

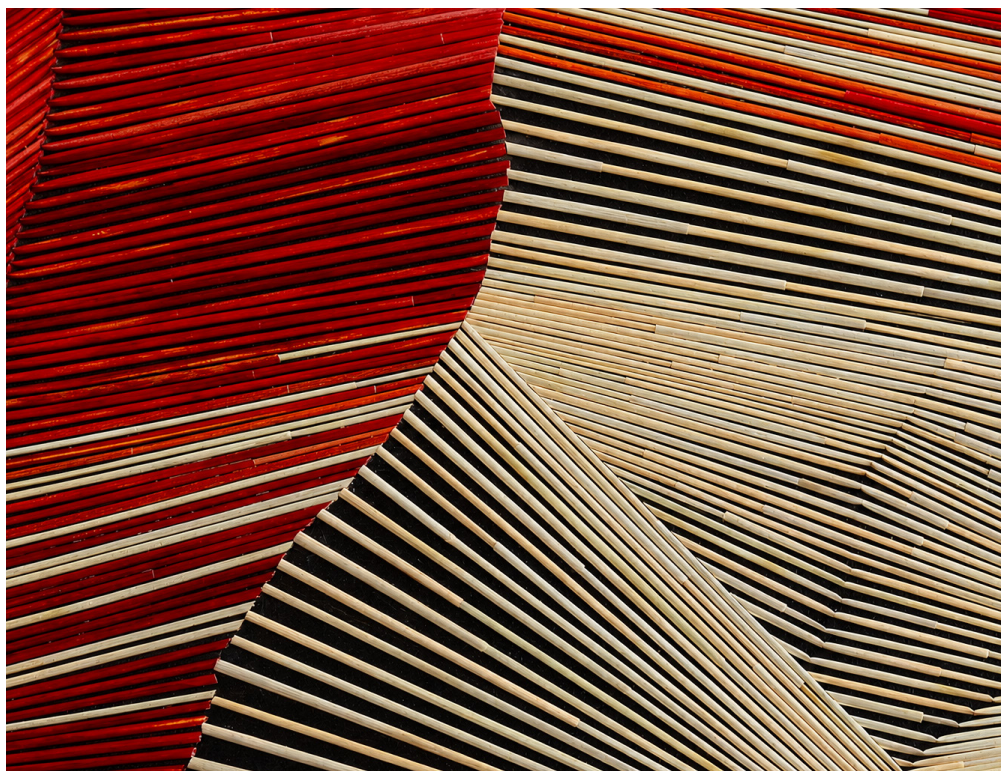
Olaf Holzapfel

Une réalité insolite

18.09.26 → 31.10.26

Press release

Olaf Holzapfel
Mercy, 2026
Rye straw on wood and Chinese
ink
(Detail)
150 x 95 cm



Xippas Geneva

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Tuesday to Friday:
10am to 1pm and 2pm to 6.30pm
Saturday: 12pm to 5pm

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Opening on 17 September from 6 to 9 pm, on the occasion of La Nuit des Bains.

Xippas Gallery is pleased to present the second solo exhibition by German artist Olaf Holzapfel at its Geneva space. *Une réalité insolite* explores our perception of time within a physical world in constant transformation.

The paintings and straw works investigate the fluidity of space as it unfolds both through the cycles of plant life and the rhythms of everyday existence. They envelop the viewer's gaze and invite a shift in perspective. The linear, flowing forms that run throughout Holzapfel's works evoke plants, textiles, organic structures, loops and ribbons. They guide the eye through space while creating the sensation of being simultaneously in motion and embraced by it. In this way, the artist achieves a paradox: he inscribes within the image that which belongs to movement, time and the ephemeral.

For the first time in Switzerland, Holzapfel presents paintings produced during the 2010s. They testify to his longstanding interest in the topography of space, its materiality and its dynamics. Prompted by the transformation of perception brought about by the emergence of digital reality, Holzapfel became interested in virtuality as early as the beginning of the 1990s. He was among the first artists to explore digital environments. This line of inquiry later developed into the large-scale installations for which he is now well known, making the experience of digital space and imagery physically tangible.

This pioneering approach took a new direction in 2009, when Holzapfel turned towards the organic world of plant-based materials. In his work, the languages of the digital and of nature are not opposed; rather, they reveal how everything remains fundamentally connected to material space. Straw, a ubiquitous seasonal natural material, becomes a support for memory: it responds to its environment and grows towards the light. Like the painted image itself, the material resists, it possesses its own irregularities and demands its own rhythm of making.

In this exhibition, the paintings enter into dialogue with the straw works, inviting visitors to engage with the conversation that unfolds between these two pictorial realms and to experience the passages that connect them without erasing their differences. The paintings already reveal Holzapfel's fascination with materiality. Their colours possess a vibrant presence that is echoed in the three-dimensional straw works. Here, the artist follows the inherent properties and dynamics of the material itself. Paradoxically, this approach strengthens the specifically artistic relationship between the maker and the material. Holzapfel transforms the pictorial surface, whether canvas or straw, and opens up new spatial possibilities within it.

We constantly inhabit these two worlds: the rhythm of the seasons and the artificial, accelerated tempo of contemporary flows. Rather than freezing this permanent state of transition or this fluid continuum, the paintings and sculptures make tangible the intermediary space where nature, humanity and technology converge.

From the art of Romanesque manuscript illumination to Renaissance painting, abstract vegetal surfaces and the folds of textiles played a fundamental role in the construction of pictorial space. In these new works, Holzapfel develops the motifs of loops and ribbons, drawing equally on the *Dürer-Schleifen*, a series created by the German painter Sigmar Polke in 1986, and on the elaborate ruffs depicted in Flemish and Burgundian portraiture, which reflected the growing importance of the textile industry at the dawn of modernity.

The motif of the fold, so central to the Baroque period, acquires renewed relevance in Holzapfel's work. Much like that era, marked by profound transformations and an increasing densification of the world it unfolds a visual language of infinite multiplication and continuous differentiation. The fold even recalls the conception of cosmic space as a sphere folded back upon itself. Its curvature expresses the constant relationship between interior and exterior, within which human existence takes shape. Holzapfel translates this notion of the «fold» into the language of the digital age. It is no longer the fabric of a garment, but the interweaving of human beings, nature and technology within a hyperconnected world.

Like the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, who encouraged close attention to what is essential and urged us to think of phenomena through their dynamic nature, Holzapfel is interested in the interaction between material substance and immaterial spaces in order to reveal their complexity. By bringing digital grids into dialogue with centuries-old craft traditions and natural materials, he conveys the extent to which we all belong to a single, continuous fabric. Holzapfel reminds us that human existence, like nature itself, remains inseparably bound to space and time.

As part of the exhibition, a walk through the Botanical Garden will be organised, followed by a conversation with the artist and Marion Festal on Friday, 18 September.

Earlier this year, Olaf Holzapfel took part in the third edition of the (Re)connecting.Earth Biennial in Geneva. On 20 September, a further conversation will take place with Julie Portier, Director of Villa du Parc, a partner institution of the (Re)connecting.Earth Biennial.

Olaf Holzapfel was born in Dresden in 1967. He lives and works in Berlin, Germany.

Olaf Holzapfel is particularly interested in the ways in which history, culture and architecture intersect and interact, and how these relationships can be examined and reinterpreted through art. His work is often characterized by repetitive patterns and organic forms inspired by both nature and human-made structures.

For more than a decade, works created from plant-based materials have occupied a central place in Olaf Holzapfel's artistic practice. Since 2009, he has developed this body of work in collaboration with Teresa, Mirta, Dionisia, Noelia and Luisa Gutiérrez, Wichí weavers from the indigenous community of the Gran Chaco in northern Argentina. These textile works are made from chaguar, a cactus-like plant that grows among the trees and foliage of the Gran Chaco region. In these works, Olaf Holzapfel combines imagery drawn from the contemporary urban environment with traditional Wichí patterns, creating what he describes as genuine electronic samples. His works highlight the relationship between human beings as inhabitants and the landscapes that surround them, while emphasizing the connections between centre and periphery, and between the urban and the rural.

After studying Fine Arts at the Hochschule für Bildende Kunst in Dresden and at the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad, India, he received his MFA in 2003. He was an artist-in-residence at Columbia University in New York and has taught as a visiting professor at the Kunstakademie Karlsruhe and the Hochschule für Bildende Künste Hamburg. Olaf Holzapfel has held numerous solo exhibitions, including at Galerie Daniel Marzona in Berlin, Galerie Sabine Knust in Munich, the Bündner Kunstmuseum in Chur, Switzerland, the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Salta in Argentina, MAC Parque Forestal in Santiago, Chile, and the Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon in France. His work has also been presented in numerous group exhibitions, including Unlimited – Art Basel and at Max Wigram Gallery in London. The artist is also represented by Baronian in Brussels, Sabine Knust in Munich and Gebr. Lehmann in Dresden.

His institutional exhibitions include the Museo Nacional de Arte Decorativo in Buenos Aires (2019), the Bündner Kunstmuseum in Chur (2021), the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo in Salta (2021), the Museum of European Cultures (MEK) in Berlin (2022), and Museum Haus Konstruktiv in Zurich (2024), where he received the Zurich Art Prize. In 2026, he is participating in the third edition of the cross-border biennial (re)connecting.earth – Sensitive Resources.

Olaf Holzapfel is the recipient of the Gerhard Altenbourg Prize (2014) and the Zurich Art Prize (2024). His work is included in numerous public and private collections, notably the Art Collection of the Federal Republic of Germany.