

***Step Out of Your Body, Enter New Ones – An Exhibition On Community and Spirituality*****IGSHAAN ADAMS, CHRISTINE & IRENE HOHENBÜCHLER, CORITA KENT, JOÃO MODÉ,  
TERESA MARGOLLES, SABINE SCHLATTER, BUHLEBEZWE SIWANI****Curated by Dr. Raphael Gyga**

April 30 - June 5, 2021

Opening: Thursday, April 29, 5 - 8pm

Finissage: Saturday, June 5, 11am - 5 pm

**The exhibition *Step Out of Your Body, Enter New Ones* turns the spotlight on art that grapples with questions of community and spirituality. Seven artists of different generations probe concerns in which community and spirituality become tangible as ideas that are of immediate relevance to society and inform each other. Rather than conceiving spirituality as an individual practice divorced from the concrete realities of the world, the show reflects on its social and political potentials.**

New Age, hiking the Way of St. James, angelology: the personal quest for spiritual experiences is the form into which contemporary society casts religious yearnings. That is one key hypothesis in the sociologist Hubert Knoblauch's study *Populäre Religion* (2009). It is a quest that is driven by a deep-seated desire for unconventional experiences of transcendence, experiences that are cultivated outside the purview of traditional religious institutions and that have filtered deep into everyday culture. The turn toward spirituality in post-industrial societies has been observed since the second half of the twentieth century and reflects a fundamental transformation of religious life. Most recently, the restrictions on social contact due to the covid-19 pandemic have lent new energy to this privatization of the spiritual; economists have documented strong growth in the market for spiritual coaching.

The sociologist Émile Durkheim's (1858–1917) study *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912) locates man's social nature at the center of its subject. Isolating the universal features of religion, Durkheim concludes with the insight that the holy or sacred that humans worship is not a divinity, metaphysical power, or distinctive experience as such: the essence of the sacred, what allows the individual to "transcend" himself or herself, is society. It follows that spiritual and transcendent experiences cannot be conceived as a purely subjective phenomenon, though they have often been portrayed as a form of ecstasy; they are essentially a social fact. To understand transcendence, one must examine its qualities as a process. As suggested by the Latin root, "transcendere," it denotes an act of rising above or moving beyond, but it does not presuppose an unambiguous distinction between two defined realms between which religious experience moves. This insight underscores the significance of connection and the blurring of distinctions rather than disjunction: the overcoming of what may appear as a boundary or difference emerges as pivotal. The dynamic that transports the individual above and beyond the mundane can be closely bound up with the faculties of self-observation and self-reflection, which enable him or her to cross potential boundaries without necessarily drawing new ones. "Transcendence," in this sense, should be defined as an activity that is performed afresh in each instance and thus actively thwarts processes of normalization.

The positions on view in the exhibition converge in their engagement with this productive dynamic and process of "transcendence." The works are not merely visual interpretations of transcendence, not just documentation of transcendental experiences. Each in its own way, they instead harness the momentum of transport across boundaries as a creative principle. They exemplify artistic strategies that, in exploring aspects of spirituality, bring a broad social context into focus, though without letting themselves be led astray by the fatuities of pseudo-religion. The emphasis is instead on attempts to defy the tendencies toward hyper-individualization and relentless self-improvement, on efforts to comprehend the individual in his or her social context. The positions on display, that is to say, champion a conception of society informed by a dense and variegated web of interrelations and the work with and on those relations, counteracting the idolization of individuality.

Far from being at the mercy of larger structures, humans are woven into them and can actively shape them. The works chart this weblike nature of social reality also through their own facture. The artists dedicate themselves to manual crafts such as knotting, weaving, or knitting that look back on centuries-long histories and have traditionally often served as sources of communal identity, as well as techniques like silkscreen printing or drawing that can be practiced individually or in groups without requiring overly complex infrastructures. In their literal as well as figurative dimensions, then, the works uncover the intertwined strands of our collective existence. They read as storehouses of knowledge and vessels preserving recollections of the quintessence of communal life and dialogue. They tell stories of the organic growth in which forms of collective making are rooted, and, in their objective presence, hark back to the ancient tradition of the contact relic.

A guided tour throughout the exhibition will be held by the curator Dr. Raphael Gyga on Saturday, June 5 at 3pm.  
For further information please contact Fabio Pink: [fabio@peterkilchmann.com](mailto:fabio@peterkilchmann.com).

## ARTISTS

The idea of “first-person politics” and its motto, “The personal is political,” are ingrained in the South African artist **Igshaan Adams’s** (b. Cape Town, 1982) performances, woven wall pieces, and installations. In his early work, the artist repeatedly integrated objects and images from his own familiar and domestic context, arranging and “interweaving” them in expansive installations that addressed not only his homosexuality, but also his commitment to a liberal practice of Islam and his role as a person of color in South Africa. Adams’s works propose subtle meditations on personal liminal experiences—on what it feels like to live on the threshold of breaking away from dominant social orders—in matters of race, religion, gender, and sexuality. Drawing on the material and formal iconographies of Islam and South African culture, he charts a polyvalent and phenomenological approach to these themes. The two works on view in the exhibition are characteristic examples: The wall installation *When Dust Settles (I)* (2018) consists of various panels of linoleum flooring, known as “tapyts” in Afrikaans, and a used prayer rug. The flooring comes from houses in the Cape Flats and Khayelitsha neighborhoods, where the artist grew up. Adams’s views of religion are shaped less by a theological interest in defined beliefs than by a concern with religious practice: the shared enactment of a faith and the sense of community it engenders. The woven pieces likewise foreground the aspect of shared practice and are often products of communal collaboration; see, for instance, the second work in the exhibition, a woven wall piece. In this sense, Adams’s transdisciplinary practice also reads as an ongoing inquiry into intersectional identities.

The Austrian siblings **Christine and Irene Hohenbüchler** (b. Vienna, 1964) rose to international renown in the 1990s with a creative practice based on working with socially stigmatized demographics such as prison inmates or people with disabilities or children and teenagers. Establishing an expanded social space and engaging marginalized social groups in dialogue, their practice also seeks to install a more robust structure of communication within the art space. One of their best-known projects was presented in the Austrian pavilion at the 1999 Venice Biennale: the Mother and Child(ren) House. The war in the Kosovo and the acute distress that countless mothers and children faced prompted the artists to team up with the architect Martin Feiersinger to conceive an extensible honeycomb-style modular shelter structure made of wood that recalls Frederick Kiesler’s idea of the *Endless House* (1950). The drawings on view in the exhibition form the basis for the complex project. They also show the artists grappling with additional concerns that are characteristic of their oeuvre: nature, questions in philosophy, and aspects of their own biographies. Much of their graphic art, on which the sisters always work together, revolves around motifs of rootedness, branching, and crystallinity, which also serve as metaphors for the interwovenness of lives, community, and collectiveness.

The American artist **Corita Kent** (Fort Dodge, Iowa, 1918–1986) attracted notice in the 1960s with silkscreen prints that mixed and matched figurative and religious motifs and textual fragments from a wide range of sources—slogans, song lyrics, Scripture, fiction. Bold in style, her work may be described as a “politicized” variant of Pop Art. At the age of eighteen, Kent entered the order of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and took the name Sister Mary Corita. The progressive spirit that prevailed in her environment encouraged her creativity, and Kent taught in and eventually chaired the art department of the college affiliated with the order until a conflict with the cardinal overseeing her diocese led her to return to secular life in 1968. With her unique combination of distinct roles—she was a visual artist, cleric, and pedagogue, as well as a champion of social justice active in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s—she became known even in her lifetime as America’s “favorite nun” (Andy Warhol). Like many of her fellow artists blending art with activism, Kent found the perfect medium for her combative spirituality in serigraphy; it allowed her to tackle issues such as the Vietnam War, racism, and social injustice and facilitated broad dissemination of her views. The execution of her work was often a collaborative enterprise. Discussing the connection between religious belief and real-world concerns, she wrote: “Maybe you can’t understand the psalms without understanding the newspaper and the other way around. Maybe that’s why it sounds so good when you insert a line from the paper after each verse of a psalm and read it aloud. Maybe they were never meant to be separate ...”

The Brazilian artist **João Modé’s** (b. Resende, 1961) work unfolds a formal idiom that breathes fresh life into the legacy of the Brazilian Constructivism and Neoconcretismo of the 1950s and 1960s with artistic strategies that were subsequently also harnessed by exponents of a “relational art.” His work *REDE* (Net, 2003–), for example, is created afresh for each presentation in a collective act that is staged in a public setting and involves over a hundred participants. Tying together a broad assortment of strings in time-consuming labor, they produce a piece that is set apart by its singularity and heterogeneity yet perceived as a cohesive body. Analog techniques like knotting and stitching are also the basis for the works Modé makes by his own hand. The exhibition features two pieces that consist of wooden and glass beads threaded on strings. The freestanding sculptures balance between a poetics of the everyday and the question of the spiritual in art beyond figurative representation. Modé himself describes his art as a kind of “affective constructivism.” In the beholder’s eye, the topological interspaces in his webs may also constitute blanks: a form of “epistemological space.”

The Mexican artist **Teresa Margolles** (b. Culiacán, 1963) makes works that revolve around themes like death, violence, and social exclusion. Since the early 1990s, she has also volunteered at the forensic division of a morgue in Mexico City, where numerous victims of violent crimes, many of them unidentified, arrive day after day. Her experiences there inspire her minimalist works, which often incorporate “residual substances” related to the human body as materials. Since 2005, the artist has focused on an ongoing investigation of the rampant violence in Ciudad Juárez, a city on Mexico’s northern border, including a never-ending series of femicides. Women’s social position and the extreme violence inflicted on them in Latin American societies, where patriarchal authority remains the dominant social model, are also the central concerns in her “Telas” (Fabrics), a series of projects she has realized in Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Brazil, and other countries since 2012, in each instance in collaboration with a local women’s initiative. The work on display, titled *Gerlaine GG Om Pão Com Molho: Identidade desconhecida* (2014), was made with the participation of the women of the Dom João Costa Social Center in Recife (Brazil). Margolles gave the group a piece of fabric that had touched the body of a woman who had met with a violent death in Recife, and encouraged them to embroider a design on the textile in order to initiate a conversation about the dead woman, violence, and the social problems plaguing their respective communities; the process was recorded on video. The labor of stitching thus not only becomes a cathartic ritual, it also serves as an occasion to negotiate questions concerning the participants’ own system of social and political values.

In large-format works on paper that stand out for their bold colors and intensity, the Swiss artist **Sabine Schlatter** (b. Zurich, 1977) operates on the interface between performance art and drawing. Executed in colored pencil, the motifs—which often recall

the organic structures that appear in microscopic photographs of plants—read not only as notations of the artist's embodied movements, but also as attempts to map mental and psychological states. In terms of both form and substance, then, her art harks back to the pioneering work of the Swede Hilma af Klint (1862–1944) and other abstract painters who found inspiration in Spiritualism and the theories of theosophy and anthroposophy. Schlatter's interest in process-centered creative strategies is already evident in her earlier performances; realized together with Benjamin Egger, they address questions concerning the dynamics of communities and their spatial (self-)empowerment. Complementing the works on paper on view in the exhibition, the artist will present installative documentation of one of her performances in public space. In these, she examines the movement patterns of passersby and especially instants of encounter, meetings, the crossing of paths. These social dynamics and territorial constellations, which she traces on the ground with colored chalk blocks, are based in each case on observations made by the artist over several days. In this way, large-format, temporary floor drawings are created that can also be described as a cartography of the singular and its integration in the whole.

The study of the historical lineages of African religions and cosmologies that have become hybridized with Christian beliefs is central to the South African artist **Buhlebezwe Siwani's** (b. Johannesburg, 1987) creative practice. More particularly, her work is informed by her role as a practicing sangoma. In Western terms, sangomas may be described as spiritual healers who play an important part in medical care in the traditional cultures of the Nguni peoples (including the Zulu and the Swazi). Taking inspiration from this philosophical knowledge around African cosmologies and healing, Siwani interrogates the racialized, stratified, and gendered society of today's South Africa. The video *Amakhosi* (2018) shows the artist before a field of sugarcane, a crop introduced by colonialism. She slowly dances from one edge of the frame to the other in a variation on a dance performed by the female members of the Shembe Church (also known as the Nazareth Baptist Church or AmaNazarites). Founded by Isaiah Shembe (1867–1935), it is one of the best-known and oldest independent denominations in Africa. Defying bans imposed by Protestant missionaries and later by the Apartheid regime, Shembe made African dances (umgido) accompanied by hymnic chants part of his services, which he often held under the open sky. A product of religious syncretism, a fusion of Zulu culture and Old Testament elements, the Shembe Church remains a vital faith community. With this reference, the short video pinpoints the intersections between the land itself, its colonial occupation, and the pivotal role of religion in the configuration of power.

## SHORT BIOS ARTISTS

**Igshaan Adams** (\*1982, Cape Town) lives and works in Cape Town, South Africa. Recent solo shows at SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah (2020) and Akershus Kunstcenter (2019). Upcoming shows at Hayward Gallery, London (2020) and The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago (2021). In 2018 Adams won the Standard Bank Young Artist of the Year Award for Visual Art

**Christine & Irene Hohenbüchler** (\*1964, Vienna) live and work near Vienna. Since 2011 Irene Hohenbüchler is Professor of Cooperative Strategies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munster. Christine Hohenbüchler has been Professor of Drawing and Visual Languages at the Institute of Art and Design in the Faculty of Architecture and Spatial Planning at the Vienna University of Technology since 2002. The twin sisters have been active as a pair of artists since 1990 and had numerous solo and group shows f.e. documenta X (1997) or Venice Biennial (1999).

**Corita Kent** (1918-1986, USA), also known as Sister Mary Corita, was an artist with an innovative approach to design and education. By the 1960s, her vibrant serigraphs were drawing international acclaim. Her works are in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Modern Art, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Museum Ludwig, the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, among others.

**Teresa Margolles** (\*1963, Culiacán, Sinaloa, Mexico) lives and works in Mexico City and Madrid, Spain. Her work has been shown internationally – including at Es Baluard, Palma (2020), Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá (2019), Witte de With, Rotterdam (2018), Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal (2017), Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich (2014), Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel (2010), Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt (2004), Venice Biennial (2019, 2009) and Manifesta (2016, 2008).

**João Modé** (\*1961, Resede) lives and works in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Since 2000 Modé's work has been shown in solo and group exhibitions all over the world a.o. Museu de Arte Contemporânea, Rio de Janeiro (2020), FRAC Marseille (2018), Triennale of Aichi, Nagoya, Okazaki and Toyohashi (2016), Kunstmuseum Trondheim (2012) and Bonniers Konsthall, Stockholm (2011).

**Sabine Schlatter** (\*1977, Zurich) lives and works in Zurich, Switzerland. Studied from 2004 to 2008 at the Zurich University of the Arts, from 2008 to 2011 she formed the artist duo eggenschlatter together with Swiss artist Benjamin Egger, which has received much recognition in Switzerland with its performances and video works. Her work was shown at Helmhaus, Zurich (2019), Last Tango, Zurich (2017) or Manifesta (2016).

**Buhlebezwe Siwani** (\*1986, Johannesburg) lives and works in Cape Town and Amsterdam. She completed her BFA at the Wits School of Arts in Johannesburg in 2011 and her MFA at the Michealis School of Fine Arts in 2015. Recent solo and group exhibitions include: Galeria Municipal de Arte de Almada (2020), Sonsbeek, Arnhem (2020), Bamako Biennial (2019), Curitiba Biennial (2019). The collective *iQhiya*, of which Buhlebezwe Siwani is part, participated in Documenta 14, 2017.

## CURATOR

**Dr. Raphael Gygax** (\*1980, Berne) is an art historian, curator and writer and lives and works in Zurich, Switzerland. From 2003–19 he was Curator at the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst in Zurich. From 2013–15 he was the curatorial advisor for Frieze Art Fair London and New York and from 2016–17 the Curator for Frieze Projects in London. Previously curated solo exhibitions include a.o. Lily van der Stokker (2019), Maria Eichhorn (2018), Charles Atlas (2018), Ian Cheng (2016), Wu Tsang (2014), Teresa Margolles (2014), Christoph Schlingensiefel (2007). Since 2019 he is Head of the Bachelor Fine Arts at the University of the Arts in Zurich. [www.raphaelgygax.com](http://www.raphaelgygax.com)