... as the space remembered its softness

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gabi schillig

exhibition, june 20 - 29, 2025
curated by irina ilieva

aquabitArt gallery, auguststrasse 35, 10119 berlin-mitte

Kay von Keitz
Soft Modernism

Spaceflight– or, to be more precise, "**space exploration**," to make it clear that we are not talking about just any space, but the **infinite vastness of the universe** – had a significant influence on the architectural avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s. Because the view of our planet from above that had become possible evoked correspondingly big questions: **What architecture should people use to react appropriately to the relativization of our home planet**, which, with its **fragile living conditions** in the midst of a **space continuum** that is not only deadly for us but also unimaginably vast, is a truly mysterious place? Must our constructed habitats, whether considered individually or in the form of urban conurbations, not be developed much more than in the past into self-sufficient worlds of their own?

Even though the **tent** is probably the oldest human dwelling after the cave and thus represents the earliest form of architecture, ideas of high-culture buildings have always been associated with static solidity. The fascinating architectural visions of Étienne-Louis Boullée already expanded conventional notions of building dimensions into the megalomaniacal in the 18th century, so that even in his work, interiors could be perceived as enclosed outdoor spaces due to their sheer size. However, even he used the aesthetics and formal language of stone classicism typical of his time for his fantastical designs. The **fluid and flexible** had yet to be discovered or rediscovered as a possible **architectural state of aggregation**. This required a **new view of nature**, especially of the earth itself as an atmospherically encased planet, and perhaps also the invention of the space suit for cosmonauts and astronauts, because the **"space exploration suit"** (as it should actually be called) is ultimately the smallest and most **body-hugging survival habitation** that exists for humans. Only from this perspective does the popular metaphor of architecture as a "third skin" for humans seem truly apt and plausible—and like a sober, modern replacement for traditional images that were historically situated between "my home is my castle" and "mother of the arts," i.e., between defensively stable and artistically supportive. **Mother architecture**, which could elevate us and **be sublime in itself**, now establishes an associative link to the **"oceanic feeling" of interconnectedness and universality in a kind of womb analogy. Floor, wall, and ceiling**, the structural equivalents of orthogonal three-dimensionality, are transformed into an **amorphous shell,** and the enclosed space becomes volume. Could it be that the spirit of modernism is materialized less in a seemingly unembellished rationalism of steel, glass, and concrete, and rather in a **new elastic body orientation**? Is modernism, in its true essence, not hard and constant, but **soft, changeable, and adaptable**, and therefore **incapable of being permanent**, let alone classic?

We are familiar with this modernity, which sees itself as fundamentally futuristic, from the decades after the Second World War, which in art and architecture is often referred to as the Second Modernity, with **avant-garde and experimental positions** that reached their peak in **"organic" architectures, tent-like (!) megastructures, inflatable halls, endlessly combinable lightweight modules, body-related**

sculptures and installations, or art objects made of textiles, plastics, and biomaterials. The **extension of the body**, the **connection between the human body and space**, the f**ree formation of space**, and the question of the **separation or inseparability of inside and outside** are central themes here. Even if it is the constitutive and apparently evolutionary perception of **human beings that they are only seemingly clearly separated from the world** around them. However, the fact that **we are existentially connected to this surrounding world** in every respect and are in constant interaction with it, that we continuously absorb and excrete, and that even **our skin not only serves as a separating boundary of the body** but is also a **permeable organ covering the entire body**, repeatedly slips out of our consciousness despite its self-evidence. The continuation of a **"soft modernity"** ensures that the old insight that **"everything is connected to everything"** continues to this day to lead to new reactions, creations, and **forms of artistic expression**.

This is also evidenced by the studies and works of **Gabi Schillig,** who is continuously working on researching **spatial perception and spatial creation**. She consistently pursues the establishment of an **expanded concept of architecture in the spirit of "soft modernity"**, which defines and interprets **the architectural not through images and forms, but through the human body and its sensory impressions and movements**. It is remarkable that she has developed an artistic language that can be described as lyrical, and this should also inspire our reflection on the diverse methods of gaining knowledge.

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Kay von Keitz studied cultural studies and aesthetic practice at the University of Hildesheim. He has lived in Cologne since 1993 and works in the fields of art, architecture, and urbanism as a freelance author, editor, and curator. He conceives artistic projects, art walks, and competitions and is invited as a speaker, panelist, and jury member. From 2014 to 2024, he was chairman of the Art Advisory Board of the City of Cologne, which advises politicians and administrators on all matters relating to art in public spaces. He is currently working in Cologne as curator of the "Panorama Waidmarkt" project by the Rotterdam artist group Observatorium, among other things

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opening + performance
yui kawaguchi / **fri, june 20, 2025, 19h-22h**

finissage + artist talk
topologies of softness / **sat, june 28 2025, 18h**

the exhibition is part of WIA festivals.
→ wia-festival.de

opening hours:
tuesday - saturday, 12-20h
sunday, 14-16h and by appointment

→ art.aquabit.com
→ gabischillig.de

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