

Here is a text about Markus  
Schinwald and his exhibition  
of new and recent work.

This is an impossible body. Some parts are painted, some are bagged, some stand straight, and others are perched up high. A network of metal rods holds them together, forming a central nervous system that allows each painting, sculpture, or piece of architecture to function as a dispersed limb of a single organism. As such, they belong with and fold into each other. Objects migrate into paintings, and bodies find a way to slip into objects. The flat surfaces of walls soften and take on the properties of fleshy skin or upholstered furniture, and cling to the paintings that hang on or inside them. The thin lines that cut through the space reappear on 19th-century portraits in the form of prostheses, and wooden sculptures cut from table legs contain that same sense of distortion.

Each element depends  
on another — *the way a hand  
depends on a wrist* — and it  
seems entirely possible that any  
change made to a painting would  
alter the shape of a sculpture or  
the angle of a wall on the other  
side of the room .

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In many ways,  
this is what  
the future  
looks like —  
a cybernetic  
entanglement  
where bodies  
merge with  
matter and  
space has a  
consciousness  
of its own .

Until fairly recently, bodies and objects have been easy to tell apart. People put objects on their bodies and put their bodies on objects all the time, and they don't usually lose their ability to distinguish between the two — *no one mistakes the neck for the necklace*, and everyone knows which is the finger and which is the phone. There has been a basic understanding of where the body begins and where it ends.

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The history of technology, for some, is a story about the body and its dependency on artificial forms. Used to enhance (and at times to replace) the body, objects have helped develop a more efficient and productive body, one capable of overcoming its vulnerabilities.

But in writing about the prosthetic or the post-human, theorists such as Elizabeth Grosz or N. Katherine Hayles point to how a technological apparatus can never entirely consume, capture, compute, or replace the tone of a voice, the character of a gesture, the rhythm of a laugh, the discretion of a pose, or the temperament of a glimpse. The body is still an affected body, an infected body, a contingent body . . . a body always vulnerable to itself.

Knowledge and consciousness, they argue, are always embodied, always enmeshed within the specifics of the body's relationship to space, time, form, and culture.

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Grosz therefore sees promise in any art or science that

“presents us with the possibilities of bodies that are *barely conceivable*, that challenge and problematize the very stability and givenness of bodies, that force us to rethink our presumptions and our understandings of what bodies are.”

Markus Schinwald imagines new, other, and sometimes impossible types of bodies and ways of thinking about bodies . His paintings, sculptures, videos, performances, and installations confuse the boundaries between bodies, objects, spaces, and behaviors, and complicate the norms that govern the ways we understand how they all coexist .

“I’m not trying to rob people of their personalities, but to give objects personalities, too. ”





Schinwald's works  
have good moods, bad  
moods, nervous tics, and  
psychological baggage.  
They have "issues" in the  
way most relationships do.  
Conversely, the artist also  
imagines a world where a  
state of mind could give rise  
to an object. "What if,"  
the work asks, "a moment  
of anxiety could generate  
a neck brace?"

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In its most basic form, the prosthesis is a  
technology that joins two disparate parts  
to create something new. When inscribed  
within the norms and conventions of  
human progress, the prosthesis exists to  
correct a fault, fulfill a void, and make an  
impossible body *possible* again. But when  
freed from those norms, the prosthesis is  
able to make a body impossible again.

Buying minor 19th-century portraits at auction, Schinwald carefully alters the images by adding incoherent characteristics such as surgical masks, straightjackets, neck braces, nose piercings, or even orthodontic apparatuses. These new details manipulate as much as they decorate. The types of portraits he purchases proliferated during the Biedermeier era (1815–48), when restrictive political policies and censorship resulted in conservative paintings of poised figures in buttoned-up shirts and flawless hairdos. Schinwald intervenes by adding possible defects, and imagines how the sitter's interior mental state might manifest itself in the form of an artificial prosthesis, albeit one with a purpose that remains unclear. One can only presume that should the figure's mood change, or a sudden moment of panic or joy emerge, the prosthesis might disappear or readjust. In other words, the object is not a defect at all.

Similarly, Schinwald's sculptures of wooden table legs inject the properties of life into inanimate objects. Sawed off from Chippendale-style tables, the sculptures are placed around the room as if an object's erratic movements had been captured in a series of frozen moments . . . Uninhibited by their objecthood, they are instilled with a heightened sense of agency and, as such, become deviant objects — they *bend*, they *stretch*, they *crawl*, they *itch*, they *flirt*. Some even wrap themselves around bronze poles and s p r e a d their legs.

The mechanism that holds the paintings and sculptures together is the room itself. Schinwald establishes an *architecture of dependency* among padded walls, brass rods, wooden legs, and painted faces, with each part of this network unfolding through the space like a dismembered limb or an artificial joint.

It seems counterintuitive that something that constrains or distorts a body can be what a body wants or needs. But Schinwald's work is less about celebrating fetishistic dysfunction than it is about challenging the ways we think about the nature of dysfunction itself. Inserting impediments not only disrupts the natural tendency to correct, replace, or repair, but also imagines a state where concealing a problem is more dysfunctional than putting it on display.

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This would be a world  
where knees happily  
*twitch* whenever they  
come close to their  
favorite doorknob,  
and where metal objects  
experience the same  
moments of despair or  
excitement as the rest  
of us .

In his 1962 novel *The Ticket That Exploded*, William S. Burroughs imagines that the human body contains within it a set of “pre-recordings” that behave like parasites, always ready to take over.

“Carry Corders of the world unite.  
You have nothing to lose but your  
pre-recordings.”

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The only way to fight back is to  
record the pre-recordings and  
then cut them up, displace them,  
play them against each other,  
and allow the ensuing *distortions*  
*and hallucinations* to produce  
another world.

Schinwald, like Burroughs, does what good science fiction does : He formulates a critique of preexisting norms and laws, devises ways to short-circuit them, and proposes other possible (or impossible) alignments and alliances between bodies, objects, emotions, and spaces . . . His is a future where inefficiency and dysfunction are not only normal, but entirely efficient and functional.

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Markus Schinwald (b. 1973, Salzburg, Austria) lives in Vienna and New York. Recent solo exhibitions include CAPC Musée d'Art Contemporain, Bordeaux (2013), Kunstverein Hannover (2011), Kunsthaus Bregenz (2009), and the Migros Museum, Zurich (2008). He represented Austria in the 2011 Venice Biennale. A solo show opens at the M – Museum Leuven later this year. This is his first major solo exhibition in the United States.

*Markus Schinwald* is on view at the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco, from September 9 through December 13, 2014. It is co-curated by Jenny Gheith, Assistant Curator of Painting and Sculpture at SFMOMA and Anthony Huberman, Director and Chief Curator at CCA Wattis Institute.

This exhibition is jointly organized by CCA Wattis Institute and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The exhibition is part of SFMOMA's *New Work* series, which is generously supported by the museum's Collectors Forum, the founding patron of the series. *Markus Schinwald* is also made possible by Adriane Iann and Christian Stolz, Carlie Wilmans, Patricia W. Fitzpatrick, Nancy and R. Patrick Forster, Station to Station, and the Austrian Cultural Forum New York, with special thanks to Giò Marconi.

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Page 8: *Untitled (legs #28)*, 2012, wood and brass, dimensions variable, courtesy the artist

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\*+) The Wattis Institute