

**RUTH
BAUMGARTE**

AFRICA: VISIONS OF LIGHT AND COLOR

Exhibition Facts

Duration	7 December – 5 March 2023
Venue	Pfeilerhalle / ALBERTINA
Curator	Angela Stief
Works	38
Catalogue	Available for EUR EUR 29,90 (English & German) onsite at the Museum Shop as well as via www.albertina.at
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Ruth Baumgarte

VISIONS OF LIGHT AND COLOR

7 January – 5 March 2023

It is with works by the German painter Ruth Baumgarte (1923–2013) that the ALBERTINA Museum sets out to present an outstanding artist of the 20th century shown in Austria for the first time. At the center of this presentation in the Columned Hall is Baumgarte's wide-ranging body of works born of her travels to African countries such as Egypt, South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Zimbabwe. These altogether approximately 70 oil paintings, watercolors, and graphic works manifest a near-magical quality when viewed in person. Zimbabwean poet Chirikure Chirikure said of the artist: "She viewed the countries of Africa and their peoples not as models to be immortalized on canvas but as an integral part of her journey through life."

Beginning in the 1950s and until well into her old age, the artist made over 40 trips to Africa, whose people she attentively observed and empathetically appreciated. She took an interest in the unfamiliar cultures of a continent that had yet to be discovered by European artists at that time. Central to any understanding of Ruth Baumgarte's art is the relationship between human beings and nature, the melding of figure and landscape. On the basis of quick sketches made onsite, she would later on—upon having returned home to her studio in Germany—create vividly colorful paintings, virtuoso watercolors, and expressive gouaches and drawings.

Baumgarte's work was most recently shown at the Museum of Art and Cultural History in Dortmund, the Ludwig Museum in the Marble Palace, the State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg and the Ludwig Museum Koblenz. The artist is being shown in Austria for the first time.

A great colourist of our time

"Dynamic streams of colour cover the paintings like a glowing lava. Alongside the radiant bright areas, which virtually dazzle the eye, there are deeply luminous colour sections of no less intensity, which have the same saturation as the intense red, yellow and orange. Through her numerous journeys to Africa, Ruth Baumgarte encountered those intense colour impressions that she could not encounter in her German homeland. Formally and colouristically, Africa with its bright light and high colour intensity was for her what Tunis was for Paul Klee and August Macke half a century earlier: the liberation of her painting

from the Central European tradition," says ALBERTINA General Director Klaus Albrecht Schröder.

"Ruth Baumgarte made her Africa paintings at a time when questions of artistic appropriation and cultural dispossession in the sense of current discourses did not yet exist. Nevertheless, she intuitively recognises that political asymmetries, which manifest themselves as a culture clash, cannot be resolved in superficial harmony, but must be mastered creatively, as it were, as a problem of form in tension-laden colour compositions. The result is an exciting cosmos that, starting with flaming red tones and rich orange-ochre, flows into the depths via yellow, pink and violet to decided violet-blue tones", says curator and ALBERTINA MODERN Director Angela Stief.

Catalogue raisonné in three volumes

The artistic oeuvre of Ruth Baumgarte (1923–2013) is firmly rooted in the representational tradition. On the basis of the latest scientific research it is presented here with a complete catalogue raisonné in an opulent, three-volume edition.

In the essay volume a portrait of the life of the artist is sketched out to reflect the biographical and cultural-historical milestones of her life; the position of Baumgarte's oeuvre in art history is examined; and the artist's particular relationship to Africa is explained. The volume is complemented by a detailed illustrated biography. The second volume lists and illustrates all Baumgarte's artistic works. Her illustrations are published in their entirety for the first time in the third volume, thereby opening up an exciting chapter in illustration in postwar art.

Catalogue Raisonné Vol. I-III

Contributions by R. M. Fischer, R. Giesen, E. J. Gillen, H. Lethen, C. Präger, B. Reifenscheid, R. Spieler.

Text: German / English

3 volumes with altogether 1172 pages, 3450 illustrations in colour

27 x 32 cm, hardcover.

https://www.hirmerverlag.de/de/titel-1-1/ruth_baumgarte-2248/

Award ceremony for Athi-Patra Ruga

Interwoven with this monographic presentation of Baumgarte's works, curated by ALBERTINA Modern director Angela Stief, are works by the South African artist Athi-Patra Ruga, recipient of this year's Ruth Baumgarte Art Award and hence a successor to previous awardees such as William Kentridge, Michael Armitage, Nan Goldin, Mona Hatoum, and

others. Ruga, who was born in Umtata, South Africa in 1984 and divides his time between Johannesburg and Cape Town, pursues a hybridization of forms and content in his multimedia oeuvre. His visual imagery, situated between the utopian and the real, playfully dismantles geographic borders, gender-based attributions and social constructions of African history. He makes the amalgamation of differing cultural influences into the concept of an art that unrestrainedly employs innumerable references and exhibits no inhibitions where appropriation is concerned.

The artistic dialogue with selected paintings, tapestries, and works in glass by Athi-Patra Ruga anchors Ruth Baumgarte's oeuvre in the present and testifies to the currency of her art. And at the same time, the striking analogies to be drawn between the works by these two artists attest to a cross-cultural understanding.

Exhibition Texts

At the center of the exhibition *Visions of Light and Color* is the Africa cycle created by Ruth Baumgarte (1923–2013). This monumental late work comprises around 70 pictures with a truly liberating, expressive force of color. Beginning in the 1950s and continuing into old age, the artist traveled more than forty times to the African continent, to Egypt, South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Zimbabwe, usually spending several months there. Baumgarte was interested in the foreign cultures of a world then largely unknown to European artists.

On the basis of quick sketches executed on site, she later created in her studio in Germany color-intensive paintings, virtuoso watercolors, expressive gouaches, and drawings.

Ruth Baumgarte produced her paintings of Africa at a time when questions of artistic appropriation and cultural dispossession were not yet up for debate as they are today in an age of postcolonial discourse. Nevertheless, she intuitively recognized that political, social, and cultural asymmetries, which manifest themselves as a culture clash, cannot be resolved in superficial harmony, but must be addressed creatively as the formal-aesthetic sediment of real contrasts in electric, colorful compositions. She thus created a coloristic cosmos, in which flaming red, rich orange-ocher, yellow, pink and purple, and resolute violet-blue tones surge from the depths. Emotion is heightened to the extreme in Baumgarte's works through coloration.

The very special light that suffuses the African landscapes finds painterly expression in this way, while the dissolution of forms and allegorization of motifs speak of the artist's unease in experiencing a continent poised between emergence and continuing inequality and exploitation

VISIONS OF COLOR

In her expressive and explosive late work, Ruth Baumgarte brought the blazing light of Africa to Europe. Understanding light as color and color as light becomes an artistic experience, a dramatic force in her works. Lava flows of colors and an almost intoxicating rhythmically fluid movement surge through the pictorial structures.

With the remarkable intensity of her paintings, Baumgarte joins the genealogy of the great colorists of the twentieth century. Her travels through numerous African countries served as the motor for her ability to release those color impressions that she could not find under the overcast skies of her German homeland. Baumgarte's art cannot be simply reduced to genre painting nor to any narrative or descriptive art: The experience of African light left a similarly incisive impression on her as the sun of Provence did on Vincent van Gogh, and as, overall, did the light of southern France on the Fauves around 1905.

ATHI-PATRA RUGA

This exhibition of works by Ruth Baumgarte includes two large-format tapestries and a drawing by Athi-Patra Ruga. The portraits by the South African artist do not depict real persons, but rather they are hybrid figures who often circumvent fixed attributions of ethnicity, class, and gender.

Athi-Patra Ruga is this year's winner of the Ruth Baumgarte Foundation Prize, following artists including William Kentridge, Michael Armitage, Nan Goldin, and Mona Hatoum. Ruga was born in Umtata (South Africa) in 1984 and lives in Johannesburg and Cape Town. His multimedia work, which encompasses glass pictures and performances in addition to tapestries and drawings, pursues an opulent, dazzling, and colorful aesthetic. In it he blends a variety of cultural influences by means of the appropriation of Western contexts and art styles such as Expressionism.

In his investigation of post-colonial history and the anti-apartheid movement of the 1950s, Ruga strives to observe the traumas of the past from a position of distance. He imagines a South Africa of equality, without racism, existing beyond personal grief and subjective defensiveness.

THE STREAM OF TIME

In this triptych, consisting of the paintings *Even the Elephant's Death Will Occur on a Single Day*, *Turn of the Fire*, and *The Stream of Time*, vultures circle in front of a toxic yellow landscape in the left picture, while eagles perch on rock formations in the right painting and

women gather and carry brushwood in the center. All the scenes take place against a dramatically colored sky and can be read as a reference to South Africa's bloody history.

Traditionally, women are considered the linchpin of life and survival on the African continent. The two symbolically charged wing panels with vultures and eagles embody the two antipodes of life and death, as well as the pair of opposites of mortality and immortality.

Pervasive threats and the impression of an imminent danger for the women is evident. The suspicious sideways glance of the main figure emphasizes the unsettling pictorial atmosphere.

African Beat I & II

Baumgarte was concerned even in her late works with the artistic potential of setting figures in motion by means of dynamic pictorial compositions. Dance and ecstasy are at the center of the large-format works African Beat I and II. Moving bodies coalesce into an energetic collage of arabesques. The rhythm of the pictures is marked by a vibrating chiaroscuro contrast and the integration of different techniques, such as gouache, pastel, charcoal, and pencil.

Burning Sky

Burning Sky belongs to the later oil paintings in Baumgarte's Africa series, when she increasingly depicted people fleeing in inferno-like landscapes. In these works she structures the tension-laden space in several levels, weaving the figures into the natural surroundings. The sky burns like fire and bathes the surroundings in a glowing apocalyptic red. The central figure resembles a modern interpretation of the Titan Atlas from ancient mythology, who appears to support the heavens on his shoulders.

Anatomical Landscape II

The almost abstract painting Anatomical Landscape is dominated by a virtually unrecognizable figure seen from behind. The body of the protagonist melts completely into the landscape. Baumgarte modulated her pictures almost sculpturally, rather like the works of Paul Cezanne, who constructed his paintings by positioning patches of color next to each other

Press images

You have the possibility to download the following pictures from www.albertina.at in the Press section. Legal notice: The images may only be used in connection with reporting on the exhibition.



Ruth Baumgarte
Early self-portrait, 1947
Oil on cardboard
47,4 × 40 cm
Ruth Baumgarte Art Foundation



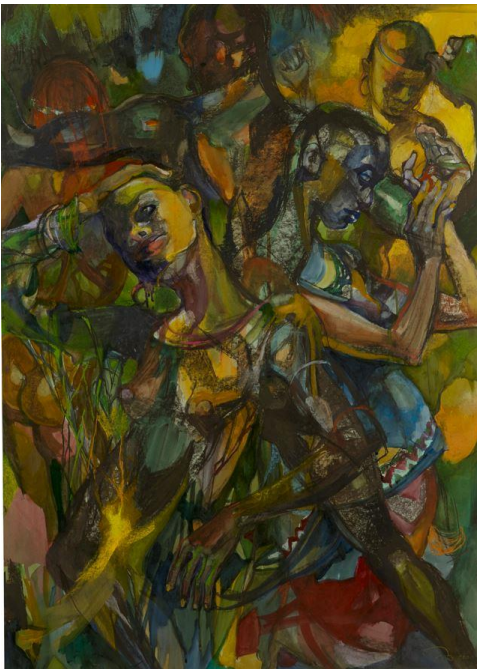
Ruth Baumgarte
Misunderstanding, Malentendu, 1993
Oil on cardboard
137 × 98 cm
Ruth Baumgarte Art Foundation



Ruth Baumgarte
Return, 1994
Oil on canvas
130 × 130 cm
Private Collection



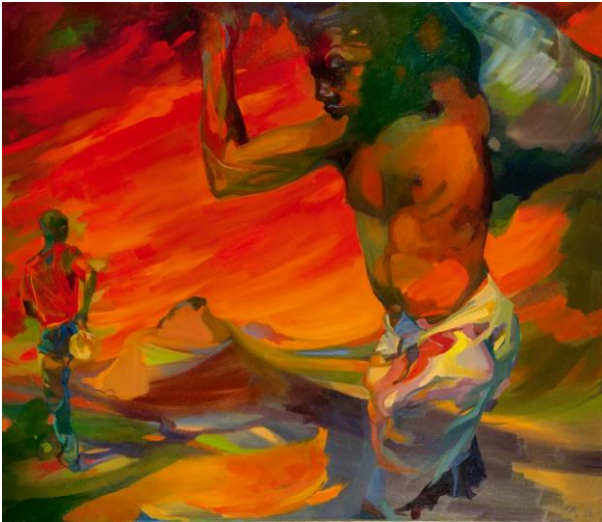
Ruth Baumgarte
The African, 1993
Oil on cardboard
137 × 98 cm
Ruth Baumgarte Art Foundation



Ruth Baumgarte
The African Beat I, 2000
Watercolour, chalk and charcoal on cardboard
134 × 103,2 cm
Ruth Baumgarte Art Foundation



Ruth Baumgarte
Shadows Falling behind your back, 1995
Oil on cardboard
129,3 × 95,5 cm
Ruth Baumgarte Art Foundation



Ruth Baumgarte
 Burning Sky, 1998
 Oil on canvas
 130 × 150 cm
 Ruth Baumgarte Art Foundation



Ruth Baumgarte
 African Vision, 1998-1999
 Oil on canvas
 129 × 150 cm
 Ruth Baumgarte Art Foundation



Ruth Baumgarte
 Even the Elephant's Death Will
 Occur on a Single Day, 1995-
 1997
 Oil on canvas
 120 × 80 cm
 Ruth Baumgarte Art
 Foundation



Ruth Baumgarte
 Turn off the Fire, 1995-1997
 Oil on canvas
 120 × 120 cm
 Ruth Baumgarte Art Foundation



Ruth Baumgarte
 Stream of Time, 1995
 Oil on cardboard
 129,3 × 95,5 cm
 Ruth Baumgarte Art Foundation



Athi-Patha Ruga
Auto Exotic / Auto Erotic, 2022
Oil stick and pastel on paper
80 x 110 cm
What If The World Gallery (Cape Town)
© Athi-Patra Ruga



Athi-Patra Ruga
Jacob about to Wrestle an Angel, 2021.
Wool and thread on tapestry canvas
190 x 144 cm
What If The World Gallery (Cape Town)
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