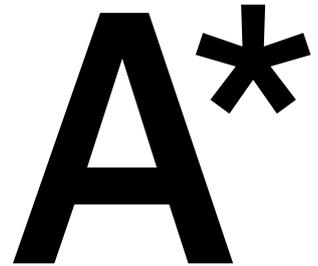


## Media release

Aarau, July 2022



**A woman is a woman is a woman ...**

**A history of the female artists**

**27 August 2022 – 15 January 2023**

**Aargauer Kunsthaus, Aarau**

**An opportunity to probe and critique the art historical canon is the gift the cultural critic Elisabeth Bronfen hands us in the exhibition she has curated around women artists in Switzerland. The exhibition focuses on the period from the 1970s to the 1990s. The relationship between visual art and sexual difference in the modern and postmodern period is examined in five thematically interlinked chapters.**

The exhibition delivers a hitherto rarely documented survey of the work of widely diverse female artists in Switzerland. It shows a cross section of the themes and aesthetic forms that engaged the energies of these artists from the 1970s through to the 1990s. The in-house collection forms the core of the exhibition but is joined by works on loan from private collectors and institutions.

Why this intense interest in women artists? In the last few years, Switzerland has witnessed a number of large solo exhibitions: Lee Krasner at the Paul Klee Zentrum, Sophie Taeuber-Arp in the Kunstmuseum Basel (after Aarau), Meret Oppenheim and Heidi Bucher at the Kunstmuseum Bern. The next logical step was to compile an overview of the concerns that preoccupied Swiss women artists in the years from 1970 to 2000. While not revisiting the question of a specifically feminine artistic practice, which in itself was controversial at the time, the show looks back on the art works of this period from a perspective sharpened by the feminist discourse surrounding sexual difference.

It is also immensely important to develop an awareness of what has come to be remembered and commemorated in our culture, and what has fallen off the radar. This is precisely what can be explored, when we direct our present-day perspective on the women artists active at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Given that during that period female artists were appearing in so many different art locations and institutions and were embraced on a large scale, it remains unclear

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why they were then eclipsed again so quickly in the two decades that followed. At the same time, guest curator Elisabeth Bronfen draws into focus the specifically Swiss version of Postmodernism; which speaks to and reflects a unique legacy of the modern and postwar eras.

The exhibition is organized around five thematic chapters, in which women's art is examined primarily in terms of its influence on the respective artistic trends, and in a second step updates a history of the art produced by women.

#### **"Exposed": Body images transformed**

The history of the female nude and figurative representations of the feminine body in the art historical canon has always included the masculine gaze as part of the visual exchange. As a result, women artists began to interrogate and refigure representation of their own bodies in the 1970s through *Action Painting* and body-centric *Performance Art*. It is striking that many female artists chose the intimate medium of drawing or the spontaneity, which the medium of photography offers to represent images of the body. Gabrielle Grässle (\*1956), Silvia Bächli (\*1956), Hannah Villiger (1951-1997) and Katrin Freisager (\*1960) are just a few examples of this.

#### **"A room of one's own": Interiors as intimate scenes**

Even before political activists in the second wave of the feminist movement focused on the interconnection between the public and the private, women artists like Ilse Weber (\*1908-1984) or Garance Grenacher (\*1943) developed their own idiosyncratic representations of architectural stagings of intimacy. They were followed by artists such as Leiko Ikemura (\*1951), Ina Barfuss (\*1949) or MANON (\*1946).

#### **"The disfigured face": Self-portraits of a different kind**

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, much energy was devoted to the problem of how to visually capture a face. This is reflected in the cubist-futurist portraits created by the Swiss artist Alice Bailly (1872-1938). Subsequently, the portrait has been increasingly used to interrogate what portraiture means for the woman artist. New forms of this reconceptualizations of the face can be found in the works of Klaudia Schifferle (\*1958), and Ella Lanz (\*1932).

#### **"Pop as attitude": Idiosyncratic appropriations of everyday culture**

Pop Art offers women artists a further perspective on how to explore their identities and living situations. A critical view of everyday consumer objects, presented in sensuous shapes and colors, has led many female artists to whimsically break with stereotypes. Doris Stauffer (1934-2017) and Donatella Maranta (\*1959) direct their gaze to household items, endowing them with a new life and, in so doing, bring into dialog their family lives with their self-conception as artist. The ironic self-portraits of Susann Walder (1959-2015) are aimed at the objectified nature of the feminine body in capitalist consumer culture.

#### **Displaced ways of seeing: Humor and visual experiments**

Unfamiliar visual expressions can be created through contradictory formal alignments or deliberate superimposed layerings. Disruptions of our usual

modes of perception in works by Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889-1943), Meret Oppenheim (1913-1985), Nanne Meyer (\*1953) and Olivia Etter (\*1956) show the viewer vividly how a playful transformation of the familiar can be carried over into daily life.

The exhibition title, *A woman is a woman is a woman...* plays with the famous line "a rose is a rose is a rose" from the poem *Sacred Emily* by Gertrude Stein, American author, publisher and art collector. What it means to be a woman cannot be essentialized. Instead, feminine identity and creativity can only be articulated in serial repetitions that keep shifting and transforming the concept.

To focus on the period between 1970 to 2000 also means drawing lines of connection back to women artists who came before, and in so doing, foregrounding a continuity between Modernism and Postmodernism. What also becomes clear is the degree to which the Aargauer Kunsthaus has faithfully dedicated its own exhibition and collection practice to female artists.

#### **Artists in the exhibition (a selection)**

Silvia Bächli (\*1956), Alice Bailly (1872-1938), Ina Barfuss (\*1949), Miriam Cahn (\*1949), Olivia Etter (\*1956), Katrin Freisager (\*1960), Gabrielle Grässle (\*1956), Garance Grenacher (\*1943), Leiko Ikemura (\*1951), Marianne Kirchhofer (\*1947), MANON (\*1946), Donatella Maranta (\*1959), Nanne Meyer (\*1953), Meret Oppenheim (1913-1985), Hannah Villiger (1951-1997), Klaudia Schifferle (\*1958), Doris Stauffer (1934-2017), Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889-1943), Susann Walder (1959-2015), Ilse Weber (\*1908-1984) and others

#### **Guest Curator**

Prof. Dr. Elisabeth Bronfen is Professor of American Studies at the University of Zürich and Global Distinguished Professor at New York University. She wrote her post-doctoral dissertation *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* at the University of Munich. As a specialist in the literature and culture of the 19th and 20th centuries, she writes articles and books on gender studies, psychoanalysis, film, cultural history and theory, as well as on visual culture. As an expert in issues relating to cultural studies and American politics, she is a regular contributor in the current media conversation. She is also collaborating more and more closely with cultural institutions, particularly as a curator and catalog contributor.

#### **In cooperation with**

Simona Ciuccio, Head of Collection & Exhibition  
Bassma El Adisey, Research Assistant

**Media preview**

Thursday, May 25, 11 am

Tour of the exhibition by Guest Curator Prof. Dr. Elisabeth Bronfen and Head of Collection & Exhibition Simona Ciuccio

Welcome address by Director Dr. Katharina Ammann

Information and registration: [christina.omlin@ag.ch](mailto:christina.omlin@ag.ch)

**Exhibition opening**

Friday, May 26, 5 pm

Speakers:

Dr. Katharina Ammann, Director

Prof. Dr. Elisabeth Bronfen, Guest Curator

Followed by aperitifs and food in the tent  
Admission free

**Preview for Art Association members**

Friday, May 26, 4 - 5 pm

**Events**

As part of the exhibition, events are planned in cooperation with the Kunstmuseum Basel and the curating staff of *Fun Feminism* as well as the Forum Schlossplatz in Aarau. A zoom talk with art historian, cultural theorist and Professor for Gender Research at the University of Leeds, Griselda Pollock (\*1949) will be held to promote international research exchange. In addition, *A woman is a woman is a woman...* will be supported by a comprehensive mediation program of guided tours for adults, school classes and families as well as children's workshops.

**Booklet**

A booklet further offers visitors a deeper understanding of the research context of this special exhibition. Discussions of selected works are featured alongside biographies of the artists.

**Acknowledgement**

The exhibition is supported by: Canton of Aargau, Aargau Art Association, Swisslos Canton of Aargau, City of Aarau, Federal Office of Culture, Thomas Stanley Johnson Stiftung

### **Aargauer Kunsthaus Opening Hours**

Tuesday - Sunday 10 am - 5 pm, Thursday 10 am - 8 pm  
Monday closed

### **Opening hours on public holidays**

St. Stephen's Day 26.12.2022 10 am - 5 pm

New Year's Eve 31.12.2022 10 am - 5 pm

New Year's Day 1.1.2023 10 am - 5 pm

Christmas Eve 24.12.2022 closed

Christmas Day 25.12.2022 closed

### **Visual material**

Images are available for download from our website [www.aargauerkunsthaus.ch](http://www.aargauerkunsthaus.ch)  
> **Medien**. Please observe the photography credits.

### **For further information**

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