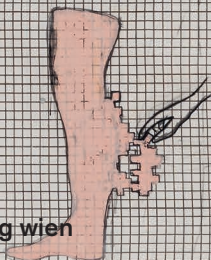
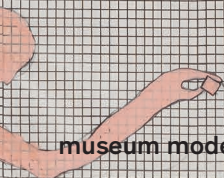
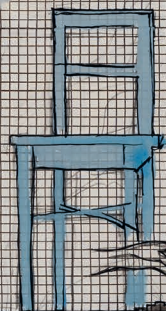
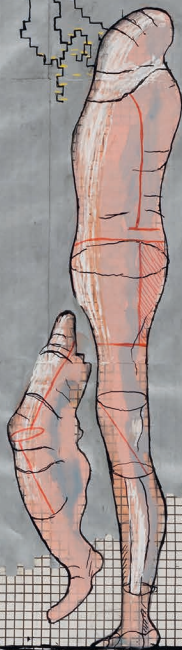
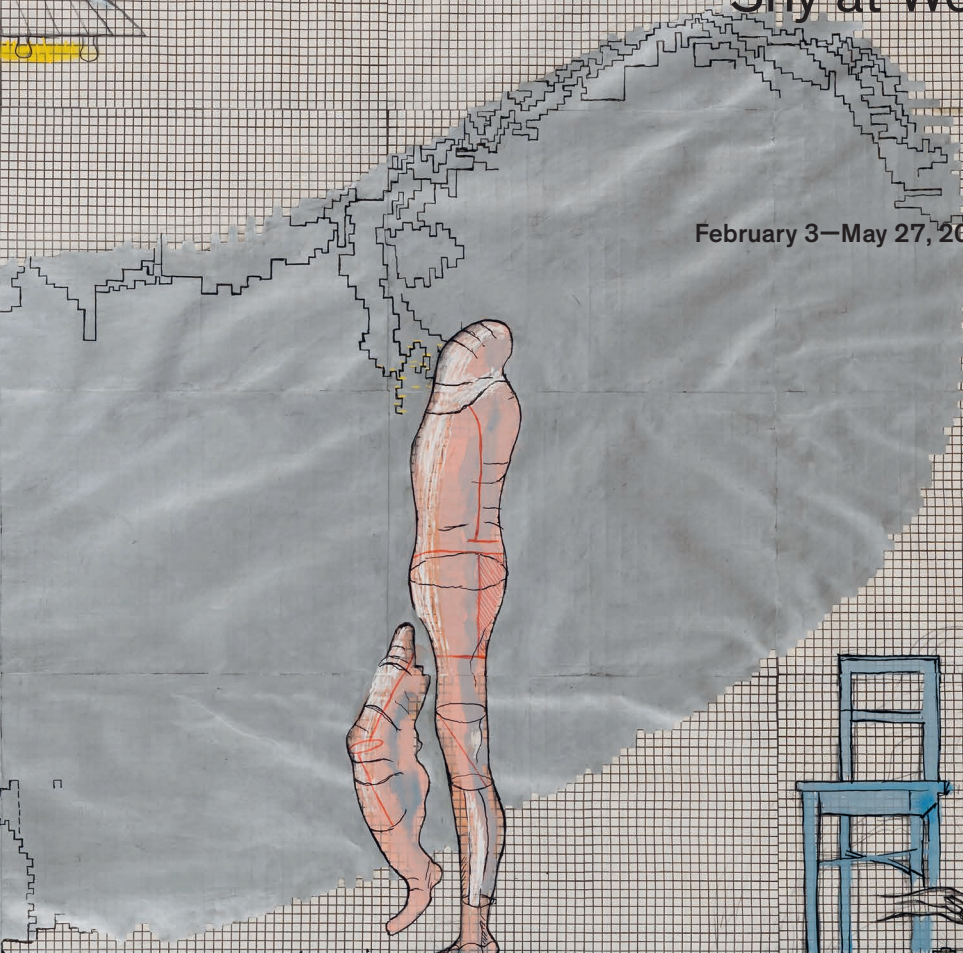


musical passage in human building structure from simple building into great architectural (Baukunst)

Bruno Gironcoli

Shy at Work

February 3—May 27, 2018



museum moderner kunst stiftung ludwig wien

mumok

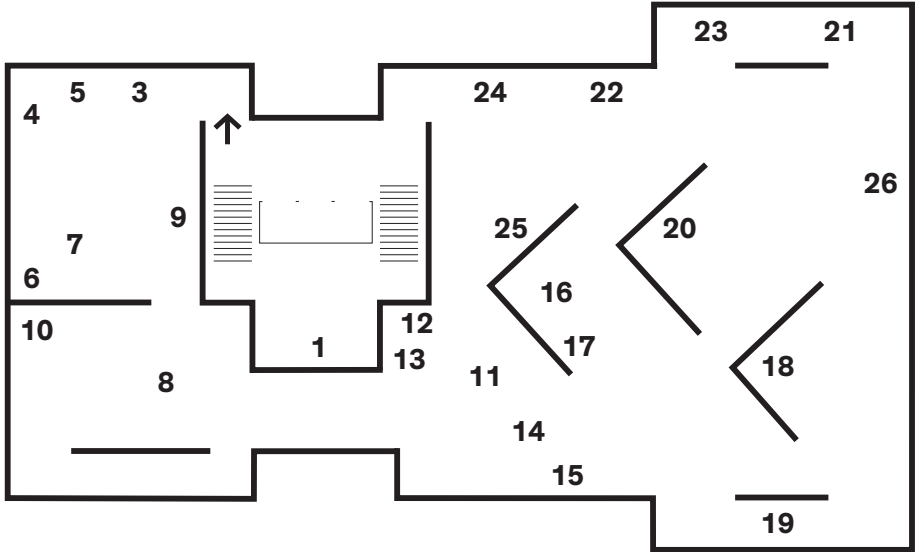
Introduction

Even before entering the exhibition area, you will have encountered a number of works by Bruno Gironcoli: relief-like objects are attached to the white cube in the mumok foyer, like giant metallic edelweiss flowers (*Ohne Titel [Untitled, 1994/1995]*) **(1)**. The sculpture in front of the entrance to the museum *Ohne Titel (Untitled, 1996)* **(2)** is also entirely covered by these flowers. Looking sumptuous thanks to their silver and gold coloring, at the same time the flowers suggest banal decorative elements from a kitsch Alpine commercial. As typically "Austrian" clichés, they take possession of the White Cube and disrupt the assertion of neutrality traditionally associated with the notion of an ideal museum space. The exhibition also opens with a floral motif. In Gironcoli's early ink drawing *Stilleben mit Tuch und Blume (Still Life with Cloth and Flower)* **(3)**, plant stems twist and turn like antennae or cables reaching outward. In their eccentricity the flowers, stylized into a form of artificial nature, seem to prefigure the artist's sculptural work.

Bruno Gironcoli (born in 1936 in Villach, died in 2010 in Vienna) is one of the most idiosyncratic artists of the 20th century. Trained as a gold-, silver- and coppersmith, he began his artistic career in 1957 by studying painting. He gained wider public recognition with the large-scale sculptures he began exhibiting in the mid-1980s, in which archetypes and trivial elements meld to form futuristic- conglomerates. Yet his career started much earlier, in the 1960s, when Gironcoli, aware of international trends in art, developed his own radical and independent perspective. Like other artists in those years, he was in search of forms of expression that raised the possibility of self-determined action in a post-fascist consumer and competition-driven society. By way of response, Gironcoli conceived of models and ideas for models – "surface[s] of considerations spread out in space" to cite the artist, that salvage from the fragments of alienated life the building blocks for possible future living.

This retrospective exhibition at mumok focuses for the first time on Gironcoli the painter and draughtsman. Works on paper from the 1960s to the 1990s enter into a dialog with outstanding examples of his wire sculptures, polyester objects, installations and monumental sculptures, also opening up new perspectives on Gironcoli's sculptural work.

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Gironcoli's sculptural practice was accompanied by continuous production of graphic work. Right from the outset, these often large-format works on paper were much more than simply blueprints for his sculptures. Instead, on paper the artist drove his ideas into dimensions that extended far beyond his work with tangible material. On paper, he animates his own sculptural oeuvre; all physical forms suspended, schematic figures, animals, symbols and apparatuses enter into hypothetical connections, combining to form surreal scenes. Gironcoli's works on paper are literally "surfaces of considerations" where he runs through sculptural possibilities that cannot function in physical space.

Looking at his graphic and sculptural work in conjunction reveals that Gironcoli negotiates much of his conception of sculpture – its thingness and materiality – on paper: this for example is where he reflects on the properties of various aggregate states and materials, or on the relationship between similar and dissimilar bodies, and how such bodies interact with the surrounding space. Graphic gestures of measuring and seizing began to play a role at an early stage, for example in Gironcoli's nude and portrait studies of his wife Christine **(4)**, which are influenced by Alberto Giacometti's graphic work. Gironcoli had become familiar with the French artist's oeuvre in 1960/61 during a stay in Paris, where he also encountered the writing of Jean-Paul Sartre and Samuel Beckett. The studies of his wife demonstrate Gironcoli's efforts to inscribe head and body within a kind of coordinate system by means of lines and hatching. He deliberately refrains in such works from elaborating plastic values or defining a volume. The whole is pushed into the background in favor of the components' workings. These drawings are transposed into sculptural form in wire objects, whose rigorous conception and perfectly executed craftsmanship evoke Gironcoli's training as a goldsmith. *Kopf (Head, 1960-64)* **(5)** is made up of wires stretched in parallel in a frame hung off the ceiling next to a wall, like a painting. Metal components and bent wires protruding into space form a profile that can be recognized only from the side. The linear structure captures the idea of a head, yet does not come together as a full illusionistic form from any vantage point.

Gironcoli, having decided that the wire sculptures were a dead-end, opted in 1963/64 to adopt the converse strategy: while the head form remains the point of departure, it is now transposed into emphatically closed, simple stereometric objects, which the artist finished off with a layer of metallic paint. The transition from linear to three-dimensional works is marked by a *Kopf (Head)* **(6)** from 1964, an object in bent cardboard, with the line of the eyes suggested by an oblique fold. After his initial experiments with metal and cardboard, Gironcoli discovered polyester – a material related to plastic, rejecting conservative sculptural means such as marble or bronze. Gironcoli was fascinated by the modern consumer world, by the forms and functions of the containers and packaging that lined the shelves of Vienna's department stores and discounters. Like Pop artists, he was intrigued by the world of merchandise with its deceptive and seductive maneuvers: mass-produced objects that assumed the appearance of precious treasures – just as Gironcoli's heads conceal their "material value."

Along with the allusion to packaging, the simplicity and archaic air of the *Köpfe (Heads)* from these years have a more than coincidental resemblance to African art; in the 1960s Gironcoli began collecting masks and figures from a wide range of sub-Saharan areas. These were later joined by Asian porcelain and cabinets. Gironcoli lived with his collection of non-European objects, adding to it constantly until his death; he also did not balk at reworking individual African figures by adding paint or plinth-like mountings.

The sketches and drawings he created in conjunction with the *Köpfe (Heads)* demonstrate how Gironcoli varied the basic form and continued to develop it. Growing more elongated and differentiated, the forms lengthen and bend, and, for all their universality, assert something akin to individuality. Although Gironcoli persisted in designating his early polyester works as “heads”, he soon began to make objects that evoke other associations too. *Figur, auf einem Punkt stehend (Stimmungsmacher) (Figure Standing on a Single Point (Mood-maker), 1965-69) (7)* plays with the image of a huge phallus – a motif deployed repeatedly by the artist. It is left up to the viewer to determine the mood conjured up by a man-sized phallus; in any event, Gironcoli equipped his sculpture with a tipping function (now no longer operable), turning the phallus into a toy – a “roly-poly”.

Allusions to furniture or vehicles also resonate in the objects. The wedge-shaped *Ohne Titel (Untitled, 1966) (8)* for example suggests a pram, a form that – in Gironcoli’s version – is simultaneously familiar and alien. The idea of usability, a physical “dialog with the thing” was enormously important for Gironcoli, as becomes apparent in particular in the large-format graphic works from those years. These, the artist explained, were intended “to convey to the viewer what I am doing; they are influenced by the advertising brochure (...). My notions of an alienated world view are presented to viewers as entertainment in the form of simple images. Objects appear there as if from the material world, yet their seeming agitation towards the exterior is turned inwards, is implied and condensed”. His graphic work *Entwurf zu einem verwendbaren Gegenstand (Design for a Useful Object, 1964) (9)* portrays an object with such agitation “turned inward”: A series of forms reminiscent of various body parts are “embossed” into a plane – like a mold in a construction set for a kind of human figure. Or are the cast parts already presented on a table? Gironcoli deliberately plays here with effects that oscillate between space and plane, between convex and concave. Cropped by the picture frame, we see a rear view of a viewer or potential user in a blue suit – an anonymous mediator between our three-dimensional world and Gironcoli’s planar pictorial universe. We shall encounter this figure repeatedly in the works on paper.

It is not only in the gold, silver and copper-colored polyester objects from the 1960s that seductive surfaces figure in Gironcoli’s art. In the works on paper depicting furniture-like objects – sometimes executed, sometimes unrealized – he focuses on decorative effects like dabs of color applied by brush and marbling, lacquered or glossy painted surfaces. Gironcoli appears to opt deliberately to over-exaggerate abstract painting, as practiced by artists such as Jackson Pollock, moving it into the realms of kitschy decoration. In adopting this approach however Gironcoli also picks up on his

own initial steps as a painter: "What I really wanted was to become a painter, and for years and years I worked hard ... in pursuit of that goal. But it was all in vain, and all that I accomplished was the routine part of what a painter does—the priming of canvases, in other words—a mode of working whose causality made perfectly good sense to me." Gironcoli's fascination with two-dimensional patterns is shot through with a contradiction – the desire to succumb to the seductive charms of decoration, pitted against a horror of its suffocating urge to expand. A work such as *Keil (Wedge, 1967)* **(10)**, in which arrow-like silver wedge forms strike lavishly marbled turquoise visualizes this ambivalence.

In the late 1960s Gironcoli began to develop a more spatial conception of his sculptures. Alongside the installation arrangements he started to produce, in 1968 when experimenting with sponge forms and plaster he also created his first full-body figure *Modell in Vitrine (Model in Showcase)* **(11)**, which he nicknamed "Murphy" after a novel by Samuel Beckett. The small sculpture features an angled tubular body, reminiscent of one of Gironcoli's head sculptures laid to rest on a divan. At its feet lies something that could be a flower, an umbrella or – even more prosaically – a kind of bathplug; the entire construct is enclosed in a double-glazed showcase (there are several variants of the work). Through the reference to Beckett's Murphy, Gironcoli alludes to an anti-hero whose attitude to life entails resting, doing nothing and cutting himself off from the world. In Beckett's novel, Murphy's preferred pose is naked, bound into a rocking chair with seven scarves. He envies the patients in the psychiatric hospital where he works as a guard for their "windowless padded cells". The form, material and position of Gironcoli's Murphy makes him virtually indistinguishable from the furniture beneath him; although his cell is not windowless, it is literally detached from the world, with twofold protection against any access. In several graphic works Gironcoli picks up on the obvious association with a "glass coffin" linking variants of the Murphy form with the fairytale *Snow White*. In *Objekt im Glassturz, Länge 240 cm, Schneewittchen (Object in Glass Case, Length 240 cm, Snow White, ca. 1972)* **(12)**, the figure in the case is set against an expressively darkened background that evokes the earth and the dwarves' reluctance to bury the seemingly dead princess as she was so beautiful – her coffin stood on a mountain (until the prince carried her away and Snow White coughed up the poisoned chunk of apple). Like Snow White, who died multiple times, the figure of Murphy is a revenant in Gironcoli's oeuvre – his form appears in various different variants including in the late work, both on a monumental scale in the sculptures and as a small citation in the paintings on paper, as can be seen on Level 0. Murphy thus embodies a decisive principle in Gironcoli's work – figures and motifs recur again and again, running throughout the artist's entire oeuvre, adapting and slotting into myriad contexts and styles.

From the late 1960s, Gironcoli also engaged with repetition in another form, reflected in the use of ruled guide-sheets glued together as pictorial supports. On the grid ground of *Entwurf für ein aus vielen gleichen Teilen bestehendes Wiesenobjekt* (*Design for a Meadow Object Made of Many Equal Parts*, 1968) **(13)** a head form turned on its side encounters sculptural elements arranged like modules. The “umbrella” at Murphy’s feet in *Modell in Vitrine* (*Model in Showcase*) has been transformed here into a kind of gentian, arranged with rows of phallus-like elements, with a yellow-green hue evoking cast metal. The conjoined panels hint that large surface areas – entire meadows – could be filled by reproducing elements. Above this, the title of the work is set like a logo over a sketch of one of the components in the meadow construction set. The principle of the series clearly also concerned Gironcoli in the late 1960s – an interest he shared with artists creating Minimal Art. In contrast to them however he did not seek to exclude narrative (“What you see is what you see,” as American artist Frank Stella once put it); on the contrary, Gironcoli forges chains of associations.

One illuminating example of this is the installation *Vielteilige Figur mit weißen Lilien* (*Multi-Part Figure with White Lilies*, 1968) **(14)** which presents a kind of brass stage with seven black pillar-like figures reminiscent of chess pieces or ceramic insulation devices for high-voltage wires. The figures on top bear nail-like attachments in brass, connecting them via cables. A phallus on a plinth, a dustpan and an orthopedic shoe also figure on the stage. In front of the brass field stands a bouquet of plastic lilies – flowers of death, but also a conventional symbol of the Virgin Mary. Here Gironcoli realizes a serial arrangement that is, in the strictest sense of the term, “charged”; not only does the arrangement seem to be electrified or traversed by a high voltage, it also sparks a whole panoply of possible associations. The notion of performing (religious) rituals, associated with danger, dirt, potential injuries and even death, resonates in this work as do forms of communication between objects in a language we cannot comprehend. The plethora of possible meanings of the often martial-looking spatial arrangements from those years corresponds to the eloquence of the materials deployed: “Poor” materials such as plastic, plaster or plywood come face-to-face with bronze, brass and aluminum; wires, cables and so on are always at play, evoking invisible circuits, zones of contact or threat. This suggests an affinity between Gironcoli’s installations and the magical object-arrangements of Joseph Beuys or – closer to home – the Vienna Actionists’ ritualistic body-based actions.

There is an almost animistic dimension to Gironcoli’s interest in electricity and how it can set things in motion and connect them. It raises the question of the form in which the “invisible” or “incorporeal” appears, manifested in the works on paper for example in the recurring motifs of the cloud, smoke or gas. These constantly shape-shifting “bodies without surfaces” exerted a particular fascination on this sculptor steeped in the packaging ethos. They are not readily reined in by the kind of strict contours that Gironcoli likes to use in his graphic work. In *Die misslungene Zimmerwolke* (*The Room Cloud Gone Wrong*, 1970) **(15)** the cloud – quite at odds with its gaseous nature – not only hangs „heavy“ and „lumpy“ on the page but also seems to hover irresolutely

between existence as a solid body or as a plane. The rays of light that fall on it from the left hint at a spatial dimension, while the grid of the pictorial ground spills out onto the silver form, asserting its allegiance with the locus. A similar play of the second and third dimension can be seen in the lower righthand corner; anonymous hands deconstruct a schematic leg and a planar depiction of a chair into puzzle pieces and pixels. The “three-dimensional” blue armchair in contrast remains intact.

In his installation *Schuhe* (*Shoes*, 1970-71) **(16)** Gironcoli conjoins the grid pattern of a light-green tiled floor with one of his favorite objects and motifs: women’s high-heeled shoes, which definitely are something of a fetish in the artist’s work. Two “display cases” and women’s shoes (with feeler-like outgrowths) are affixed to six “tracks” that define the field on the ground and are interconnected by cables. The field contains a kind of frame with curtains and various cleaning utensils. Against the backdrop of related paper works with eloquent titles like *Gib es in einen leeren Raum ... und mache deine Erscheinung* (*Put It In An Empty Space ... And Make Your Appearance*, ca. 1970) **(17)**, in which the tracks are clearly electrified, phantom-like bodies flit around, while a chest bearing the word “Kostüme” (costumes) alludes to a masquerade, with the borders between life and death, thing and subject growing indeterminate yet again. It seems that the artist has transformed his passion for African masks into an artistic principle with which to unsettle the obsessions and abysses of Western society.

Linking up with large-scale installations such as *Schuhe* (*Shoes*) or *Große Messingfigur* (*Large Brass Figure*, 1970-71) **(18)**, which again enacts the idea of a martial “arena for action” – this time extended by the association of gymnastics, disciplining the body through sport –, Gironcoli developed the format of a graphic stage upon which he unfurled performances until well into the 1970s. In these works, often entitled simply *Entwurf* (*Design*), references to his own sculptural practice appear, a diverse medley of furniture, household utensils, electrical devices and so on – elements with which we are already familiar. The new element is a human protagonist, a man, seen from behind, usually crouching, in an off-the-peg blue suit, who may also appear as just a silhouette or even just the suit. Sometimes the man seems electrified, sometimes he wears high-heeled women’s shoes. Here and there he appears in a multiple, sometimes mirrored embodiment or has a standing doppelgänger. Gironcoli calls this figure the apprentice or Robert, at times also Murphy. The stage ensemble also includes mummy-like bandaged figures, dogs conjoined in copulation and crouching baboons, occasionally parading their erect penises for no particular reason.

These stage-like settings have an unmistakably existential dimension, reflecting both Gironcoli as a representative individual and the time that shaped his work: swastikas, Stars of David, scythes, tanks and other death symbols evoke a wartime childhood and remind us of repressed realms still to be worked through. Electrified toilets and mattress springs sketch out an everyday existence in which “amenities” increasingly take on a life of their own and turn against us. The dogs and monkeys, silent observers and surrogates for human figures, represent animal instincts and

drives pushed beyond the pale in the “civilized” world. The artistic questions woven into these existential topics concerned Gironcoli throughout his life: the apprentice alias Robert alias Murphy for example becomes clearly identifiable as a template through repetition – as a figure, transposed with the help of tracing paper, and, like the utensils surrounding him, the fruit of “serial reproduction.” As such, he is reminiscent of the cast forms deployed in Gironcoli’s sculpture from the early “heads” to the late monumental sculptures. The monkeys – a separate cabinet in the exhibition **(19)** dedicated to these creatures highlights how Gironcoli repeated entire compositions with variations – “ape” human beings and the disciplinarian society, bringing us full circle to imitation and masquerade. Gironcoli’s stages enact a world in which templates perform an absurd play – if human individuals wish to assert themselves, they too must find a pretext to enter and leave the scene.

Probably the darkest form of the “mask” in Gironcoli’s work is the skull, a motif that figures in the repeatedly altered installation *Säule mit Totenkopf (Column with Skull, 1970/1974/1981)* **(20)**, as well as in a series of works on paper – frequently in connection with the swastika. The combination of column and skull arose from an association that came to the artist when making the column; looking at the column’s “flawed” form, he “suddenly saw a skeleton’s spine that was decomposed and damaged with leaks in the plaster, as if blood would flow, or a paste, like congealed blood.” Alongside a table construction with a piece of “razor-sharp” glass and three bowls, the installation also includes five tapering brass tubes, bent at the ends, and stored in a chest. In various works on paper they are indicated as penis extensions or “suction straws” that hint at an exchange of fluids within the frame of this ritualistic setting. Gironcoli’s use of the swastika in connection with the skull is reminiscent of Max Horkheimer’s analysis of fascism, which the artist was familiar with; Horkheimer describes fascism as a system in which the individual “has far worse things to fear than death.” At the same time, Gironcoli’s scenarios of violence and torture seem to refer to more general social contexts, which he alludes to as “ongoing total devastation and administration, and the ensuing altered quality of experience” and “destruction by alien rationality.”

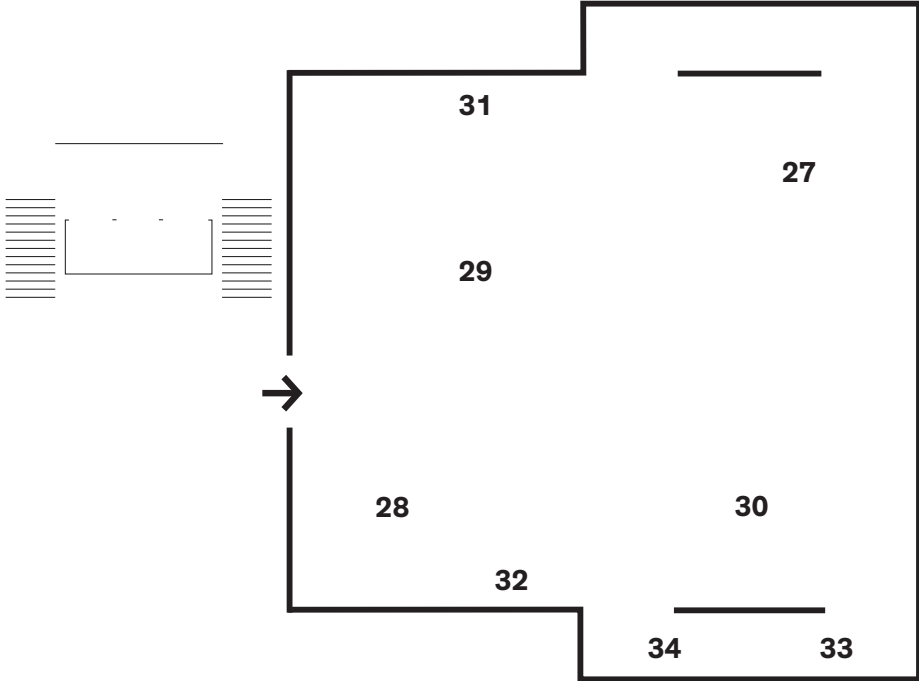
The graphic works he created from 1970 on, with creatures on rack-like platforms reminiscent of depictions of crucifixions, appear to create a *mise-en-scène* of such destruction through alien rationality. Their bodies are caught in a metamorphosis between human form, formable mass and total abstraction, which they are condemned to observe through a multitude of mirrors. Spoons, bowls and outflows hint at a process of liquefaction, also the hallmark of metal casting – as transposed in a painterly vein in *Entwurf (Design, 1975)* **(21)** through the gestural application of silver paint. Beaked masks (*Entwurf [Design], 1975*) **(22)** and the drawing of a “box of slides” (*Entwurf [Design], 1974*) **(23)** hint at the context of a performance or staging. This explicit theatrical dimension of (self-)observation also characterizes a series of works created in the same period, in which Gironcoli portrays figures encountering one another in a kind of boxing ring. Camera-like extensions and the word “film” (in *Ohne Titel, [Untitled], 1970/75*) **(24)** recall the portable perceptive apparatus of

Austrian artist Walter Pichler (such as *TV-Helm [Tragbares Wohnzimmer]/TV-Helmet [Portable Living Room]*, 1967); like Gironcoli, he was among the artists linked to Vienna's Galerie nächst St. Stephan. However, the zoomorphic masks also picked up on Gironcoli's ethnographic interests and evoke depictions from Ancient Egypt, such as the Thot, the god of scholars and scribes, frequently depicted with a long-beaked ibis head (and sometimes also as a baboon).

The cultic dimension of these works was also manifested in the mid-1970s in a new generation of sculptures, as exemplified in *Ohne Titel (Untitled)*, 1975-76) **(25)** – also known as the “Yellow Madonna.” The planar arrangements made up of different materials are replaced by altar-like constructions, whose components Gironcoli coats with a uniform layer of paint. Disconcerting touches in this “altar to the Madonna” include two toilet bowls or bidets with drainage grooves, on which stylized ears of grain are mounted. Between the toilet bowls is a curved “arm” with a brass tip to which an electric plug is attached. Its counterpart can be found in an almond-shaped container that suggests a stoup; alongside the receptacle is a brush, with which any dirt can promptly be removed. Gironcoli's altar was apparently not constructed to venerate a pleasure-eschewing “Immaculate Conception” – and in 1978 in fact led to an exhibition of his works in Innsbruck being closed due to concerns about “Catholic raiding parties.” Drawing on the formal vocabulary of kitsch devotionalia, he turned his attention above all to the surrogate nature of Christian teachings on salvation, calling into question the associated ideology of purity. In the *Entwurf (Design)*, 1973) **(26)** preceding the sculpture, he accompanies the contours of a life-size hand reaching into the image with the caption “schematic drawing of a filthy paw.”

Ebene

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Taking on the role as professor and head of the master school for sculpture at Vienna's Academy of Fine Arts as Fritz Wotruba's successor in 1977, along with the expanded studio space thus available to him, added a new dimension to Gironcoli's artistic oeuvre. After a few years of rather introverted work, in the mid-1980s he began to exhibit monumental sculptures, most executed in the first instance in polyester and subsequently – when possible – also realized as metal casts. In these sculptures, Gironcoli combines his early interest in standardized metallic bodies with his somewhat later focus on dynamically connecting heterogeneous elements. However, the martial nature of his installations in particular recedes into the background and is replaced by a more organic overall appearance. Nevertheless, the monumental sculptures are also characterized by spatial "tension": the three examples exhibited balance on comparatively delicate small feet, as if they had just landed or were about to take off at any moment – as if gravity only affects them to a limited degree. The interest in balance demonstrated in the early "roly-poly" *Figur auf einem Punkt stehend* (*Figure Standing on a Single Point (Mood-maker)*, 1965-69) is also a key hallmark here, although the later sculptures display much more complexity in the tipping motions, and in the interplay of symmetry and asymmetry, positive and negative forms, fullness and emptiness.

Despite all the obvious differences, in Gironcoli's late works we encounter a panoply of familiar elements. The figure of Murphy is still detached from reality, but in *Figur mit ovalförmigen Hängeteilen* (*Figure with Suspended Oval Parts*, 1984-90) **(27)** it is carried and supported by intermingled vegetation, encompassing from cocoon, leaf and thorn forms, as well as snail-like extensions that either "conglomerate" weight or transmit it elegantly to the surrounding space. Almost twenty years after his arbitrary "birth" from banal sponge forms, Murphy finally seems ready to initiate a procession in his honor. The counter-model to the expansive conquest of space however remains part of Gironcoli's vocabulary: In *Hutnadel I (Hat Pin I)* and *Hutnadel II (Hat Pin II*, 1989-91) **(28)**, Murphy figures again sit resplendent in display cases, enclosed in the massive boxes like precious jewels – or dangerous projectiles. The silver Murphy, with his snail-like antennae, seems to be exploring the dimensions of his dwelling; the golden one rampantly flourishes in his as vegetative ornament. The display cases exemplify how Gironcoli plays with growth and stagnation, expansion and contraction: constrained by the glass facades in all directions, the figurations become planar ornaments – framed images.

A frequent motif in the later works, which rarely appears in the early works, is the embryonic figure of a child: "The Unborn," to cite the title of Gironcoli's 1997 exhibition at MAK – Austrian Museum of Applied Arts in Vienna. Multiple iterations of this unborn figure appear in *Ohne Titel (Untitled)*, 1997) **(29)** on a kind of carousel or circuit dotted with reclining beings characterized as female, their arms akimbo and eyes closed, while the only male unborn stands upright playing a mouth harmonica, his eyes wide-open, yet "blind." This could be seen as an allusion to Gironcoli's statement that his sculpture was seeking out a "tone" or "sonority", or as a reference to the hypnotic effect of the *Pied Piper of Hamelin* (as we know, Gironcoli was anything

but averse to fairy tales and sagas). In any event, this unborn being is an ambivalent figure, embodying the twofold qualities of growth and standstill, the organic and the organized that characterize Gironcoli's sculptures more generally. In depicting this mask-like countenance and unseeing eyes, the artist positions this being between sensual physicality and dead thingness; he gives it clearly human traits, yet denies it any individuality.

The compactness of *Ohne Titel (Untitled, 1999)* (30) makes it probably one of the artist's most complex sculptures; entirely different impressions arise depending on the viewer's vantage point, despite its comparatively closed, even "flat" form. It almost seems, when viewed "head-on," to be a kind of four-legged animal astride a vehicle with hook-like outgrowths, while from one side we seem to recognize the profile of a face and a kind of mask attachment. The load-bearing construction in turn recalls Baroque furniture or – once again – a sedan chair. This liquefying accumulation and stratification of forms that appear familiar – not least from Gironcoli's own work – is also symptomatic of the artist's work on paper, which, like his sculpture in those years, also underwent a transformation. In the 1980s Gironcoli worked almost exclusively in large-scale formats deploying a patently "painterly" vocabulary: powerful colors such as pink, violet or yellow defy graphic constraints, developing an expressive life of their own.

Here too however we find clear connections both to the early graphic works and between the graphic pieces and the sculptures. The crouching figure viewed from the rear, for example, appears everywhere, yet it seems the figure has aged along with the artist, becoming visibly rounder. Once again, we encounter the bandages, dogs, monkeys, silhouettes of clothing, mattress springs, toilets, scythes and ears of corn, the cutlery and combs, along with many other familiar props. The puzzle and the grid, old and new sculptural forms are cited too. At times Gironcoli adopts entire compositions of early works in a mode of repetition that – moves forward. As in the sculptures, the motifs and pictorial means are condensed and combined in the later graphic works. Gironcoli "constructs" his images in a multi-step process, covering over and/or accentuating the graphic strata in ink with gouache, tempera and metallic paint (31). In the process, he deploys painterly means with such lavish profligacy that surfaces appear "tactile" and, particularly where metal paints are used, sometimes almost liquid or "wet." This "accumulation" of means frequently causes the paper substrate to change shape, developing undulations, as it cannot bear up against these multiple strata.


The metaphors of growth and reproduction in the sculptures correspond to recurring images of copulating dogs, as well as the vase forms (32), with human figures breaking off as if from incubators. The familiar motifs have broken free of the mechanical concatenations of the spatial stages, now seeming able to enter into organic connections. The painterly gesture, which in his early works Gironcoli tended to associate with a loss of form and control (clouds, smoke, gas) or to deploy as the index of an error (in the form of crossing-outs) serves in his later images as the catalyst of these new combinatory possibilities. The “attack” on the integrity of form is not a threat here but seeks out disintegration, which testifies to the artist’s fundamentally altered relationship to the pictorial space: A sequence of graphics (33) that layer copulating dogs and discs like pieces in a puzzle, stack them one upon another or create other types of connection – often overseen by the rear-view figure – seem to perform balancing acts, expansions and contractions in a similar vein to the sculptures, yet using only the surface of the paper as a stage. In related works we discover a hand-drawn grid (34), which rather than assuming an organizing function or determining position seems instead to be constrained in its impact by the amorphous forms beneath it.

Gironcoli commented on this changed understanding of space: “As I myself see it, my concept of verism and realistic representation is transformed in these graphic works. Whereas initially ... I tried to arrive at representations of space comparable with the photographic sense of space—by which I mean not the illustration but rather the apprehension of space, what is called Euclidian space, I believe—and in this way to arrive at perspective space, realistic space, I now observe that my representations of people and of space are giving rise to a disorder that actually undercuts the aforementioned sense of space. The space I manipulate expands and contracts and the representations of people inside it surrender attempts at realistic imaging in favor of, if anything, grotesque forms of representation as a way of better getting to grips with reality as I experience it today. The grotesque, the hyperbolic, today seems closer to my sense of reality than any ‘normal,’ straightforward representation.”

A representative selection of Bruno Gironcoli’s monumental sculptures is on display all year in the Gironcoli Kristall at the STRABAG building, in Vienna’s Donau-City, along with three metal casts on view in the exterior area. More information is available at: www.strabag-kunstforum.at

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Exhibition

Bruno Gironcoli
Shy at Work

February 3—May 27, 2018

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Exhibition Management: Claudia Dohr,
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Exhibition Booklet

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room cloud*, 1970
© BRUNO GIRONCOLI WERK
VERWALTUNG GMBH / ESTATE BRUNO
GIRONCOLI / GESCHÄFTSFÜHRERIN
CHRISTINE GIRONCOLI

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ZIMMER
DIE MISZLUNGENE SCHWERE KLUMPIGE WOLKE

