

## LUKA BERCHTOLD | Make Room for Lisa

Text: Anna Hugo

It is very relaxing to lie in a sensory deprivation tank, releasing anxiety and muscle tension, and amusing to think that such a man-made device exists. While researching this object, I discovered the various names used for it: Isolation Tank, Sensory Deprivation Tank, Float Tank, Float Pod, Float Cabin, Flotation Tub, or Sensory Attenuation Tank—terms that hint at its functions. It is essentially a soundproof, salty, skin-temperature, water-filled bath where a person floats in isolation. This setup allows the body to relax completely, alleviates tension through the sensation of complete weightlessness, and supports the mind in entering a meditative state, disconnecting from the outside world.

Luka Berchtold's exhibition *Make Room for Lisa* consists of four works that create space for one another through both connection and contradiction. The overarching title is taken from *The Simpsons* Season 10, Episode 16, *Make Room for Lisa* (first aired in 1999) in which Lisa Simpson once again feels displaced by her father, Homer, due to his thoughtless actions and grows frustrated with his selfishness. The stress leads her to develop an irritated stomach. To help her relax and as an act of reconciliation, Homer takes Lisa to a "New Age" store, where they experience a sensory deprivation tank. This leads to a series of contrasting experiences: introspective for Lisa and extroverted for Homer, yet ultimately bringing the two closer together by the end of the episode.

I like to think about the pairing, rekindling, and reconnecting in this exhibition. The first pairing you face within the space are two tubs: *Tub I* and *Tub II*, which can be positioned next to each other or modularly integrated into one another. This interlacing of two cold, hard, and almost identical objects suggests the idea of a support structure. A basin that holds water. A safety net within itself. This is paralleled by a father's desperate attempts to be a supportive and understanding presence in his daughter's life. In contrast to this relationship, a sense of coldness and absence emanates from these two works. This is conveyed through the domesticated yet unused or even sterile coffin-like objects, which hint at someone's past presence and evoke a feeling of loss.

The sensation of hugging is one of the sensory experiences evoked in the float tank, helping reduce blood pressure, anxiety, and stress. It is very relaxing to hug for an extended period of time, and this comforting feeling is something many of us lack. In the exhibition, another type of pairing is given through two carrots naturally intertwining, growing as one. This beautiful, accidental warm embrace is monumentalized by Luka through the casting of their root vegetable forms, giving them weight and significance.

Corporeal contact is also hinted at in the next work by its position as well as title, it is a rhino horn-shaped object that is pushing through the wall made out of wooden shingles titled *Thug Rose*. Who or what is *Thug Rose* was my first question? She is a 32-year-old mixed martial artist currently competing in the Ultimate Fighting Championship. While thinking of wrestling, I see two bodies encroached, entangled—I guess, even hugging.

The physical pressure and pushing and scramble into multiple techniques and positions. Again, I researched the term "wrestling" and came across various grappling positions: Bear Hug, Collar-and-Elbow Position, Double Collar Tie, Double Underhooks, Pinch Grip Tie, and Clinch Hold. In this aggressive act of tightening, twisting, and affecting each other's bodies, the goal is often to pin the opponent's shoulders to the mat for a short duration, resulting in a victory.

Strategically, the piece is positioned within the exhibition space at body height, so one is confronted with the horn-like object. The use of wooden shingles is a technique traditionally employed on building house facades in the **Bregenzerwald** region of Austria, where Luka is from. This technique works similarly to fish scales where the water beads off perfectly, like a very durable and weather-resistant membrane. Luka already explored this method in the past with the work *untitled creep*, a snake-like, monstrous creature weaving from the ground. In *Thug Rose*, however, she uses a different form of shingles that form into a conical shape, reminiscent of a rhino horn. In spite of rhinos having the facade of an aggressive behaviour, they are actually shy and solitary or live peacefully in matriarchal groups, an aspect that amplifies its contrast with the duality of the objects across the space.

This makes me think again of Lisa, who, due to her sharp intellect and left-wing socio-political and feminist views, is set apart from other children her age. Effectively making her somewhat of a loner and social outcast. Even though there are organic pairings occurring in the room, such as a father and daughter or two vegetables, there is also a desire to be alone, to avoid being distracted by other impulses. Through the use of a sensory deprivation tank, Lisa embarks on a spiritual journey and becomes enlightened, gaining the ability to see her life from Homer's perspective. By isolating herself, she is able to reconnect.

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