

THE BEAUTY OF DIVERSITY

16.02.2023 TO 18.8.2024



ALBERTINA modern

Exhibition Facts

Duration	16 February – 18 August 2024
Venue	ALBERTINA MODERN
Curator	Angela Stief
Works	110
Catalogue	Available for EUR 32,90 (English/German) onsite at the Museum Shop as well as via www.albertina.at

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The Beauty of Diversity

16 Feb. – 18 Aug. 2024

The Beauty of Diversity leads a highly charged existence between an established understanding of art and its renewal. This exhibition manifests a compelling force in its juxtaposition of renowned artists who broke out of the canon before becoming canonized themselves with new discoveries as well as those who have disrupted accustomed ways of seeing, swum against the current, shaken the foundations of high culture, and violated norms, thereby laying the foundation for an aesthetic of the diverse.

Above all, however, *The Beauty of Diversity* serves to resituate a collection. Museums with multiple centuries of collecting history and institutions that bring together the most important icons and masterpieces of the distant and recent past are all currently faced with much the same dilemma. Recent developments including the present-day postulate of diversity and inclusion have shone a brighter light than ever on the one-sided collecting focuses that long determined collections' substantive orientations. As a result, mechanisms of exclusion have become dramatically evident.

New Identities Outside the Canon

Today's art world is inhabited by a deep interest in identity politics and the attendant issues of class, race, and gender. The resulting broad spectrum of artistic, stylistic, and substantive approaches entails a necessary expansion of that historical artistic canon which is represented at the ALBERTINA Museum by artists ranging from Michelangelo and Raphael to Dürer, Rembrandt, and Rubens and on to Goya, Schiele, Picasso, and Warhol.

The call to expand and diversify museum collections goes hand in hand with unconditional claims to equal rights and freedom of expression. The exhibition *The Beauty of Diversity* therefore features the ALBERTINA Museum's post-1945 holdings including recent new acquisitions in order to present the diversity of its collections, defining their richness in terms of heterogeneity and in light of an unequivocal desire for the diverse. It also underlines how essential it is to lend visibility to other perspectives and thus to women, LGBTQIA+ artists, people of color, indigenous artistic stances, autodidacts, and outsiders who stand out against the contrasting foil of the Old Masters.

This exhibition manifests an aesthetic of the diverse that upends the ideality of classicist stylistic and formal strivings: it pursues the beauty to be found in the grotesque, impure, and repressed, shining a light on that which exists on the fringes and diverges from the norm. The

hybrid mixing and recombination of distinct systems and genders plays as prominent a role here as does the presentation of the marginalized.

Inclusion of artists from continents such as Australia, Africa, Asia, and South America is a central priority, serving to counteract the exclusive character of Eurocentric thought and action as well as Western art and culture.

Autodidacts exemplify a pronounced will to do what one must, proving their authenticity in how they affirm art's internal necessity, and individuals who probe and transcend boundaries call to mind art's role as an anthropological constant while also exemplifying nonconformist strategies by which to live and work in their deviation from the norm.

Artists:

Jean-Michel Basquiat, Eva Beresin, Amoako Boafo, Verena Bretschneider, Cecily Brown, Nyunmiti Burton, Miriam Cahn, Alexandre Diop, Ines Doujak, Jean Dubuffet, Stefanie Erjautz, Gelitin/Gelatin, Aïcha Khorchid, Soli Kiani, Basil Kincaid, Jürgen Klauke, Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Elena Koneff, Maria Lassnig, Daniel Lezama, Angelika Loderer, Claudia Märzendorfer, Jonathan Meese, Sungi Mlengeya, Tracey Moffatt, Michel Nedjar, Tony Oursler, Grayson Perry, Marc Quinn, Franz Ringel, George Rouy, Iris Sageder, Cindy Sherman, Sarah Slappey, Kiki Smith, Tal R, VALIE EXPORT, Jannis Varelas, August Walla, Franz West, Kennedy Yanko

Curator: Angela Stief

Exhibition Texts

The Beauty of Diversity

The Beauty of Diversity leads a tense existence between the poles of an established understanding of art and its renewal. This exhibition manifests its dynamic nature in the juxtaposition of renowned artists who constantly attempted to break out of the canon yet became canonized themselves with new discoveries as well as with those who disrupt accustomed ways of seeing, swim against the current, shake the foundations of high culture, violate norms, and thereby lay the foundation for an aesthetics of the diverse.

Above all, however, this presentation serves to resituate a collection. All museums that bring together the most important masterpieces of the past within their walls now face a similar dilemma, for the present-day postulate of diversity and inclusion shines a bright light on one-sided collecting focuses and makes exclusionary mechanisms drastically apparent.

The call to expand, rectify, and diversify museum collections goes hand in hand with unconditional calls for equal rights and freedom of expression. The exhibition The Beauty of Diversity demonstrates the broadness of the ALBERTINA Museum's collection and redefines the collection's richness in terms of its heterogeneity. It also underlines the necessity of affording visibility to women, LGBTQIA+ artists, people of color, indigenous artistic stances, and outsiders.

This exhibition develops an aesthetics of the diverse that upends the ideality of classicist stylistic and formal strivings and pursues the beauty to be found in the grotesque, impure, and repressed while lending visibility to that which exists on the fringes and diverges from the norm. The hybrid mixing and recombination of distinct systems and genders plays as prominent a role here as does the presentation of the marginalized. Artists from the continents of Australia, Africa, Asia, and South America feature prominently in this presentation and serve to undermine Eurocentric thought and action and/or Western art and culture. Autodidacts exhibit a pronounced will to do what one must, proving their authenticity by assertively acting upon art's internal necessity—just as individuals who probe and transcend boundaries not only call to mind art's role as an anthropological constant but also, in their deviant modes of existence, exemplify nonconformist strategies by which to live and work.

Puppet Shows

Room 2

Puppets made of soft fabrics and materials for modeling and children's play like clay and plasticine evoke the secure, cared-for, and protected realm of childhood, an idyllic world. But as the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud once set forth, the distance between the security and coziness of the nursery and the horror of the uncanny is a short one. Among those artworks that address the idea of reality crashing in upon a prelapsarian world are creations that flirt with the aesthetics of puppetry or even seem deceptively puppet-like. They show just how closely guilt and innocence, power and powerlessness, privilege and subjection to discrimination often coexist. Stefanie Erjautz's early puppets seem as if taken from a fantastical world. In later works, however, she began orienting herself on newspaper photographs and developed an interest in social themes, addressing abuse and violence in religion, the church, and (geo)politics. From portraying the dictator Adolf Hitler to paying homage to the artist and human rights activist Ai Weiwei, her oeuvre engages with human beings' entire behavioral range. It is the inexpressible, on the other hand, that is lent expression by Tony Oursler's distorted faces and emotionally intense projections of protagonists trapped in dialogic loops onto often puppet-like artificial bodies and frames.

Self-Empowerment

Room 3

The right to self-determination is an important demand of the feminist movement, strategies of self-empowerment have always existed in art. Indeed, one of its functions has been as an organ of (identitarian) political expression, a bullhorn for activists demanding the improvement of conditions faced by groups with shared interests and experiences of discrimination. Particularly the idea of women's empowerment, as an aspect of the feminist avant-garde since the 1970s and a reaction to discrimination against women, has retained its great importance to this day. Artists have pioneered the promotion of women's rights, using powerful imagery to rebel against the status quo and fighting to both alter social structures and ameliorate onerous conditions. They self-confidently demonstrate what Austrian art's grande dame Maria Lassnig, striding across New York as a "Queen Kong" of sorts, termed Woman Power. Common to Lassnig and the artist Miriam Cahn is their aversion to being understood as explicit feminists amidst careers consistently oriented toward the attainment of acceptance and recognition throughout the art world.

Art Brut

Room 4

There exists a need to question the belief that art can permit inferences concerning the psychological dispositions of its creators and that visual images say something about the health or even illness of those who produce them. Assuming all-too-close associations between biography, artist, and work is problematic in numerous respects. The 20th century witnessed the development of various tendencies that interwove art and the psyche, discovering the unconscious mind as a source of inspiration. Particularly the surrealists recognized the creative possibilities and added value that could be unlocked by giving free rein to the psyche's powers. They adopted the 1922 publication *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, authored by the Heidelberg-based psychiatrist and art historian Hans Prinzhorn, as their bible. The mid-century period then saw Jean Dubuffet introduce the notion of "art brut", a mode of creativity that seeks out and finds the raw, unadulterated, undeformed, and anti-academic, an art removed from cultural norms. Works by autodidacts and supposed misfits also featured in Roger Cardinale and Victor Musgrave's legendary 1979 exhibition *Outsiders* in London. And in Austria, the psychiatrist Leo Navratil established the House of Artists in Gugging—discovering pioneers such as August Walla and Johann Hauser for the broader art world.

Black Art Matters

Room 6

It was in the wake of major civil unrest in 2013 that the Black Lives Matter movement formed in the USA. By just one year later, following numerous demonstrations sparked by African American deaths particularly at the hands of white law enforcement officers, it had achieved worldwide awareness thanks to the lightning-fast spread of information and news across social media accompanied by the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. In art, the politicization and sensitization of broad swaths of society to racism, (police) violence, and aggression as well as to social discrimination against people of African descent found strong resonance in the 1980s works of Jean-Michel Basquiat, just as they also have in the contemporary art of recent years. New African voices are taking positions and creating new visibility, with art by and portraits of BIPOC persons serving to ensure the presence of those who had long been underrepresented in the history of Western art. Today's artists engage deeply with questions of class, race, and gender, in which context they also turn a criticize eye on white supremacy—defined as the hegemony of white people, their worldview, and their influence in society.

Obsessions

Room 8

Obsessions can be understood as individual myths, as internal forces that take the self by surprise again and again. Obsessive forces lead to compulsive eruptions, to unimagined degrees of intensity and internal necessity. Fraught with personal and societal taboos, they frequently manifest themselves in secret and without witnesses. Obsession features as an indispensable ingredient in numerous artists' biographies, which are transfigured by this elixir of life fed by a mysterious source. Obsessions write life stories, drastically reshuffle existences, propel the highest achievements—and can also destroy. Those who know them regard them with both love and hate, while those unfamiliar with them feel excluded from the Olympus of the initiated. Particularly those individuals who apply themselves to art are nourished by a fierce drive that can thwart efforts to realize enlightened life designs or calculate strategic decisions. Whether obsession in fact reveals a golden thread that runs throughout a person's life, and whether obsessions cause people to race toward both good fortune and ruin in defiance of all decency and morality—such questions must remain open.

Grotesque Figures

It was long the case that high culture had turned its back on the grotesque, impure, and inscrutable, giving itself over to just proportion and the harmoniously consummate, shunning rulelessness and divergence from the norm. The grotesque, on the other hand, is ever in search of difference and divergent beauty. It questions form's ideality and liberates itself from classicist creative principles. In holding up a mirror to the world, artists distort, overextend, and upend reality in carnivalesque fashion, discovering the fantastical, deformed, and occasionally kitsch. The grotesque body as demonstrated by Eva Beresin and Franz Ringel is not a self-contained whole; it is unfinished, fragmentary, transformative, continually metamorphosing. Ines Doujak's figures unite the beautiful with the ugly in a bizarre manner, rendering the repulsive and disgusting worthy of visualization. And Jonathan Meese's grotesque bronze figures embody an expression of the shocking, exaggerated, and ambivalent, allowing one to peer behind the facade of an all-too-smooth surface into the terrifying abysses of human existence.

Hybrid Forms

Room 9

Hybridity is the key concept in light of which to describe cultural diversity, multimediality, and heterogeneity. The Latin term *hybrida* denotes something of mixed origin and has to do with the melding of human and animal, woman and man, artificial and natural, and hence with the mixing and recombination of different systems, languages, and genders, with the collision of cultures, and with combining the (supposedly) contradictory. Differences are not melded together but instead persist openly and alongside one another in their distinctness. Hybrid beings defy classic attributions and clear categorizations, with purity requirements having become obsolete. Artists today invoke identity's reorientation: by exposing and engaging with gender, artists such as Grayson Perry and Verena Bretschneider question conventional role models. August Walla, on the other hand, goes so far as to concern himself with a new world order: in his neologism-laced pictorial exegeses, he combines various worldviews as well as elements drawn from politics, religion, and myth.

Dream and Trauma

Room 10

A metaphor of origin to be found in art holds that the dark and unordered, the formless and chaotic stands at the beginning of any aesthetic production. Peculiar to both art and dreams is a reality status that excludes the enlightened and managed outside world with its utilitarian rationality and fixation with functionality. The artistic added value of the mysterious, ambiguous, and cryptic arises from the labyrinthine tangles that constitute the subsurface pathways of consciousness. Traumatic occurrences, things repressed and forgotten can manifest themselves in the imaginary aspects of art and dreams. Like the proverbial tip of the iceberg, events pushed out of daytime awareness can crop up in those places, situated halfway to the clarity of consciousness, where internal images are permitted. The task of the imagination's machinery is to shift, in a constant act of rotation, that which has been overlooked, painfully repressed, and marginalized out of latency and into the realm of the evident so that it may be acknowledged by the psyche. Drawing on a visionary power that pushes toward visibility, artists like Aïcha Khorchid banish their fears and stride forth to process traumatic experiences, abuse, and violence.

Inclusion

Room 13

The inclusion of artists from continents such as Australia, Africa, Asia, and South America is an important priority in contemporary art that undermines the exclusivity of Eurocentric thought and action and of Western art and culture. The invocation of other cultures embodies an ex negativo attempt to question our faith in limitless progress, growth-based capitalist utopias, global digitization, and the increasing virtualization of our world. In Aboriginal art, one sees this in the output of artists such as Emily Kame Kngwarreye and Nyunmiti Burton, who take up ancestral stories such as that of the Seven Sisters. The rediscovery of indigenous myths and age-old cultural techniques, rituals, artisanship, and textiles, though it might initially seem to run counter to Western civilizations' high culture-derived self-understanding, represents an enrichment of the canon. Autochthonous peoples' belief in the collective power of community puts the lie especially to egocentric worldviews that manifest in a cult of genius.

Press images

The following images are available free of charge during the exhibition in the Press section of www.albertina.at



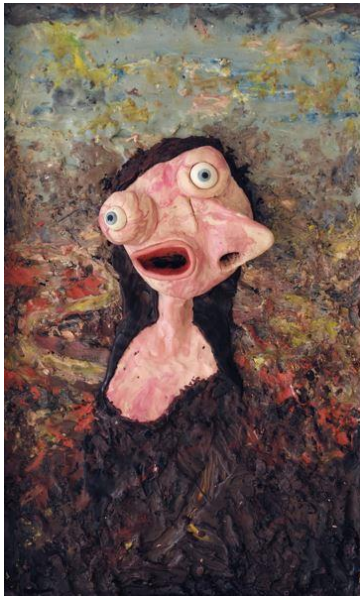
Sungi Mlengeya
Wallow, 2022
Acrylic on canvas
150 × 140 cm
Private Collection
© Sungi Mlengeya, Photo: Courtesy of Afriart Gallery



Amoako Bofo
Ivy Off Shoulder Dress, 2023
 Oil on canvas
 170 × 150 cm
 The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – Haselsteiner Family
 Collection © Bildrecht, Vienna 2024
 Photo: © Sandro E. E. Zanzinger



Verena Bretschneider
Adam, 1989
 Material image
 115 × 80 × 35 cm
 The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – Collection Dagmar
 and Manfred Chobot
 © Verena Georgina Bretschneider



Gelitin/Gelatin
MONA LISA (2184), 2020
 Plasticine, paraffin, beeswax and pigments on wood
 70 × 45 × 10 cm
 The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – Haselsteiner Family
 Collection
 © Gelitin/Gelatin & Bildrecht Vienna, 2024



August Walla
Ewigkeitendepolizist.!, 1988
 Acrylic on canvas, paper glued on, coloured pencils
 200 × 160 × 5 cm
 The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – Haselsteiner Family
 Collection
 © ART BRUT KG

ALBERTINA modern



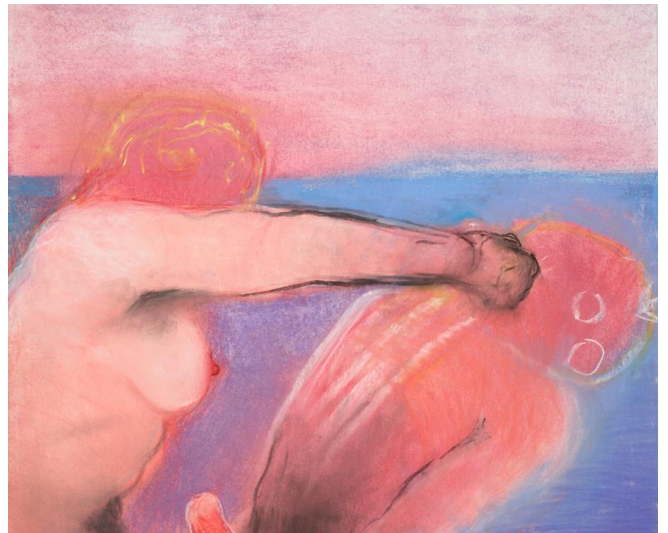
Cindy Sherman
Untitled, 2003
Chromogenic print
130 x 100 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – The ESSL
Collection
© Cindy Sherman. Courtesy the artist and
Hauser & Wirth
Photo: © Cindy Sherman. Courtesy the artist and
Hauser & Wirth



Cecily Brown
Cherries and Pearls, 2020
Oil on canvas
210 x 230 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – On Loan from the
Dames Collection, Berlin
© Cecily Brown. Courtesy of Paula Cooper Gallery, New
York



Jean Dubuffet
Red hat, lowered eyes, 1954
Oil on canvas
90 x 75 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – The Batliner
Collection
© Bildrecht, Vienna 2024



Miriam Cahn
strike back, 2018
Pastel, chalk
95 x 110 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – On permanent loan
from the Austrian Ludwig Foundation for Art and Science
© Miriam Cahn



Alexandre Diop
Il était une fois le Mouton Noir, 2021
Mixed media on wood
215 × 500 × 6 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna
© Alexandre Diop



Franz Ringel
Expulsion from Paradise, 1978
Mixed media
200 × 300 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna - The ESSL Collection
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