

LEAN RÜEGG

“Close, but not too close: the boundary between art and life is fragile.”

Lean Rüegg explores to what extent the self can be separated from art — or if it cannot. For the audience, Rüegg’s work often appears as a window directly into an existence — intimate, political, and radical. Simply put: all in.

Rüegg himself understands art as a process, a practice, rather than a final product. In this sense, artistic creation never truly ends, and the self is necessarily part of the art. For Lean, however, art is not just something created by artists; art is human behavior: everyone makes art, everything is art. Yet Lean is convinced that certain boundaries are necessary — and that it is important to set them. “To share radical intimacy, you need a framework and rules of the game,” Rüegg says. One possible agreement might be to state: yes, everything here is fiction. This protects both the self and the art of the self.

How clearly the boundaries between artist and art must be drawn depends on the context. Lean’s work often revolves around his own environment, friends, and experiences. It always begins with writing, Rüegg explains: “Writing is close to the voice and the body. I write love letters, I create gifts for my loved ones through my art. Above all, I tell stories — that is my main juice. It is the narratives that shape how we see the world. With my art, I am also shaping a narrative.”

Drawing attention to one’s own stories, experiences, and realities through art also means exposing oneself to the public — being vulnerable. All in. Depending on one’s life circumstances, this makes art inherently political — particularly in the current climate. Therefore, boundaries, rules, and new practices are necessary, Rüegg says, to protect the people behind the art. When the fear of repression is ever-present — triggered by increasingly human-rights-violating policies, the growing criminalization of migrants, and heightened attacks on the existential rights of those outside heteronormative societal structures — boundaries also serve as protection.

And yet, Lean Rüegg has consciously chosen his own style: art that — sometimes playfully, sometimes radically direct, and often intimately — questions societal norms, concepts, and structures. Performative, visual, and auditory — sometimes one of these, often all at once. Lean’s art has already been nominated for several awards and is one of 24 positions proposed this year for a project grant from the Canton of Zurich.

With the performance “I love all pits of everything”, Rüegg won the Audience Award at last year’s Swiss Performance Art Awards. “The sunflower in our garden grew a stall as a tree”, a 2023 installation created in collaboration with artist Daniela Brugger, plays with ideas of love, transformation, and growth. For ALL IN at the Musée, Lean Rüegg is reinterpreting this installation as a performative reading — featuring texts by Dora Koster.

Text: Daria Frick