based practice that recall the work of other pioneering women artists-Eva Hesse, Rebecca Horn, and Ana Mendieta-never found the same critical acclaim when Bucher returned to her native Switzerland.

Here, the sensitive and elegant installation underlined Bucher's ability to make poetry from the everyday by conveying the experience of being inside a human body, first through clothing pieces, then through the representation and transformation of architectural space. A film (shown on DVD) documenting the 1971 performance *Bodyshells* introduced the playfulness that ran through Bucher's subsequent explorations of the boundaries between the individual body and its surroundings: Large, bell-shaped foam sculptures on Venice Beach forced the performers to hop and circle around each other in slow motion. The enormous *Dragonfly Costume*, 1976, worn by Bucher in a photograph, was exhibited alongside a series of framed clothes from the mid-'70s. Dipped in milky liquid latex, the old underwear, dresses, and aprons were transformed into smooth, flat surfaces, the fixative coming to resemble a second skin as it aged.

Recalling Brazilian artist Lygia Clark's references in the '70s to architectural structures as a body, a kind of sensory shelter, the clothing pieces evolved into a process-which Bucher

continued to develop from the late '70s until her death in 1993-of recording interior spaces. Using houses familiar to her, she applied first fabric and then latex to furniture, windows, doors,

floors, and finally whole rooms, peeling the casts away as single objects. The door handle, stair rail, and window shown in the exhibition preserved traces of the past, the creased surface of the latex resembling aged, sloughed-off flesh. At the same time the iridescent mother-of-pearl pigment that Bucher rubbed into these smaller skinings gave them a purplish or silvery sheen that metamorphosed solid, domestic detail into the forms and tones of the shells and fish scales that inspired the tiny collages she made in the mid-'50s.

It was in the casting of entire rooms, shown suspended and free to tremble gently, that Bucher finally achieved an elastic three-dimensionality. Like the skinings of floors that contained traces of the original wood, plaster, and even newspaper fragments, *Flying Skinroom* (Ahnenhaus), 1980-82, appropriated the forms of the tiled oven, paneling, and grand windows of the room while materializing the fragility of memory. A crucial element of the exhibition was a series of black-and-white photographs documenting Bucher's extraordinary method, showing the moment when the latex imprints were torn free from the architecture. The tension inherent in the performative process was communicated in the images of the artist winding one skin around her own body until she disappeared into it and in another in which she had arranged for *Flying Skinroom* to be flown through the air suspended, weightless at last, from a crane.

-Felicity Lunn