

BERLIN - LONDON
CONTEMPORARY ART
BY WOMEN

GERMAN EMBASSY LONDON 2015

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34 BELGRAVE SQUARE
5 FEBRUARY – 5 APRIL 2015

UTA BROUET
ILKA LEUKEFELD
VERONIKA MARSH
BEATE RÖNSPIESS
GIGI SALOMON
RENATA TUMAROVA

AND PAINTINGS FROM THE PENZ ART COLLECTION

ELVIRA BACH
HEIKE RUSCHMEYER
DORIS VON SCHLEYER

Introduction



Some say the battle for gender equality is over, at least in principle. Women won. So why does this exhibition set its sights solely on female artists? Is the artist's gender still relevant in the 21st century?

Up to the early 20th century, female artists, like women in general, found their professional development limited by the societal constraints that forcibly reduced their role to that of mother and wife.

Over centuries men dominated the art world, with only very few female artists finding recognition of their talents, let alone reaching the same level of fame as their male colleagues.

Clearly times have changed since. Most western countries have enshrined equal rights for both sexes in law, and the debate now revolves around whether quotas are the best instrument to ensure equal participation, for example in the world of politics and business.

The art world has historically been the forerunner of societal trends. Does it not often claim to give us a forward-looking, hitherto unknown perspective of things: expressing what is not quite there yet? However, architecture, painting and sculpture remained the reserve of male artists for centuries.

So what about today's world? Surely female artists nowadays must be experiencing the same opportunities and the same success as their male colleagues.

Unfortunately, the numbers do not support this. Although in many western countries, like in Germany for example, the majority of art students are female, the number of women artists remains surprisingly small. Only one in three works acquired by the German government between 1995 and 2000 was created by a woman. In Britain, 83% of all exhibitions in the Tate Modern were by male artists in 2012. The National Gallery in London, with over 2300 works on display, features only 11 women artists.

On the other side of the Atlantic the situation is not much different either: when the new wing of the Museum of Modern Art in New York was opened in 2004, the American Art critic Jerry Saltz found that of the 415 works on display only 20 were by female artists. Since a female curator took the reins, these numbers have increased slightly: today there are 29 works by female artists out of a total 367. Unfortunately, this seems to be a general trend: it is estimated that women produced only 5% of the artwork of the world's greatest museums.

Money talks even louder: in the top selling list of the 100 most successful artists no woman appears.

Many more examples could be given of how even in today's art world women are not enjoying the same level of success as men.

Thus arose the idea to organise an exhibition concentrating exclusively on female artists. The present show is an exciting mixture of works by six contemporary women artists who hail from Berlin and London. It also includes a contribution of paintings from the Penz Art Collection Berlin.

The intention was not to separate female from male art. Clearly, an artist's gender should play no role when appreciating his or her work.

Instead this exhibition seeks to stimulate a discussion of why women are still underrepresented and not sufficiently recognised in the field of art. It also aims to provide an opportunity for women to show their works and thus make a small contribution to overcoming the marginalisation of women in the art world.

I hope you like the contemporary art exhibited here and you will join me in my belief that societies should make an effort to bring the artistic talents of women to the centre of our attention where they belong.

I wish to thank all the participating artists, Mrs. Marlies Greffin-Penz and Mr. Helmuth Penz, and especially Mr. Ecke Cörlin for his ongoing support.

Marliese Heimann-Ammon

Uta Brouet

Uta Brouet is interested in making visible what she senses to be present behind the surface appearance of things. Influenced by her upbringing on a farm in Germany she strongly responds to the form, texture and colour of organic matter such as wood, soil, rust or bones. She removes natural material and abandoned manmade objects from their original context and through this simple process they become spontaneously loaded with history, meaning and imagination. Her sculptures are composed of opposing elements, organic-metallic, soft-rough, female-masculine, nurturing-menacing. Their disturbing beauty creates a feeling of ambiguity and challenge, unsettling our perception of the order of the world.

The artist observes the strong emotional connections between human beings and material objects and investigates the process which leads us to project a personified being onto an inanimate object. The symbolism of the deer in Norse mythology inspired her large anthropomorphic sculptures. These totemic structures remind us of shamanic relics of a bygone era. The study of the fertility cult of Lajja Gauri in the Indus Valley influenced softer feminine forms. Cast in smooth jesmonite or amber glass, these convey the idea of fecundity, protection and grace.



Uta Brouet was born in 1967 in Paderborn, Germany. She worked in publishing, communications and interior design before turning her passion into a full time commitment. Winner of the Heatherley Sculpture Prize, she recently graduated with a diploma in Figurative Sculpture from Heatherley School of Fine Art in 2012. She has since had three exhibitions, "Norse Mythology" (2012), "Landscape and Memory" (2013) and "Marius" (2013), and has participated in various group shows. Her work is represented in the London Art Gallery 'frenchartstudio'.

She lives and works in London and the south of France.



Ilka Leukefeld

Ilka Leukefeld's practice includes drawing, sculpture, performance and video, often combined in complex installations. She transforms ideas from the sciences and widely shared sources in a fine-art context.

Her work is often site specific and having been born and raised in East Germany, she will naturally respond to her exhibition environment, which used to be the Embassy of the former GDR.

During her preparation for this exhibition, the starting point being her research into chaos, Leukefeld came across a fact that she had forgotten about. The Stasi, as one of many torture methods, secretly directed radioactive rays at the genitals and heads of political prisoners. Many of them died suffering from cancer long after that state had collapsed. Entitled Love and compassion, Leukefeld's new work here is a room installation of mixed media sculptures and drawings. She has dedicated it to the victims of torture – physical and mental – inflicted by ruthless minions of a government which had initially set out to change the world for the better.

The installation Love and compassion is also a reaction to the latest attempt in Paris to repress freedom of speech.

Leukefeld was born in Halle/Saale, the former GDR. She gained her BA (Hons) in Fine Art from Goldsmiths College, University of London in 1998, the year her son was born, and her MA in sculpture at the University of the Arts London in 2009.

Her work has been widely exhibited in Greece, Italy, Sweden, Germany and the UK, including at the Southbank Centre and recently at the Victoria and Albert Museum; and is represented in public and private collections in New York, Athens, Berlin, Halberstadt and London.



Epileptic Dog with LED Collar. 2015.

Hello magazine, wire, plastic packaging, LED dog collar.



Veronika Marsh

I conceive my paintings as a translation of an experience, a memory, an intuition, an emotion.

They are lyrical abstractions, opening up and laying bare the vulnerability of the exposed inner worlds, inhabited by feelings like anxiety, threat, isolation, a caress, serenity or calm. My aim is to show another reality and give the unseen, the unsaid, the unexpected, the unsuspected a visual voice. Colours and shapes often take on their own dynamics, the process guiding the resultant image.

The paintings aim to take the viewer on a journey and entice them to see or feel a resonance of their own.

Veronika Marsh not only demonstrates the close relationship between words and colour - 'Painting is visual poetry, poetry is painting with words' - in some of her paintings, but also in her short stories and poems.

Veronika Marsh grew up among the vineyards and hills of Swabia and the Palatinate and after initial training with Martha Rumpf left for the diversity of the city.

She holds a BA in Linguistics and postgraduate degrees in Sociology and French. She has travelled widely and has lived and worked in several European capitals.

Veronika Marsh studied Fine Art in Paris and London. She initially pursued design, painting on silk, printing, enamelling and sculpture with equal enthusiasm. But watercolour painting with its fluidity, the often unpredictable play of colours, shapes and forms, soon became her favourite medium.

Her probing imagination, the desire to be free from the constraints of the real and to capture the essence of an object, a situation, a feeling in its purest form lifted her work into the abstract.

The search for underlying meaning and the capture of the whole spectrum of emotion on canvas is reflected in the complexity and filigree detail which characterise her painting. Veronika Marsh exhibits regularly and has work in private collections in London, Paris and Berlin.





Beate Rönspiess

Born in Berlin in 1962; lives and works in Berlin and in Bad Alexandersbad, Bavaria.

After completing her studies she worked in the teaching field and has been a freelance artist since 2001.

She holds regular exhibitions in her own studio and has taken part in numerous individual and group exhibitions in Berlin and elsewhere.

She has also for several years acted as consultant for advised on art collections and curatorial exhibitions at home and abroad.

Landscapes

I really make no distinction between abstract painting and my landscape images; what interests me are strong colours and shapes. These two worlds emerge directly from the canvas, without a prior concept, but it seems it's my experience of landscapes that truly touches me. Franconia for example. And of course the Alps. I like being outdoors. I don't criticise nor do I idealise. Things are simply there, mountains and water, warehouses and concrete. Together with much brightness. I am fascinated by the sharpness and contrast that light can produce.

Still Life

Still life is merely a playground for me. Model images take on representative form. Often circular shapes and pure colours, too. Fruits, flowers, all the objects in my paintings are never just "still life" per se. The pictures must radiate, must be living things. For this I use vibrant colours. The natural form itself plays no major role. A painting can also reflect the energy I myself put into it. I like that.

The Four Seasons. 2011. Acryl on canvas.

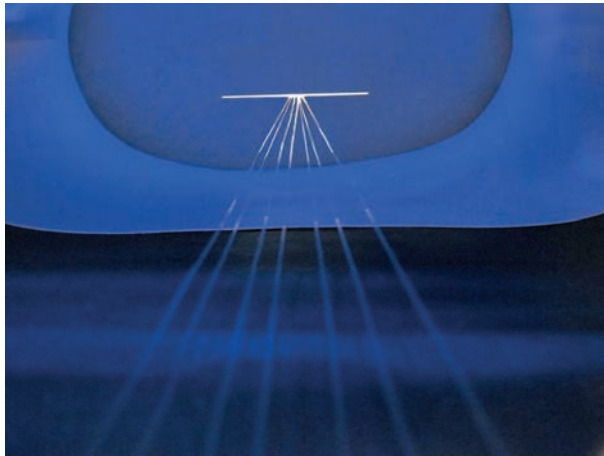




Gigi Salomon

Sculptor & Printmaker

Early Influences were an artist grandmother, an adventure-some great uncle, land, romantic landscapes, dry stone buildings, Romanesque architecture, archaeology, early settlements and monasteries. Gigi continues to be inspired by sculptural relief, photography, rummaging, acts of discovery and the resultant unexpected connections. Gigi gained an M.A. in History. She worked as a recording engineer, producer, writer and presenter of Arts programmes for the World and Language services and Radio 3 and 4 of the BBC. She went on to run her own public relations company devoted to the Arts.



In 2010 she decided to study for a Diploma in Sculpture at Heatherley School of Fine Art in London. Since graduating, Gigi has had two exhibitions; the first centred on her work about Land and Deep Time. The most recent exhibition has focussed on her sculptures and photography; the theme of the myth of Jason and his quest for the Golden Fleece.

Gigi has developed a concept of making mixed media sculptures within a viewing chamber; it enables the transformation of found objects by harnessing and manipulating colour and light to create illusory, mythical landscapes. She has called these 'Sculpturescapes'. Seen through a single aperture, the spectators' perception and imagination are central to them embarking on a journey of their own.

This series of Sculpturescapes is an interpretation of the epic myth of Jason and his journey through the Symplegades – the Clashing Rocks. Inspired by Jason's telescope on board his ship, the Argo, Gigi has distilled the themes of this episode down to its core elements: the journey, worlds beyond the horizon and below the seas. Form, line, colour and light are at the heart of Gigi's translation of the myth into sculptural reality.

"... and the same objects appear straight when looked at out of the water, and crooked when in the water, and the concave becomes convex, owing to the illusion about colours to which sight is liable. Thus every sort of confusion is revealed within us, and this is that weakness of the human mind in which the art of conjuring and of deceiving by light and shadow and other ingenious devices imposes, having an effect upon us like magic."

Plato 'The Republic' Book X

Where Sea and Sky Meet. 2012. Sculpturescape.



Renata Tumarova

Renata Tumarova, born in 1979, today lives and works in Berlin. From 1997 to 2001 she studied painting at the Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg, Russia, within a classical and conservative-academic tradition. Chance took her to Germany in 2001, where she continued her studies in 2002 under Prof. K. H. Hödicke and Prof. Valérie Favre at the University of Arts in Berlin, completing them in 2007. There she was able to experiment freely, dedicating herself to both impressionistic and expressionistic painting as well as to contemporary figurative art, shifting between figuration and abstraction.

In Berlin and on her travels in Europe, Renata Tumarova finds motifs for her paintings in abundance: the daily hectic pace of modern city life as well as the lonely desolation to which people are exposed in it. The titles given to the paintings try to involve the viewers emotionally with them and inspire them to discover something about themselves. But her paintings are far from simply showing or reproducing reality. They are selected snapshots and impressions that reflect a fragmentary vision of metropolitan life, of lights and faces, of ir retrievable moments, dissolved into vibrant colours and carefully composed on canvas.



Through her exhibitions in Berlin and many parts of Germany, in Paris and in Washington, D.C., most of them well documented in catalogues, her presence at annual art fairs in Cologne, Frankfurt and Karlsruhe as well as several articles in the press, Renata Tumarova has become known to a wide public. Her paintings have been shown in various galleries and been bought by many private collectors.

One Love. 2014. Oil on canvas.



Elvira Bach

Elvira Bach, one of the most well known artists in Germany, was born in 1951 near Frankfurt am Main. Between 1972 and 1979 she studied at the Hochschule der Künste (College of the Arts) in West Berlin. Berlin's artistic scene, with its openness to experimentation, its sense of social engagement, was fertile ground for Elvira Bach's simultaneously contemporary and striking art. In the 1980s she numbered among the "Junge Wilden" ("Young and Wild"). She first achieved international recognition in 1982 with her participation in documenta 7.

Lengthy stays in Africa broadened her thematic scope, as did the experience of twice being a mother. Her pictures always come across as powerful and full of energy, strong colour and angular forms marking and defining her neo-expressionist work.

Her large-scale portraits reflecting a woman's role, whether as femme fatale, mother, temptress or kitchen-diva, are famous. Her hands-on painting style and the fascinating mixture of melancholy and irony, the erotic and the exotic are what makes Elvira Bach's work unmistakable.

In the Penz Art Collection Berlin there are outstanding works by the artist in the period before the fall of the Wall.



Modell Fiorella. 1981. Oil on canvas. 200 x 250 cm



Heike Ruschmeyer

"Painting for me is a place for political action. I don't consider painting as decoration or a way of illustrating history."

Heike Ruschmeyer, Berlin 2015

"Heike Ruschmeyer's characters are timeless, and usually unclothed. References to them as living beings seem superfluous and are not provided. That the figures depicted might once have existed in real life surrounded by everyday things and had their own personal history comes across as absurd. This impression is created not just because the artist alienates and depersonalises her characters, but because she reinvents and reinvigorates them. Heike Ruschmeyer's figures have soul. Once one realises this, one no longer sees them as mere bodies and figures but once again as persons, knowing they are not the same as they once were, that they are now changed people, that they are indeed....different. (...) Heike Ruschmeyer often works with quotations from the visual arts of the past, reformulating and applying them to new contexts. The result is deranged worlds arising from excesses of colour, unreal spaces and bizarre landscapes.

Cornelia Gerner, Mother Holle and Erbkönig's Daughters, exhibition catalogue HEIKE RUSCHMEYER, 'Maßlose Zeit' ('Extreme Time'), Staatliche Kunsthalle Berlin, Berlin 1993, p 12

The Penz Art Collection Berlin holds a significant number of works by the artist from the 1980s previously and currently on display in national and international exhibitions.

The Red Corsair. 1983. Resin, egg tempera, oil on untreated cotton.





Doris von Schleyer

1948 - 2008



The Penz Art Collection includes a number of unique works of artists and painters that have found their way directly into the collection from the easel.

Doris von Schleyer studied in 1980/81 at the Berlin University of the Arts as a master's student under Professor Wolfgang Petrick, himself a founding member of the legendary West Berlin art studio and gallery 'Großgörschen 35' (named after its street address in Berlin). This became, three years after the Berlin Wall was built, the laboratory for a new figurative art that was to lead the way out of the cul-de-sac of abstract art and have a profound influence on West German painting until well into the 1980s.

Doris von Schleyer sets out on an investigative journey. Using pictorial techniques such as collage, overpainting and drawing she brings everyday objects artistically to the canvas: things that merit little attention in themselves - articles torn from newspapers, shapes of footprints, puzzling odds and ends. All vaguely recognisable and at the same time ephemeral and transient.

left: Untitled. 1980. Collage, acrylic, sand, indian ink on paper.
right: On the Edge of the Road. 1981. Collage, acrylic, sand, indian ink on paper. Detail.



Imprint

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BROUET
LEUKEFELD
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AND
THE PENZ ART
COLLECTION