

In the exhibition *Spirit*, Rémy Markowitsch elucidates the vast collection of the Coninx Museum in Zurich. He consults the works and their collector Werner Coninx, and he invokes the spirits of the house by bringing darkness to light: the collector's mother, Max Frisch, art, moderation and excess.

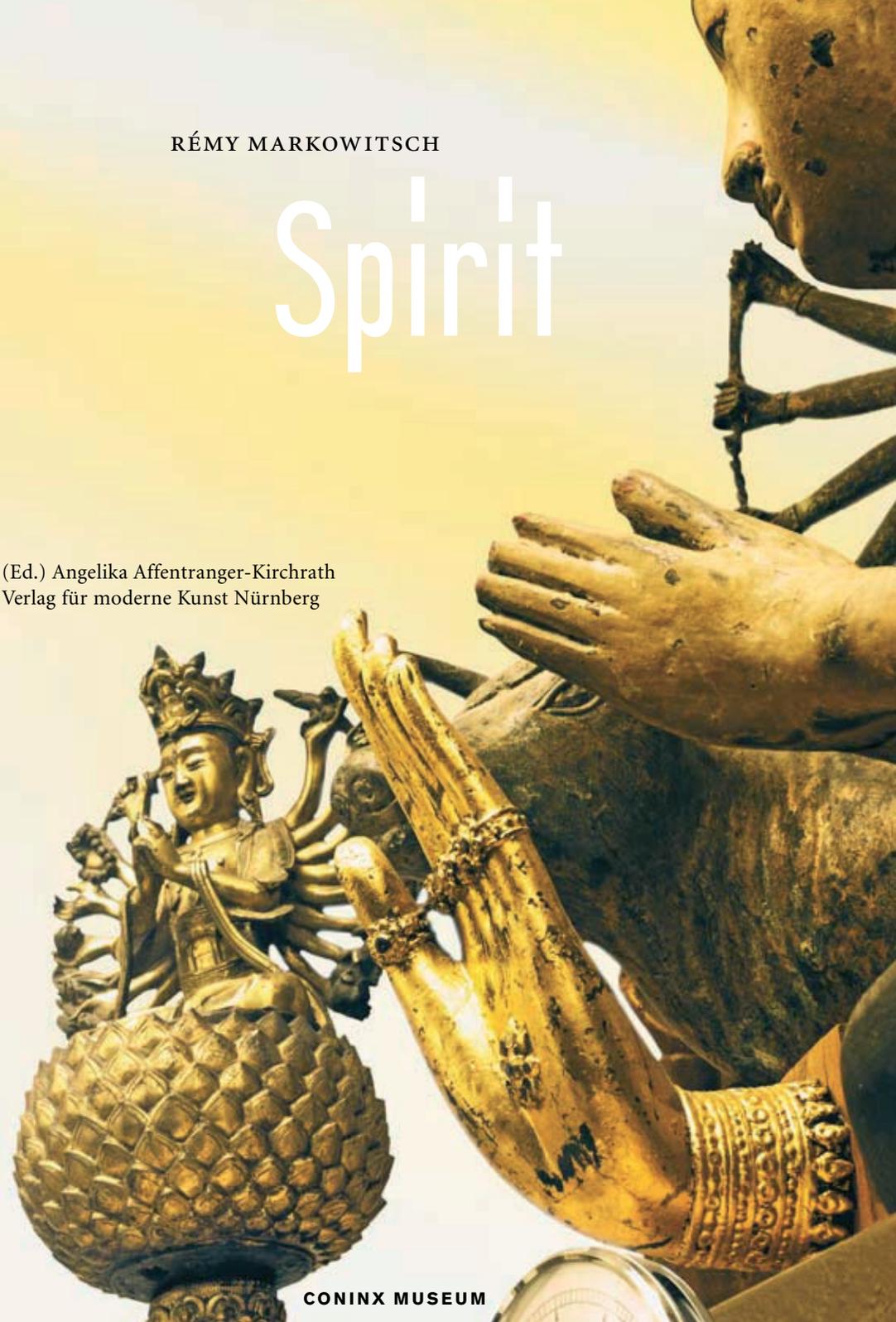
With contributions by  
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Right page: *Spirit* (Cover)

RÉMY MARKOWITSCH

# Spirit

(Ed.) Angelika Affentranger-Kirchrath  
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CONINX MUSEUM

Rémy Markowitsch – Spirit  
CONINX MUSEUM Zürich

Rémy Markowitsch, who attracted considerable attention in 2004 with his exhibitions *You're not alone* at the Kirchner Museum in Davos and *On Travel* at the Museum zu Allerheiligen in Schaffhausen, now has a six-month guest appearance at the Coninx Museum in Zurich. Just as he has previously 'candled' and regenerated photographs from books, his new Spirit exhibition elucidates the vast Coninx Collection. Markowitsch sheds light on the works and on the collector, Werner Coninx, creating a dialogue of intriguing complexity. Markowitsch invokes the spirits of the house and brings them into the present day in an exhibition that spans an arc through all the rooms.

Werner Coninx (1911–1980), whose father Otto Coninx founded the Swiss daily Tages-Anzeiger, was an obsessive collector. That, at least, seems the only plausible explanation for the fact that he single-handedly amassed a collection of some 14,000 works. In the novel *Montauk*, Max Frisch portrays his boyhood friend Werner Coninx as a highly sensitive and intelligent individual who was also a complex and melancholy loner. Coninx himself had trained as a painter but, having met with little success, increasingly channelled his energies into collecting the works of other artists. His collection includes works by his artist friends in Zurich as well as paintings by Calame and Hodler and entire groups of works by the Barraud brothers Aurèle, Aimé, Charles and François, who have only recently begun to receive recognition. Prints and drawings form one of the mainstays of the collection, including works by Picasso, Bonnard, Vuillard and Kirchner. Although Werner Coninx never actually travelled to other continents, he collected a large number of sculptures of Indian, Chinese and African origin.

The sheer quantity of this extraordinarily extensive private collection gave Rémy Markowitsch a point of reference for his own work, in which he also addresses the theme of excess and the phenomenon of manic enthusiasm. With an explorer's thirst for knowledge, Markowitsch has combed through, brought to light and reinterpreted many of the traces left in the Coninx Villa by those who once lived there and by the art they collected. One fundamental aspect of his approach lies in his handling of light. Rooms as bright as day alternate in a crescendo and diminuendo of light with dimly lit spaces and still others that are shrouded in darkness. This score of light and dark not only influences and interprets the effect of the works presented in these rooms, but also points up the architectural changes to the building. In 1997 the dark wood-panelled rooms were transformed into light, understated exhibition spaces.

The installation *You are not alone Vol. 4*, a wall consisting of more than 2000 wine bottles, breaks the light into shades of green that lend an uncanny note to the *Dark Wall* opposite, with its works in sombre tones by Robert Schürch, Ignaz Epper, Fritz Pauli and Gregor Rabinovitch. By focusing in this way on one important aspect of the collection, Markowitsch succeeds in evoking the introverted, even claustrophobic, aspects of Werner Coninx' personality.

The *Portrait of a Collection* video in the former dining room of the Villa Coninx seeks to render the collection physically and mentally tangible. More than 2000 works – paintings, sculptures, drawings – are projected onto the wall in the same size, burning themselves into our memory like lightning flashes at a rate of six images per second. The significance of the individual work succumbs to a sense of immense quantity, underscored by the voice of the artist reading the passage about Werner Coninx from Max Frisch's *Montauk*.

Elsewhere, in a rather unexpected place, Markowitsch has again appropriated and transformed what already exists: a huge cabinet, designed by Max Frisch for the Coninx family and later banished to the basement, has been converted into a bookcase by the artist with the aid of cabinetmaker Martin Schmid. Fresh Frisch now forms the heart of a house library containing books that provide an intellectual and spiritual backdrop to the exhibition. The library not only becomes a place where visitors to the exhibition can linger, but also a meeting point for all the characters of the house. The memoirs of the collector's widely travelled mother Berta Coninx-Girardet rub shoulders here with the philosophical and cultural treatises that Werner Coninx once owned and with the collected works of Max Frisch, reuniting long-disunited thoughts and ideas.

The book *Spirit*, published by Verlag für moderne Kunst Nürnberg, is intended as an extension of the exhibition. Markowitsch's photographic journeys through the depot concentrate on the collection in its raw state, illuminating objects that might otherwise never have seen the light of an exhibition.

Angelika Affentranger-Kirchrath  
Curator, Coninx Museum



Musikzimmer: *Lager Regal* / Music Room: *Keep Peek*

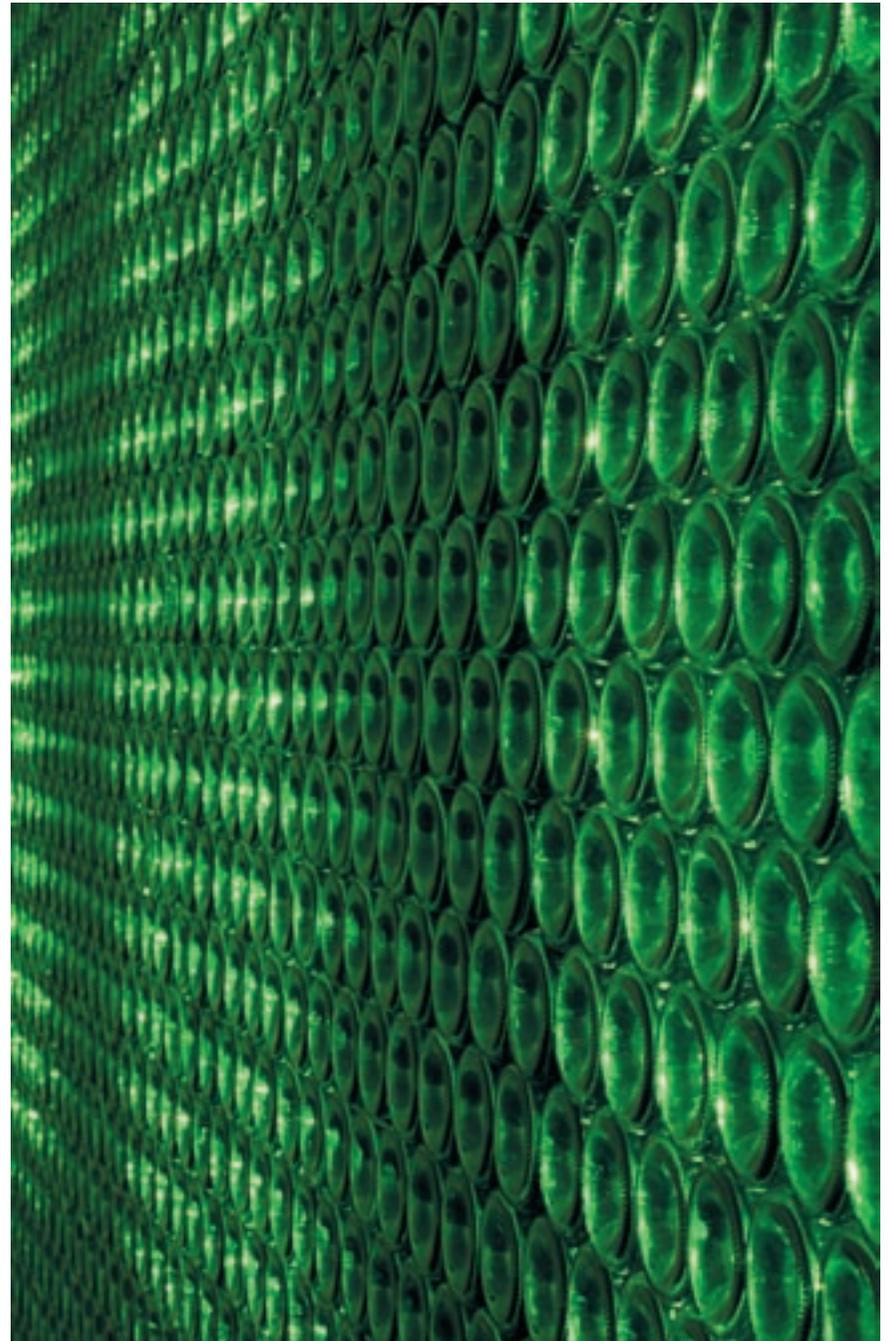
Rémy Markowitsch, *Spirit*, Coninx Museum Zürich, 2005

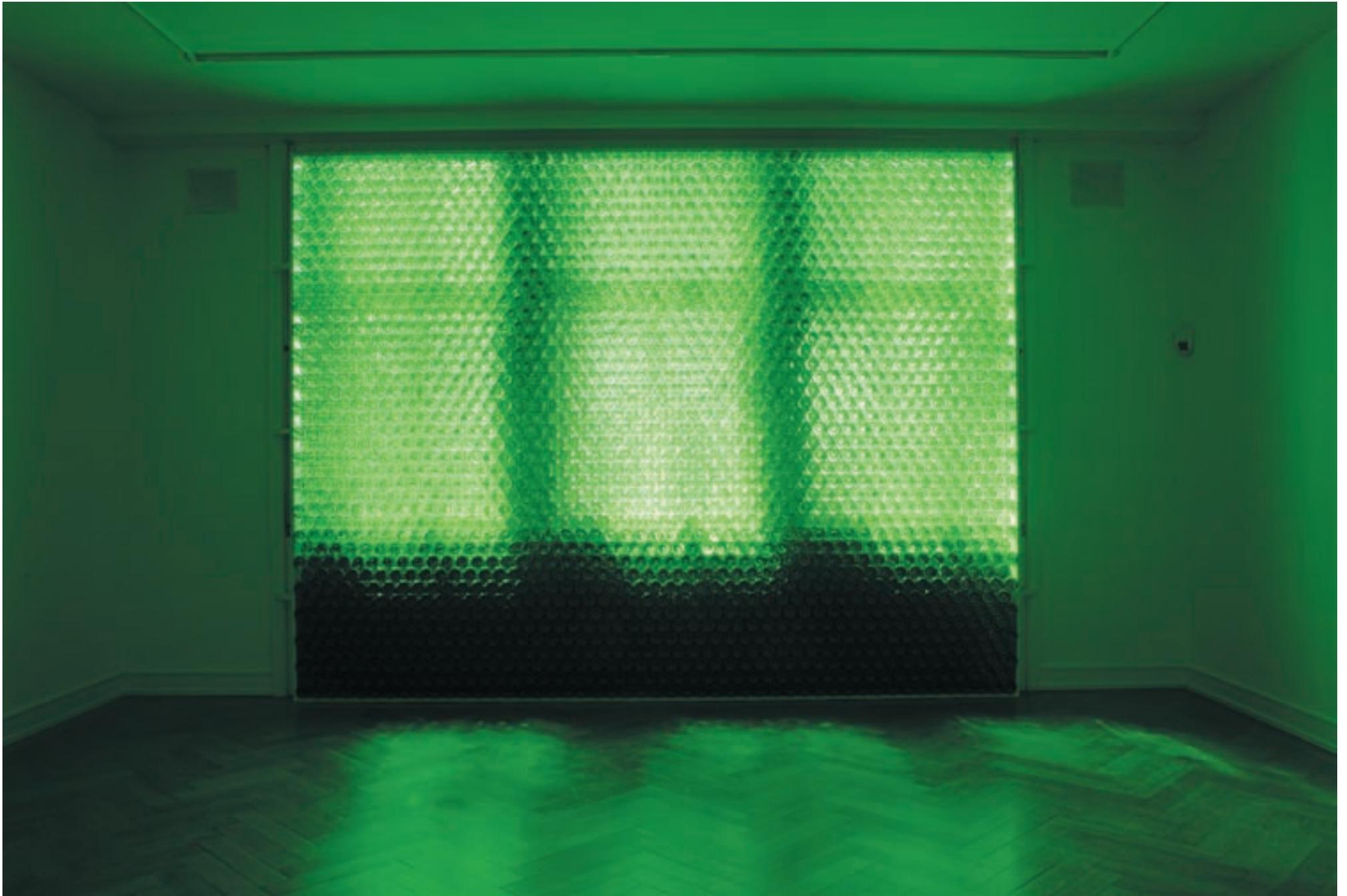
## YOU ARE NOT ALONE (VOL.4), 2005

More than 2000 empty Bordeaux wine bottles stacked against the wall break the daylight into hues of green, further heightening the gloomy atmosphere of the Dark Wall. This is already the fourth time that Markowitsch has used a wall of bottles as part of an in-situ installation (in 2004 at Galerie EIGEN + ART, Berlin and Galerie Urs Meile, Luzern, and in 2005 at the Kunsthalle Nürnberg). The title of the work refers to a line in David Bowie's Rock 'n' Roll Suicide, which the musician himself has described as a reference to Charles Baudelaire's *Paradis artificiels* (1860). The wall of bottles, situated in the room that formerly contained the house bar, also cites the bottle-glass panes that are a characteristic architectural element of the Villa Coninx.

### Installation:

ca. 2000 Bordeaux-Flaschen, Holz / approx. 2000 Bordeaux wine bottles, wood,  
283 x 376 x 29 cm





Salon / Drawing Room: YOU ARE NOT ALONE (VOL.4)

Rémy Markowitsch, *Spirit*, Coninx Museum Zürich, 2005

Dark Wall, 2005

Werner Coninx had a penchant for figurative works by Swiss Expressionists. The prints and drawings by Ignaz Epper, Fritz Pauli, Gregor Rabinovitch and Johannes Robert Schürch that make up the Dark Wall bear witness to the predominant theme of the individual as a solitary being, oppressed by external circumstances or inner turmoil and caught in the confinement of claustrophobic spaces.

Installation:

/21works on paper (wood, glass, framed)

In collaboration with Angelika Affentranger-Kirchrath





Salon / Drawing Room: *Dark Wall*

Rémy Markowitsch, *Spirit*, Coninx Museum Zürich, 2005

## Portrait of a Collection, 2005

Rémy Markowitsch has created a video installation in the former dining room of the villa. The image shows the monumental head of a Buddha of Indian Mathura origin. It once stood on the writing desk in Werner Coninx' bedroom.

2000 works – paintings, sculptures, drawings – all projected in the same wall-to-wall dimensions in the former dining room, burn themselves on our memory like flashes of lightning at a rate of six images per second in a five-and-half minute cycle. The significance of the individual work is overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of images and the superimposed voice of the artist reading the extract from Max Frisch's *Montauk* that describes Werner Coninx.

Video installation 5'30

Video editing: Stefan Davix, Berlin

Soundtrack: Reading from *Montauk*

Sound recording: Hanspeter Dommann, Luzern



Esszimmer: *Portrait einer Sammlung* / Dining Room: *Portrait of a Collection*

Rémy Markowitsch, *Spirit*, Coninx Museum Zürich, 2005

*Headhunters, 2005*

Sculptures are kept on the second set of shelving, which again transposes the depot atmosphere to the exhibition space in the form of a readymade. Unlike the paintings where, for the most part, only the frames can be seen, the heads of these sculptures face the viewer directly. They draw attention to the Asian world, focusing in particular on the Gandharan art that is so strongly represented in the Coninx Collection. In their bid to appropriate the very soul of the work, many dealers and collectors in those days concentrated on obtaining only the heads of sculptures – an approach that, to today's art historians, seems tantamount to headhunting.

Number of sculptures: 48

Window with buttermilk

Shelving, 250 x 243 x 50 cm



Schlafzimmer des Sammlers / The collector's bedroom: *Headhunters*

Rémy Markowitsch, *Spirit*, Coninx Museum Zürich, 2005

*I thought you were already in the soup, 2005*

Berta Coninx-Girardet travelled through Africa by car. In her memoirs of the journey, *Aequatorial-Afrika vom Auto aus* (1931), she gives a vivid description of the somewhat uneasy situation that typically found its way into the xenophobic annals of white Europeans in Africa. On one occasion, she suddenly saw herself surrounded by black people. On reaching the safety of her car only moments later, her companion remarked laconically, "I thought you were already in the soup." This sentence, scanned from the lead type of her book, now adorns a wall in the former master bedroom. As a quote, it offers many potential associations, including its reference to the Senufo sculpture of a figure nursing two infants that squats before the buttermilk-coated windows.

Senufo sculpture, Sudan,  
Ivory Coast, wood, approx. 1940, 81 cm  
Window with buttermilk

The photographic translucidations are taken from the following publication:  
Berta Coninx-Girardet, *Aequatorial-Afrika vom Auto aus*, Orell Füssli, Zürich, 1931.

*Aequatorial-Afrika vom Auto aus* (01, 2005)  
RC-Print, acrylic glass, wood, 140 x 220 cm





Elternschlafzimmer / Master bedroom: *I thought you were already in the soup*

Rémy Markowitsch, *Spirit*, Coninx Museum Zürich, 2005



*Aequatorial-Afrika vom Auto aus* (02, 2005) RC-Print, acrylic glass, wood, 260 x 150 cm



Elternschlafzimmer / Master bedroom: *I thought you were already in the soup*

Rémy Markowitsch, *Spirit*, Coninx Museum Zürich, 2005

*Fresh Frisch, 2005*

The Fresh Frisch bookcase pays homage to its maker: Max Frisch. The writer, a school friend of Werner Coninx, designed the cabinet for the Coninx family when he was an architect. This bulky item of furniture, which was banished to the basement for years, has been transformed into a bookcase by Markowitsch together with cabinetmaker Martin Schmid. It now forms the heart of a library containing, among other things, the collected works of Max Frisch.

The other pieces of furniture in this room are made from the remaining pieces of the cabinet. The upholstery of men's suit fabric is a reference to the oversized suits that Werner Coninx handed down to Max Frisch, who confesses in *Montauk* that he was not particularly grateful to his benefactor because they were always too big.

Werner Coninx' mother Berta Coninx-Girardet was not only an intrepid traveller, but also an art lover who laid the foundations of the collection by acquiring works by Hodler and Courbet. Artist Johann von Tscharnner captured her quirky personality in a portrait that now hangs in the library high above the drawers of the cabinet, now transformed into stools, where it is mirrored in the glass panes of the bookcase, recalling the ancestral portraits of the pre-photographic age.

Bookcase: Glas /wood (oak and walnut),  
glass, 261 x 349 x 49 cm

Stools and bench: upholstery (men's suit jackets), Stefanie Biggel, Zürich

In collaboration with Martin Schmid, Schmid & Vollenweider, Möbelwerkstatt Luzern





Wandschrank entworfen von Max Frisch für die Familie Coninx

Rémy Markowitsch, *Spirit*, Coninx Museum Zürich, 2005



Treppenhaus (1.Stock): *Fresh Frisch* (Sitzbank) / Stairway (first floor): *Fresh Frisch*

Rémy Markowitsch, *Spirit*, Coninx Museum Zürich, 2005



Badezimmer: Fresh Frisch (Bücherschrank) / Bathroom: Fresh Frisch (bookcase)

Rémy Markowitsch, *Spirit*, Coninx Museum Zürich, 2005



Bathroom: *Fresh Frisch* (detail with Spirit project books)



Oil painting: Johann von Tschärner, *Portrait Frau Dr. Coninx*, 1933, 73 x 60 cm



Badezimmer: *Fresh Frisch* (Bibliothek) / Bathroom: *Fresh Frisch* (library)

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