

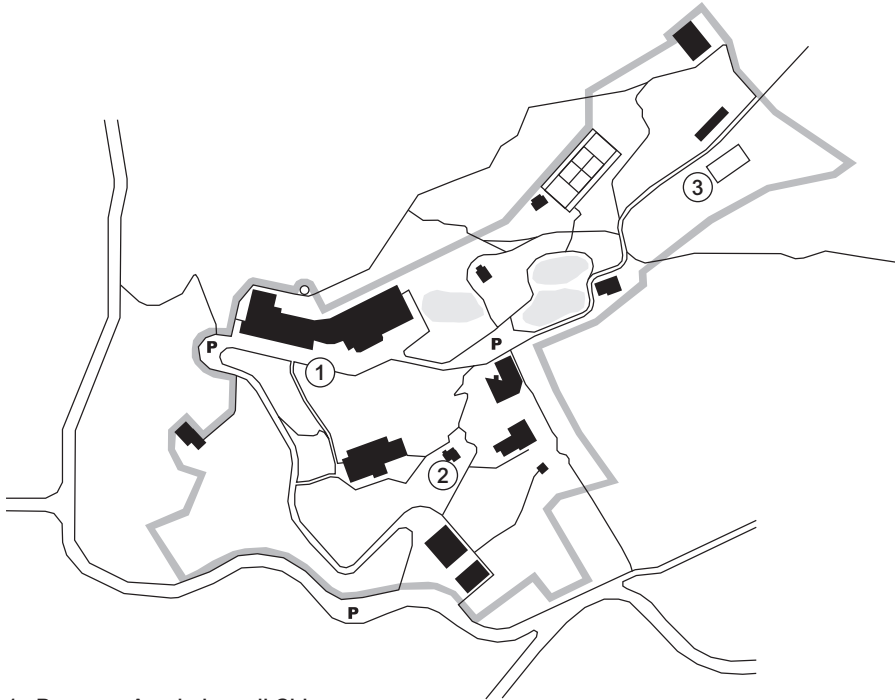
**«Songs to the Suns»  
Cabaret Voltaire on Monte Verità  
14.08.2021–02.10.2021**

- 1 Site map**
- 2 «Songs to the Suns»**
- 3 Izidora L. LETHE**
- 4 Paul Maheke**
- 5 Monte Verità Re-Visit**

<b>Casa dei Russi</b>	<b>Spazio Piscina</b>
<b>Sat: 14:00–18:00</b>	<b>daily, 24 hours</b>
<b>Sun: 10:00–13:00/14:00–18:00</b>	
<b>or on request</b>	

**Cabaret Voltaire**  
**[cabaretvoltaire.ch](http://cabaretvoltaire.ch), [info@cabaretvoltaire.ch](mailto:info@cabaretvoltaire.ch)**

# 1 Site plan



- 1 Percorso Arcobaleno di Chiara  
Cabaret Voltaire Stele
- 2 Casa dei Russi  
Exhibition Izidora L. LETHE
- 3 Spazio Piscina  
Installation Paul Maheke

## 2 «Songs to the Suns»

Monte Verità – like the Cabaret Voltaire – has long been considered one of the most important places of the avant-garde, whether in relation to art, theory or lifestyle. It is therefore not surprising that artists around the Zurich Dada circle spent their summers on the hill in Ascona, which was regarded as the center of the Lebensreform movement. Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Emmy Hennings, Hans Arp, and Hugo Ball attended Rudolf von Laban's courses, danced, held exhibitions and gave parties. Both in the Cabaret Voltaire and on Monte Verità, liberation from physical and linguistic conventions was central. The Lebensreform strove to free society from the stiff corset of bourgeois constraints through vegetarianism, expressive dance, naturopathy, light- and air-bathing, free-body culture and reform clothing. The primary focus of their «third way» between capitalism and communism was the individual, the body, and a way of life that was as “close to nature” as possible. Later, the Lebensreform's criticism of progress and their interest in a mythical past found their way into fascist ideas. Numerous life-reformist ideas live on in today's industries based around self-optimization and health. But they also appear where thinking is aimed at further challenging social categories through the body and its movements – and certainly in the search for alternative and communally organized models of life. However, the parameters around citizenship, identity, and knowledge have changed and need to be looked at from a new perspective. This return is not a nostalgic act, but rather a starting point from which to encounter concerns and forms of expression from the perspective of the present. «Songs to the Suns» combines holistic and fragmented approaches, and seeks a polyphony that challenges binary ways of thinking in terms of nature and culture, gender and origin. The focus is on the body as an archive and a site of emancipation.

With Izidora L. LETHE and Paul Maheke, Cabaret Voltaire invites two contemporary artists for a collaboration with the Monte Verità Cultural Centre. Performers on the opening weekend will be Val Minnig, Stéphan, Nina Emge, Jovin Joëlle Barrer, Hermes Schneider, Donya Speaks, and Claudia Barth. Yantan Ministry will make an audio contribution. Christa Baumberger, Sophie Doutreligne, and Minna Salami will participate in the conversation.

The title «Songs to the Suns» plays with Rudolf von Laban's «Sang an die Sonne»: a dance drama glorifying the sun, which was performed on

Monte Verità in 1917 – with the presence and participation (Marcel Janco created the costumes) of some Dadaists. «Sang an die Sonne» represented a utopian hope for a higher development. The sun as a symbol of absolute truth and pure knowledge runs through the history of philosophy and art. By pluralizing sun as suns and sang as sings, the exhibition title attempts to disrupt this exaggeration, which also creates opposites. Body knowledge is included, the pure brightness positively understood soiled.

### 3 Izidora L. LETHE

In the research-based works, Izidora L. LETHE starts from the body as a site of knowledge- production and knowledge-repository. LETHE is concerned with revising depoliticized notions of landscape, geology, or the body in inter-dependence with its human and non-human environment. For «Songs to the Suns», LETHE pushes this groundwork further: with a focus on destabilizing the avant-gardists' normative notions of body, movement and idea of freedom. In doing so, LETHE honors an embodied knowledge, that has often been systematically overlooked, notably, the knowledge of the queer, female, non-binary/trans\*, postcolonial and post-migrant body.

On the upper floor of the «Casa dei Russi» LETHE shows drawings that are to be understood as notations of corporeality. The nine graphite drawings on semi-transparent paper visualize scores like «REST», «OPEN», «UNEARTH», «RE-/DE-NEGOTIATE», «TOUCH», «FOLD», «ENVELOP», «GATHER», «DISPERSE» – while the large-scale drawing presented on the first floor articulates the artist's entire «embodied research» for this project. In this way, LETHE resists the geometric thinking of Rudolf von Laban, who, with his Labanotation ultimately attempted to make the body readable and noticeable through a grid. LETHE instead seeks qualities of movement, and of thinking through movement, that allow latent or overlooked vocabularies of the body to be renegotiated.

For LETHE, the history of dance notations has not yet been able to successfully assert universality. Dance notations therefore do not have a specific cultural and social status in the artist's work and consequently refuse authority or a narrow signage. They are not entrenched in the dualism of nature and culture, nor are bodies reduced to characteristics. Instead of standardized systems of order, LETHE works formally and metaphorically with brackets and strata. The latter denote the horizontal geological formations, so-called «cultural strata», which preserve or release moments of history and the present. Furthermore, the body can be thought of as a stratum, as can the exhibition display – here, however, set by the artist as a «quere» (queer) wall through the historical building, illuminated with artificial light, in a construction that underlining an understanding of light as pure and truthful. «You cannot look into the sun. There are incalculable universes, vast solar systems, gravitational pulls. 85% of all matter in the universe is invisible», writes LETHE to «Stratum

Suns» in the risograph-poster designed by A Frei, that accompanies the exhibition. In the exhibition space, only the back of the display, which blocks the view, is sunny. The front shimmers gray, magnetic.

Brackets harmonize, embrace, create a logic, but they can also cheekily elude that same logic. In *WE* ( ), LETHE performatively repositions the brackets. The open parenthesis is also found in the sculptures, which are reminiscent of corporeal folds and orifices, or botanical objects. As a form and a continuing concept, the brackets also show up as vignettes during the choreography/intervention on the opening day. They are performed by dancers in the broadest sense – people who practice an openness and access to their body knowledge. The individual vignettes are in turn informed by the nine «scores» in the «Casa dei Russi». LETHE understands the poses of the performers as vignettes that reflect a moment, a place, an idea, opening and closing brackets.

Via the QR code shown below, a staged video documentation of the performance can be viewed from 25.08.2021. Visitors are thus able to view these vignettes at the respective locations.

The group of performers consists of Val Minnig, Stéphan, Nina Emge, Jovin Joëlle Barrer, Hermes Schneider, Donya Speaks and Claudia Barth. Yantan Ministry contributes the audio element of the live performance.



## 4 Paul Maheke

Paul Maheke's artistic interest is in the social construct of corporeality, the invisible, and the forces that influence and inform our bodies and identities. As with the avant-gardists, Maheke holds the view that the body no longer functions merely as an instrument of aesthetic representation but is transformed into a source of experience and liberation. Art becomes catharsis in a place that is open to counter-narratives and collective debate.

In Spazio Piscina, the artist presents an installation of fabric panels printed with text fragments. As *Saturn and Jupiter Conjunct* (2021–ongoing) can be understood as digital drawings that evoke imaginary microscopic views – it could be evocative of a body, water, or dust. The curtains are a way for Maheke to address the body without representing it as a human shell with specific features. Yet, as a curtain, the material refers to a domestic object that grants intimacy to the body. If interpreted as a kind of veil, it cites the desire to see, but also protects against what does not want to be shown. The fine, transparent fabric supports the personal text fragments that reveal vulnerability and interact with the thoughts and bodies of the viewers. But it also captures the environment and the light, the wind, the rays of the sun, the shimmer of the moon. A sense of continuity is created that is broken by the different bodies and narratives. During the exhibition, visitors are invited to walk through the installation, which subtly choreographs their movements.

The texts extracted from the artist's journal written during the first lockdown in 2020 are about vulnerability and embodiment, violence and emancipation. One can read, for example, «I needed to write because I needed to give weight to my own voice. I needed to hear it louder, for myself and for others to know», «Make it become flesh», «The year I've been raped was the year I was made to feel confused», «Whatever was there isn't anymore». Writing is a healing process for Paul Maheke, just like dance; the words do not illustrate the body: rather, they speak together.

The solo performance *Taboo Durag* (2021) approaches the themes of personal trauma and healing, and the porous interface between vulnerability and resilience, from another perspective. On the opening night, in the midst of the curtains, Paul Maheke dances, accompanied by a sound-

track composed by his brother Simon and voiced over by Maheke himself. For the performance, Maheke wears a durag, a headscarf of African origin that has been part of African-American youth culture since the 1970s and has been transformed by mainstream white culture into a racist signifier associated with gang culture and prisoners. In this way, Maheke attempts to dismantle the system of signs inscribed in clothing.

The audio work for the installation can be listened to from 15.08.2021 via the QR code below:





## 5 Monte Verità Re-Visit

In Zurich's Niederdorf, on February 5, 1916, Emmy Hennings and Hugo Ball founded the artists' pub Voltaire, from which the world-famous Dada movement emerged. Hans Arp, Sophie Taeuber, Marcel Janco, Tristan Tzara and many others participated in the orientation and the program. In the chaos of the First World War, the Cabaret Voltaire offered a place of refuge, mostly to young emigrants; they countered the madness of the time with new forms of language and expression, and experimented in the juxtaposition of literature, art, theory, dance, and architecture. Since 2004, the Cabaret Voltaire has once again been run as a cultural venue. In 2021, due to renovations, the institution will visit places that were already of interest to the Dadaists in 1916/1917. The first stop is Monte Verità: the cradle of the Lebensreform, and the summer residence of many Dadaists.

More than a decade before the Cabaret Voltaire, around 1900, a community had formed in Ascona that shaped the Lebensreform ("Life Reform") movement like no other place. Calling the hill "Monte Verità" (Hill of Truth), they opposed bourgeois values, industrialization, and urbanization. The Lebensreform sacralized the body, and propagated anti-materialistic values such as sensuality, spirituality, health, and individuality. In contrast to the industrial working body, the avant-garde body was a source of joy, pleasure, suffering, and self-directed change. On the one hand, this brought emancipation from existing role models and body ideals. On the other hand, it was also accompanied by a backward-looking transfiguration of primordiality and nature. The Lebensreform strived for the liberation of the body and often also for gender equality, but with its notion of „beautiful,” "healthy," and "natural," it also created problematic categories. The idealization of certain types of bodies leads to sexism, racism, or ableism. Health was no longer simply the absence of illness, but a state that had to be actively created. The diversity and the cultural deformation of the body – that is, that the body is never original or natural but always made by a society – are ignored, the binarity of gender characteristics, nature and culture solidified.

In addition to vegetarianism, light and air baths (often nude), and naturopathy, the body was also explored as a medium with regards to its artistic potential. Rudolf von Laban, choreographer and pioneer of expressive dance, played a special role here. From 1913 onwards, he initiated

summer courses on Monte Verità together with his assistant Suzanne Perrottet and dancers such as Mary Wigman and Katja Wulff. Dadaists also took part in such courses (some only on so-called entertainment evenings), which consisted of the subjects “art of movement” (the pure expression of movement), “sound art” (sound rhythm), “word art” (clear expression of a thought), and “form art” (weaving, painting, building, forming, etc.). The subject “art of movement” was mostly led by Laban. For him, the movement of the body in dance represented an essential means of human expression that provided access to deeper layers of consciousness and revealed a person’s relationship to his or her inner world, environment and community. In his teaching, he combined dance, sound, rhythm, and words to transform the dancers into new human beings. It was important for him to grasp the harmony and balance that he was as underlying everything, in resonance with what surrounded it.

Expressive dance was, and still is, presented as a means of liberating the body from normalized movements and bourgeois conventions. In Ascona, Laban began to develop a system of notation for body movements that later became known as Labanotation. Despite the romantic ideal and the anti-modernist impulse of his dance conception, Laban perpetuated the dualisms of Western thought. His choreographic system distinguishes between what springs from the body and what belongs solely to the mind, and reduces bodily movements to signs that can be read as language; thus the body is not regarded as an autonomous means of expression, but is rather forced into a strict rationalization.

Beginning in 1916, Laban ran his school in Zurich during the winter months, and in the summer he stayed and taught in Ascona. He also maintained a close relationship with many Dadaists in Zurich. Sophie Taeuber-Arp was one of his pupils in 1916, while Suzanne Perrottet was a pupil, a collaborator and later Laban’s partner; she took over the school in Zurich in 1918. Both women, as well as other Laban students such as Mary Wigman, performed at the Cabaret Voltaire and the Dada Galerie. Despite these many points of contact, Laban’s expressive dance, Dada, and the Lebensreform movement differ in essential points. Laban’s concept was based on the expression of an individual statement and the will to transform dance into high art. Dada was more critical of expressionism, the exaggeration of an individual, and high art. While the Lebensreform sought wholeness, Dada fragmented the present. Dada tended to seek out states of intoxication; but on Monte Verità, “stimulants” such as alcohol and coffee were renounced.

For the Dadaists in particular, however, the confrontation and the expe-

rience of self-determination over the body must have had a lasting effect. The body was explored both on Monte Verità and in the Cabaret Voltaire as a direct medium that communicated physically with the audience in order to bring about a paradigm shift in thinking and to generate new knowledge. Tactile knowledge and expression through gesture and movement has never been sufficiently a part of modern Western culture according to this understanding. *Songs to the Suns* asks such questions at the “Monte Verità Re-Visit”: How can corporeality – via notations or play forms – be grasped in the present times? In what relationships is the body conceived? To what extent does a body show itself in the context of cross-disciplinary, queer, postcolonial, or posthuman concepts? What insights do we gain through transhistorical and transcultural approaches? To what extent do the holistic and the fragmented illuminate each other? What is personal and collective body knowledge? How do verbal and non-verbal languages interact?

The artists Izidora L. LETHE and Paul Maheke are both interested in the body as an archive and a place of emancipation, reflecting on it in the context of social and ecological networks. These questions will also be the focus of a talk on the opening Saturday. The exhibition, installation, and performances will be complemented by a talk with Christa Baumberger, Sophie Doutreligne, and Minna Salami. Sophie Doutreligne’s dissertation examines female Dada performances at the Cabaret Voltaire and on Monte Verità. With art history prioritizing text and photography over movement and processes, female (or non-male) dancing bodies have fallen out of view. Yet it was precisely through their physical interventions that Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Emmy Hennings, and Suzanne Perrottet criticized the prevailing concepts of logic and identity. Sophie Taeuber-Arp, for example, rebelled against patriarchal discourse with masked dances that enabled her to conceal her identity and not reduce her status as an artist to being this female “other.” Christa Baumberger has extensively researched Dada; she is co-editor of the prose edition of Emmy Hennings at Wallstein Verlag and was curator of the estate of Emmy Hennings, Friedrich Glauser, and Robert Walser at the Swiss Literary Archives in Bern from 2009 to 2018. She will introduce the topic of Dada and Ascona. The thoughts of journalist and author Minna Salami, who recently published her acclaimed book *Sensuous Knowledge: A Black Feminist Approach for Everyone*, help bridge the gap between the historical legacy and the artistic interventions of LETHE and Maheke. Among other things, her writing analyzes Euro-patriarchal knowledge as a worldview that sees fragmentation, polarization, and division at its core. Holistic approaches would disrupt this divisive thinking between races, classes, and genders, or between the non-human natural world and humans. Her remarks can

also be a template for the Dadaists” and the Lebensreform’s approach to non-Western cultures. Both the Dadaists and Laban looked to other cultures for ritual and primal qualities, but did not reflect on their own status. Their “natural corporeality” must be understood as a very Western and binary concept, which should contribute to a completion of (Western) humanity.



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