SIGNA
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**BANK AUSTRIA KUNSTFORUM WIEN**

# FLYING HIGH
# WOMEN ARTISTS OF ART BRUT

15 February - 23 June 2019

"**FLYING HIGH**" is the first exhibition that is devoted "globally" to female positions in Art Brut produced from 1860 until the present. The exhibition "flies high" in every sense: it has gathered together 316 works by 93 women artists from 21 countries, which in many aspects of content and aesthetics challenge our idea of what art is.

The exhibition adopts the term Art Brut – *raw art* or *outsider art* – defined by Jean Dubuffet in 1945 as starting point for the primordial, non-academic art produced outside the cultural mainstream. The diversity and heterogeneity of the works being presented in the Bank Austria Kunstforum Wien demonstrate clearly that the scope of the Art Brut concept today has over time encompassed far more than works of the mentally ill; it also includes the production of "mediumistic" (spiritualist) women artists, "lone wolves" and women artists with disabilities. This broadening of scope derives not least from the radical change in psychiatric medicine and its institutions – from formerly closed buildings to more open structures and even their dissolution. Contemporary Art Brut emerges today to a great extent from studios or from the structures created by the artists themselves.

The chronology of the exhibition starts with highlights from the historic collections of the psychiatrists Walter Morgenthaler (Stiftung Psychiatrie-Museum Bern) and Hans Prinzhorn (Universitätsklinikum Heidelberg). Both collected and supported art from psychiatric institutions in the early twentieth century and produced publications on it – *Ein Geisteskranker als Künstler* (1921 – *Madness & Art*) and *Bildnerei der Geisteskranken* (1922 – *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*). The main room of the Bank Austria Kunstforum Wien is showing masterpieces from the collection of Jean Dubuffet (Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne) which he assembled between 1945 and 1976. A representative selection of works from the L'Aracine Collection (LaM, Lille Métropole Musée d'art moderne, d'art contemporain et d'art brut, Villeneuve d'Ascq) concludes the overview of the collections that had a decisive and formative influence on the development and history of Art Brut. Moreover, the show includes many works from important international and Austrian private collections.

The history of female Art Brut artists reflects the history of women's emancipation on a precarious level: they have always been "the outsiders among outsiders". Art Brut has never been treated on a par with the "high arts". Since women first have to conquer their place both within Art Brut and also beyond feminist art, it is high time for a presentation of their works. This is the task that "**FLYING HIGH. Women Artists of Art Brut**" in the Bank Austria Kunstforum Wien has set itself.

The exhibition demonstrates that aesthetic points of view are gaining more and more relevance as opposed to diagnostic criteria and biography, and also the artists' eccentricity. Its inclusion of works by a diversity of women artists creates a multifaceted panorama of creative powers of expression: wherein lies the difference between the

"individual mythologies" (Harald Szeemann) that Art Brut is based on depending on whether it was produced by female or male artists? Do women's works really tell a different story from men's? How are differences in production methods, media and iconographies visualised? The show pursues these questions and reflects the direct and primordial – frequently also subversive – expressive power and quality of Art Brut created by women. Visualising the differences and also potential similarities in the expressiveness of female and male artists by juxtaposing examples will be the topic of a different exhibition.

As in everything, this also applies to art: only what can be seen, exists.

Curators: Ingried Brugger and Hannah Rieger
Assistant Curator: Veronika Rudorfer

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