



Museum Ulm | Marktplatz 9 | 89073 Ulm

BERBLINGER  
20·21

Stadt Ulm

ulm

: Press Text

# : Transhuman

## From Prosthetics to the Cyborg

### 11 July to 13 December 2020

The failed flight attempt of Albrecht Ludwig Berblinger (1770-1829), who went down in history as the "Schneiders of Ulm", is known by almost everyone today. Another, much more successful invention of the famous inventor has been largely forgotten: Over 200 years ago, Albrecht Ludwig Berblinger built the first movable prosthetic legs for the many injured soldiers of the Napoleonic Wars. He thus succeeded in creating a basic design for the development of modern prosthetics. In the context of the 250th anniversary of Albrecht Ludwig Berblinger's birth, his invention provides the occasion for an interdisciplinary exhibition dealing with the complementation, imitation and improvement of human nature, the overcoming of our physical limits and the artificial human being. On the one hand, it takes a look at the 3,000-year cultural and medical-historical development of prosthetics. On the other hand, it sheds light on the change in the religious and social significance of physical disability in artistic depictions since the Middle Ages. Finally, with aspects of Body Enhancement, she discusses the technological possibilities for optimization and the ethical-social challenges that unfold with the overcoming of the body as a defect and its expansion towards immortality.



The idea of man as a being capable of and committed to self-optimization can be traced back to the Renaissance. The relationship of his body to technology, its repair by means of prostheses and finally its transhumanistic expansion are and remain characterized by the ambivalent interplay of adjustment and support, destruction and the building of physical integrity. The individual demands on prosthetics are and remain as diverse as our life plans. For many centuries, the design of prostheses followed the pragmatic aspects of motor functionality and natural design. As spare parts, which were often self-denying, they served to improve quality of life and performance. In the past decades, the possibilities of specifically overcoming human biology have increased massively. Flexible materials and powerful microprocessors, actuators and brain-computer interfaces have revolutionized the relationship between man and machine. Robotics, prosthetics, artificial intelligence and neuro-enhancement are constantly pushing the limits of what is thinkable and feasible. The machines crawl under the skin, so to speak. And so in the face of technoself, the natural body appears as an antiquated ideal. Beyond concealing imitation and the reconstruction of normality, prostheses today support the construction of identity to a large extent.

The human attempt to replace lost limbs or limbs whose function has been impaired in a practical and aesthetic way has a long history. Anyone looking for the representation of prostheses in the visual arts between the Middle Ages and the 19th century will find almost exclusively prosthetic legs and will also come across a very specific iconographic context: in the representational conventions of art throughout the centuries, prostheses were the dubious privilege of the poor, beggars and people at the lower end of society. In religious depictions or in works of art that are supposed to convey Christian values, people with physical disabilities and wearers of prostheses appear as objects of charitable care. In other artistic contexts, however, they often became the object of satire and stigmatization. As early as the 18th century, however, the pictorial motif of the prosthesis was found less frequently than before; finally, in the 19th century, artificial legs and hands lost their relevance to the iconographic thematic field of poverty and war wounding. It was only with the catastrophe of the early 20th century, the First World War and its aftermath, that the prosthetic motif was to experience a dramatic resurgence in an art that was now completely redefined.

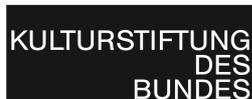
Despite all the profound changes in our increasingly virtual world, the human body with all its forms of appearance was and is the most important reference point in the fine arts. For generations, the desire, longing and striving for a physical ideal has been reflected in them. With the beginning of modernity and as a reaction to the emerging industrialisation, the first collective man-machine fantasies began to emerge. As early as 1914, the founder of Italian Futurism, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, formulated his vision of a humanoid, which went hand in hand with the creation of a mechanical man from spare parts. The development of psychoanalysis brought the split of the human being with its physical symptoms, its neuroses, drives and fetishes into public discourse and into the focus of artistic contemplation. In Surrealism, the symbolic power of the fragmented body became the dominant artistic theme for the first time. In the face of technological progress, current contemporary artistic positions also reflect prosthetics up to the cyborg; the exhibition presents works by:

**Kader Attia | Sophie de Oliveira Barata | Anna Blumenkranz | Renaud Jerez | Mari Katayama | Alexander Kluge | Erika Mondria | Aimee Mullins | Miguel Angel Rojas | Martha Rosler | Keisuke Shimakage | Igor Simić | Stelarc**

The **exhibition** will be accompanied by a **publication** (German/English, 264 pages, numerous illustrations) and a comprehensive programme of **events**.

: In cooperation with the **Schwäbisch Gmünd School of Design**

Founded by the German Federal Cultural Foundation



## Press Conference | Thu | 09 July 2020 | 11 a.m.

With the curator **Dr. Stefanie Dathe**, **Prof. Ralf Dringenberg** (Rector), **Prof. Dr. Dagmar Rinker** (Professor of Design History, Design Research and Exhibition Theory in the Communication Design course of study), **Prof. Gabriele N. Reichert** (Professor of Basics, Product Design and Transhumanism in the Master of Strategic Design), **Prof. Gerhard Reichert** (Professor of Product Design, Initiator Simple Limb) from the cooperation partner **Schwäbisch Gmünd School of Design**

: Further information on the **exhibition** is also available at [www.museumulm.de](http://www.museumulm.de). There you will also find **text and image material** for **download** in the **press area**.

Image: Albrecht Ludwig Berblinger, Artificial Foot Machine, pencil on watercolour and paper, 1809, City Archive Ulm | Sophie de Oliveira Barata and Dani Clode, Synchronised for Kelly Knox, 2017, The Alternative Limb Project, Photo Omkaar Kotedia

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**New Opening Hours**  
Tue - Sun : 11 a.m. - 05 p.m.  
Sat - Sun : 11 a.m. - 06 p.m.  
[www.museumulm.de](http://www.museumulm.de)