Prix

Meret Oppenheim

Schweizer Grand Prix Kunst
Grand Prix suisse d'art
Gran Premio svizzero d'arte
Grond premi svizzer d'art
Swiss Grand Award for Art

Swiss Grand Award for Art
Prix Meret Oppenheim 2021

for

Georges Descombes
Esther Eppstein
Vivian Suter

Swiss Grand Award for Art
Prix Meret Oppenheim 2021

20–26 September 2021
Messe Basel, Halle 3

Award Ceremony
20 September 2021

For the 21st time, the Federal Office of Culture (FOC) is presenting the Swiss Grand Award for Art / Prix Meret Oppenheim to outstanding Swiss culture practitioners:

In 2021 they are the architect Georges Descombes; curator Esther Eppstein; and artist Vivian Suter. Providing the pandemic situation allows, they will be honoured on 20 September 2021 in Basel along with the winners of the Swiss Art Awards.

Upon recommendation of the Federal Art Commission, the Swiss Grand Award for Art / Prix Meret Oppenheim is awarded to individuals in the fields of art, art education and architecture whose work is particularly topical and relevant to Swiss artistic and architectural production. The laureates were selected in late 2020 by the Federal Art Commission.

The Swiss Art Awards exhibition, which showcases the participants in the second round of the Swiss Art Competition, also includes film portraits of the Swiss Grand Award for Art / Prix Meret Oppenheim 2021 recipients.

The Federal Office of Culture is also producing the 'Swiss Grand Award for Art / Prix Meret Oppenheim 2021 publication, containing interviews in which the laureates offer a deeper insight into their work. It will be enclosed with the Kunstbulletin July / August 2021.

Georges Descombes

Born 1939 in Geneva,
lives in Geneva

« Ne pas voir les arbres, mais le vent qu'ils
rendent visible. Les tourbillons des eaux
plus que les rives. Elle est un choix, un risque,
une hypothèse, la possibilité d'une interven-
tion entrevue dans la complexité d'un site,
puis l'ajustement de contraintes de plus en plus
proches. C'est dans la confrontation avec la
résistance des choses, du monde, qu'on trouve
la forme. »

'Not to see the trees, but the wind that they make visible. The
eddies of the water more than the banks. It's a choice, a risk,
a hypothesis, the possibility of an intervention glimpsed in the
complexity of a site, then the adjustment of constraints that
are closer and closer. It is in the confrontation with the resistance
of things, of the world, that we find form.'

« En parlant avec Georges Descombes, je regrette
de ne pas avoir pu suivre ses enseignements
et l'effervescence disciplinaire qu'il a su créer au
sein de l'école d'architecture de Genève, dans
ce séminaire ‹Architecture et Paysage›, entouré
de coryphées du territoire et de la philosophie. »
(Victoria Easton)

'In speaking with Georges Descombes, I regret not having been
able to follow his teaching and the disciplinary effervescence that
he was able to create within the Geneva school of architecture,
in that Architecture and Landscape seminar, surrounded by leading
lights of landscape and philosophy.' (Victoria Easton)

Georges Descombes is an 'architect of landscape':
a landscape that extends from Geneva to Zurich
(and beyond) and that he travelled around while
a student of architecture. After formative years with
Pier Luigi Nervi and Marc-Joseph Saugey, he
discovered London in the early 1970s. In 1975 he
returned from there to Geneva, where his academic
career began and he set up the CREX (Centre
de Réalisation Expérimentale) at what was then
the École d'Architecture de Genève. His teaching
activities repeatedly drew him to the wide expanses
of America: to Harvard University Graduate
School of Design in Cambridge (1999) and the Uni-
versity of Virginia School of Architecture in
Charlottesville (2000).

Alongside his academic work and architectural
projects, Georges Descombes executed projects in
the landscape which were invariably guided by
the history of the location but without ever becom-
ing nostalgic. Instead, they were always designed
to give a sense not just of the present but also
of the potential future. In his early projects, such
as the Parc de Lancy in the 1980s, the Geneva
section of the Swiss Path around Lake Lucerne in
the early 1990s and the Bijlmer Monument in
Amsterdam at the end of the 1990s, he treated the
landscape concerned as a palimpsest, and was
always on the lookout for traces both visible and
invisible. He felt it was crucial 'to live not in the
past but with the past'.

In 2000 he began working on the Confluence
district of Lyon, Antwerp's southern docks and the
Quai des Matériaux in Brussels. Employing
participatory processes, he asked what it means
to make a landscape in an urban environment
today. A believer in strong gestures, Georges
Descombes invariably strove to arouse emotion,
driven by his view of architecture as 'par excel-
lence an art of experience'. As Ludwig Hohl put
it, in his work, Descombes was always concerned
'to raise the temperature of existing things'.

Also in the early 2000s, Georges Descombes began
to study the renaturing of the River Aire landscape
in the canton of Geneva, which over the course
of its execution until it was completed in 2015
became one of his most emblematic projects: like
a manifesto of landscape and the 'urbanism of
revelation', it prompted a reflection on nature in
all its violence and artificiality, at once dominated
and dominant, but also on its relationship to
humankind, which is both responsible for, and
victim of, the Anthropocene.

Esther Eppstein

Born 1967 in Zurich,
lives in Zurich

«Das Schönste ist es, etwas Gemeinsames voll-
bracht zu haben und Teil zu haben an dieser
Welt, in dieser Zeit, die wir mitgestalten können,
wenn wir es nur einfach machen, uns einmis-
chen, etwas wagen, den Raum beanspruchen und
sichtbar sind.»

'The best thing is to have accomplished something together and to
be part of this world, these times that we can help to shape if we
just keep it simple, get involved, have the courage to be bold, take
hold of space and be visible.'

«Uns verbindet das Staunen über die Stadt,
das Spielen mit der Rolle der Künstlerin in der
Gesellschaft, wir sind beide gut im Machen
und Machenlassen, darin, einen einfachen Rah-
men zu schaffen, in dem man sich begegnen
kann. Tatsächlich bin ich ein wenig stolz,
Esther bereits so lange zu kennen und mit ihr
dieses Gespräch zu führen.» (San Keller)

'We share an amazement with the city, a playful approach to
the artist's role in society; we're both good at getting things done
or getting others to do them for us, and creating a simple frame-
work within which people can meet. I'm actually quite proud to have
known Esther for so long and to be having this conversation
with her.'

Esther Eppstein has been running her message
salon art project since 1996, and it remains
central to her artistic practice to this day.
Founded on Ankerstrasse in Zurich's 4th district,
the offspace has occupied various temporary
homes around the city, including a camper van
which was purchased in 2001 for the Migros
Museum collection. In 2006 she teamed up with
other culture practitioners to launch the Perla-
Mode culture house on the corner of Brauer-
strasse and Langstrasse.

Zurich is at once her home, material for her
work, and her display. Over the years, she has
evolved a kind of seventh sense for the way
the city develops. From the mid-1990s onwards
in particular, she helped to shape the percep-
tion of an entire neighbourhood – Zurich's
fourth district – through her projects and the
use of shops and their window displays that were
standing empty, removing the taboos surround-
ing it and making it the focus of public attention.

For Esther Eppstein, urban development is
and always has been closely bound up with sub-
culture and established cultural life. As she
moved from place to place, she invariably suc-
ceeded in combining art with a living community,
with the aim of creating a network and a
new scene, a kind of diverse art family as social
sculpture, around the physical space that is
message salon.

Since 2015, following the closure of Perla-Mode,
she has been curating message salon embassy,
an artist-run residence without a permanent
home. She invites international artists to spend
time in Zurich and join her on expeditions
into the city's cultural scene, forge new contacts
and publish a message salon embassy zine.

Her projects have always emphasised that the
places where art is staged are truly independent
spaces enabling encounters between diverse
personalities. They have exerted an inestimable
influence on the way art today is experienced
and mediated through people coming together,
and how ideas are picked up and developed.

Esther Eppstein has received numerous awards
for her work as a curator and artist, notably from
the City and Canton of Zurich and the Federal
Office of Culture (2003 and 2006). Her works are
held in the collection of the Migros Museum
für Gegenwartskunst and the Collection of Prints
and Drawings at the Kunsthaus Zürich.

Vivian Suter

born 1949 in Buenos Aires,
lives in Panajachel (Guatemala)

'My state of mind is like a meditation, I am
in an osmotic relationship to nature, which
is changing all the time. I think that mobility
is in my work too.'

'As a member of the Swiss Federal Art Commission who is used to talking to artists, I confess
that my encounter with Vivian Suter remains one
of the most beautiful moments of art criticism
I've ever experienced. Despite the frustration of
being far apart and her extremely shy reserve,
discovering her world, remote from all the usual
landmarks of a conventional artistic career,
allowed me to enter the inner universe of a
woman who made radical choices and never gave
up until the art scene came to find her. (..) I'm
convinced Vivian Suter is a strong model for the
young generation, whose future is more than
ever beset with doubts at the moment.'
(Julie Enckell Julliard)

Vivian Suter comes from a family of artists. Her
great-grandmother was an artist, as was her
mother Elisabeth Wild (1922–2020). Her mother
painted the whole time Vivian was growing up.
Until Vivian Suter was 13, the family lived in
Argentina. Thereafter, in Switzerland, she graduated from the Kunstgewerbeschule in Basel
where she attended painting classes and also
studied sculpture, colour and writing. She had
her first exhibition in 1972, at the Galerie Stampa
in Basel. In 1981, the same year in which she
received a Federal Art Scholarship, she was invited
to put on an exhibition by Jean-Christophe
Ammann, director of the Kunsthalle Basel at
the time.

When Vivian Suter left Switzerland in 1983
following those initial successes, the art world
was unable to comprehend why she had chosen
to live her life in isolation, and more or less
forgot about her. It was some time before she
was rediscovered. In 2014, at the invitation
of curator Adam Szymczyk, she returned to the
picture surface and the Kunsthalle Basel: in
the solo exhibition 'Vivian Suter intrépida featuring Elisabeth Wild Fantasías 2', she presented
works from the preceding thirty years, along
with selected collages by Elisabeth Wild. It was
also Adam Szymczyk who, 45 years after her
first trip to Documenta, presented her at the 14th
edition in Kassel and in Athens. Until then,
Vivian Suter had been working and refining her
artistic practice far away from the art world
on a former coffee plantation Guatemala. Freed
from all those influences, she had developed
her own distinctive language in which
the moments of its creation are inscribed.

Nature was Vivian Suter's studio all the while,
and remains so today: 'You have to climb to
get there, through the plants and trees. You're
already immersed in the chirping of birds, the
smell of the soil and fruits. You have to look for
space in the forest in order to paint.'
(Julie Enckell Julliard)

The characteristic features of this specific production context can also be appreciated in
her exhibitions, where the paintings mounted or
suspended in space come together as pieces of
a giant textile sculpture. Moving into it is an
immersive experience that makes you feel as if
you are travelling far away and experiencing
the density of the rainforest.

Vivian Suter's exceptional work is being honoured by two solo exhibitions this year: in June
at the Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid and in
November with 'Vivian Suter Retrospective' at
the Kunstmuseum Luzern.

Publication

The Federal Office of Culture is publishing 'Swiss Grand Award for Art/Prix Meret Oppenheim 2021', containing portraits of the award winners and interviews. The interviews were conducted by Victoria Easton (architect, Christ & Gantenbein, Basel) with Georges Descombes; San Keller (artist, Zurich) with Esther Eppstein; and Julie Enckell Julliard (head of the Cultural Development Department, HEAD, Geneva) with Vivian Suter.

ISBN 978-3-9525152-7-3
German, English, French

Editorial
Gina Bucher

Graphic Design
Adeline Mollard

Photography
Flavio Karrer
Douglas Mandry
Karla Hiraldo Voleau

Illustration
Olga Prader

Circulation
10 000

The publication will be available with the July/august 2021 Kunstbulletin and free copies can be ordered by email **swissart@bak.admin.ch.**

Film Portraits

Director Marie-Eve Hildbrand (Terrain Vague, Lausanne) is producing film portraits of the laureates of the Swiss Grand Award for Art / Prix Meret Oppenheim 2021.

German, French with subtitles

Duration
approx. 7 min each

Trailers
Georges Descombes
Esther Eppstein
Vivian Suter

Présentation
Swiss Art Awards 2021 exhibition and online from 20 September 2021
swissartawards.ch
Link

Swiss Grand Award for Art / Prix Meret Oppenheim

Created in 2001 by the Federal Office for Culture in collaboration with the Federal Art Commission, the Swiss Grand Award for Art / Prix Meret Oppenheim is awarded on the recommendation of the Commission to artists, architects, curators, researchers and critics, whose internationally renowned work is of particular relevance and importance to Swiss artistic and architectural practice. Each award carries prize money of CHF 40 000.

Jury
Prix Meret Oppenheim 2021

Federal Art Commission

President
Raffael Dörig
(Director, Kunsthaus Langenthal)

Members
Laura Arici
(Art historian, Zurich)

Victoria Easton
(Architect, Christ & Gantenbein, Basel)

Julie Enckell Julliard
(Head of Cultural Development Department, HEAD – Genève, Geneva)

San Keller
(Artist, Zurich)

Anne-Julie Raccoursier
(Artist, Lausanne)

Architecture Experts
Jeannette Kuo
(Architect, Karamuk Kuo, Zürich)

Tanya Zein
(Architect, FAZ architectes, Geneva)

**Laureates
2001–2020**

2020
Marc Bauer
Barbara Buser & Eric Honegger
Koyo Kouoh

2019
Meili Peter Architekten
Shirana Shahbazi
Samuel Schellenberg

2018
Sylvie Fleury
Thomas Hirschhorn
Luigi Snozzi

2017
Daniela Keiser
Peter Märkli
Philip Ursprung

2016
Adelina von Fürstenberg
Christian Philipp Müller
Martin Steinmann

2015
Christoph Büchel
Olivier Mosset
Urs Stahel
Staufer/Hasler

2014
Anton Bruhin
Catherine Quéloz
Pipilotti Rist
pool Architekten

2013
Thomas Huber
Quintus Miller & Paola Maranta
MarcOlivier Wahler

2012
Bice Curiger
Niele Toroni
Günther Vogt

2011
John Armleder
Patrick Devanthéry & Inès Lamunière
Silvia Gmür
Ingeborg Lüscher
Guido Nussbaum

2010
Gion A. Caminada
Yan Duyvendak
Claudia & Julia Müller
Annette Schindler
Roman Signer

2009
Ursula Biemann
Roger Diener
Christian Marclay
Muda Mathis & Sus Zwick
Ingrid Wildi Merino

2008
edition fink (Georg Rutishauser)
Mariann Grunder
Manon
Mario Pagliarani
Arthur Rüegg

2007
Véronique Bacchetta
Kurt W. Forster
Peter Roesch
Anselm Stalder

2006
Dario Gamboni
Markus Raetz
Catherine Schelbert
Robert Suermondt
Rolf Winnewisser
Peter Zumthor

2005
Miriam Cahn
Alexander Fickert & Katharina Knapkiewicz
Johannes Gachnang
Gianni Motti
Václav Požárek
Michel Ritter

2004
Christine Binswanger & Harry Gugger
Roman Kurzmeyer
Peter Regli
Hannes Rickli

2003
Silvia Bächli
Rudolf Blättler
Hervé Graumann
Harm Lux
Claude Sandoz

2002
Ian Anüll Hannes Brunner
Marie José Burki
Relax (Marie-Antoinette Chiarenza, Daniel Croptier, Daniel Hauser)
Renée Levi

2001
Peter Kamm
Ilona Rüegg
George Steinmann

Dates

Award Ceremony
Swiss Grand Award for Art /
Prix Meret Oppenheim and
Swiss Art Awards

20 September 2021
Details on the website
schweizerkulturpreise.ch

Exhibition
Swiss Art Awards 2021
20–26 September 2021
Halle 3, Messe Basel
Free entrance

Social Media
swissartawards.ch
@swissartawards
#swissartawards
#prixmeretoppenheim

Contacts

**Information on the
Confederation's culture awards**

Danielle Nanchen
Cultural Production
Federal Office of Culture

+41 58 464 98 23
danielle.nanchen@bak.admin.ch

**Information
on the Swiss Art Awards**

Léa Fluck
Head of Art Promotion
Cultural Production
Federal Office of Culture

+41 58 462 92 89
lea.fluck@bak.admin.ch

Media services

KEINE AGENTUR
Jenni Schmitt & Andrea Brun

+41 78 940 04 37
media-kunst@
schweizerkulturpreise.ch

Press images

High-resolution portraits of
the laureates are available at:
www.bak.admin.ch/pmo