

SOFIA HULTÉN

CONCRETE HEAD

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Sofia Hultén was born 1972 in Stockholm, Sweden. She grew up in Birmingham, UK and studied sculpture at Sheffield Hallam University. Since 1998 she lives and works in Berlin. She is a professor at the State Academy of Fine Art Stuttgart since 2023.

Hultén has had solo exhibitions at KINDL Zentrum für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Berlin (2018), Museum Tinguely, Basel and Ikon Gallery Birmingham (both 2018), Espai 13, Fundació Miró, Barcelona (2015), Kunstverein Braunschweig, Brunswick (2013), Ikon Gallery, Birmingham (2009), Künstlerhaus Bremen (2008), Kunstverein Nürnberg (2007). Hultén was part of various group exhibitions among others at Fullersta Gärd, Stockholm (2025), Schiller Museum, Weimar (2023), Kunstmuseum Solothurn, Kunstpalais Erlangen (both 2022), Kunstmuseum Bonn (2021), Museum für Sepulkralkultur, Kassel (2020), Kunsthalle Mainz (2017), Kunstverein Freiburg (2016), DAAD Galerie, Berlin, 8th Nordic Biennial of Contemporary Art, Moss (both 2015), Magasin 3 Stockholm Konsthall, Frankfurter Kunstverein (both 2014). She will participate in a group exhibition curated John Peter Nilsson in Stockholm later this year.

Sofia Hultén was recipient of the Moderna Museets Vänners Skulpturpris in 2011.

In her fifth solo exhibition at Galerie Nordenhake, Sofia Hultén presents new kinetic sculptures, a series of works on paper, and two groups of new sculptures. The title draws on an expression from her hometown of Birmingham: While the term usually refers to a stubborn or mentally rigid person, the artist knows it from her youth, when it was colloquially used to describe someone who could consume drugs without any noticeable physical consequences. In her practice, linguistic ambiguities intersect with material narratives, generating new meanings through their friction.

In her eponymous series, the artist mixes clay with concrete and adds found pebbles and other materials, allowing the mixture to harden inside baseball caps. What remains is a heavy, open-pored, mineral-like shell that traces the structure of the pliable textile like a skin or membrane. The pebbles leave behind bulging, sprawling elevations reminiscent of organic material. The result is a hybrid, almost uncanny object that evokes both fascination and aversion because it challenges the supposedly stable boundary between body, subject, and the outside world.

The artist frequently sources her materials from the street: raw objects shaped by weather, use and decay, their surfaces bearing the traces of time. This is also evident in a series in which Hultén works with clay drainage pipes she first encountered while rebuilding her fire-damaged home. The artist — whose mother worked as a genetic researcher and who therefore grew up with a refrigerator full of sperm samples — combines these materials with histological wax, a substance used to stabilise organic tissue, as well as human sperm from anonymous donors. The resulting whitish substance resembles a congealed fluid lodged within the pipes, lending the inert structures a strangely animate quality, and subtly undermining their association with technical progress.

Another work in the exhibition engages bodily associations through mechanical movement. A rotating rod taken from a car wash, stands upright. Its fluted surface and vertical stance recall the form of a column, suggesting stability and integrity. Attached to it is a detached pocket from a pair of bleached jeans, weighted with coins. As the rod turns, the fabric begins to move, its motions remaining slight, at times resembling trembling or slackened limbs. This produces a faintly uncanny sense of corporeality, in which the severed pocket becomes an abstract surrogate for the human body. The work appears at once human and mechanical, dissolving the boundary between these states and generating a subtle unease. The fragile rhythm of its movement conveys an unexpected vulnerability and intimacy, reminiscent of an awkward, clumsy dance.

Signs of wear, material ruptures and subtle shifts in context are sufficient to unsettle familiar meanings. Through these precise displacements, Hultén's works open up speculative spaces that resist fixed or unambiguous interpretation. They operate with a quiet sense of resistance, almost anarchic in their refusal of linear narratives and functional clarity that increasingly shape contemporary reality. By transforming the familiar and the everyday into strange, at times uncanny forms, the works draw attention to nuance and destabilise the certainties on which our ideas of order and reality are built.