

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



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

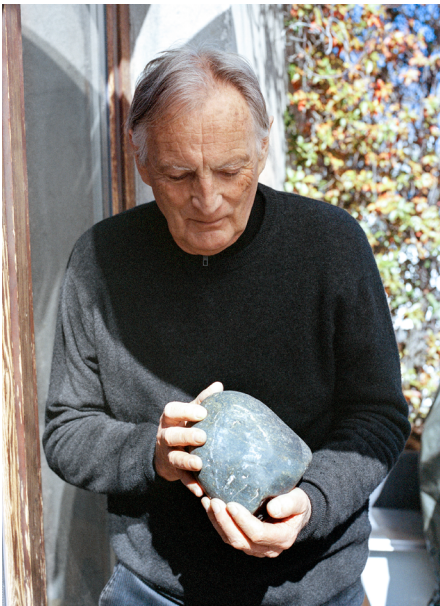
Swiss Confederation

Eidgenössisches Departement des Innern EDI
Département fédéral de l'intérieur DFI
Dipartimento federale dell'interno DFI
Departament federal da l'intern DFI
Federal Department of Home Affairs FDHA
Bundesamt für Kultur BAK
Office fédéral de la culture OFC
Ufficio federale della cultura UFC
Uffizi federal da cultura UFC
Federal Office of Culture FOC

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 intervention 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 University 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 becoming 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 excellence 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 vollbracht zu haben und Teil zu haben an dieser Welt, in dieser Zeit, die wir mitgestalten können, wenn wir es nur einfach machen, uns einmischen, 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 Rahmen 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 framework 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.'

From 1996 Esther Eppstein directed the offspace and the cross-disciplinary art project message salon in Zurich for 20 years. In 2006, she founded with other cultural workers the art space Perla-Mode in a former fashion boutique. In 2013, the property on Langstrasse was demolished and Perla-Mode closed its doors. For her, Zurich is home, material for her work, and 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 perception of an entire neighbourhood – Zurich's fourth district – through her projects and the use of shops and industrial buildings that were standing empty, removing the taboos surrounding it and making it the focus of public attention.

For Esther Eppstein, urban development is and always has been closely bound up with subculture and established cultural life. As she moved from place to place, she invariably succeeded 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 the closure of the Perla-Mode exhibition space in 2015, she has been running the message salon embassy art project – an artist-run residence that invites international artists to spend time in Zurich and practise their art there. She also publishes zines and souvenirs through message salon embassy.

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, Kunsthau
Langenthal)

Members

Laura Arici
(Art historian, Zurich)

Victoria Easton
(Architect, Christ & Ganten-
bein, 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 Guggler
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](https://www.instagram.com/swissartawards)
[#swissartawards](https://www.facebook.com/swissartawards)
[#prixmeretoppenheim](https://www.facebook.com/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