

EVA BERESIN
THICK AIR

Exhibition Facts

Duration	1 May – 15 September 2024
Venue	Columned Hall The ALBERTINA Museum
Curator	Angela Stief Melissa Lumbroso (Assistant Curator)
Works	31 (24 paintings, 7 sculptures)
Artist Book	Eva Beresin - Thick Air. The Wedding of Humor and Horror Edited by Angela Stief and Klaus Albrecht Schröder German/English Published by Hatje Cantz EUR 46,00 Available at the museum shop and other book stores
Contact	Albertinaplatz 1 1010 Vienna T +43 (0)1 534 83 0 presse@albertina.at www.albertina.at
Press Department	Daniel Benyes T +43 (0)1 534 83 511 M +43 (0)699 12178720 d.benyes@albertina.at Nina Eisterer T +43 (0)1 534 83 512 M +43 (0)699 10981743 n.eisterer@albertina.at

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Introduction

One could speak of an encounter between beauty and horror, or of how the fantastic has married the dreadful in the artworks of Eva Beresin. Moving through the painterly and graphic worlds of this Hungarian artist, who has lived and worked in Vienna since 1976, one comes across hybrid creatures, grotesque figures, and curiously fantastical beings. The artist's broad thematic palette, rife with bizarre whimsy as well as the tragic and existential, ranges from medieval-style cruelties to everyday banalities and even humorous episodes.

Beresin challenges the idea of the one-dimensional human being in defiance of any totality. She frequently endows her subjects with animalistic behaviors, while the numerous bona fide animals populating Beresin's paintings exhibit human traits. There unfolds an artistic universe of sly humor and shenanigans that celebrate just clearly it has gone off the rails.

Moments of nonsense coalesce in a veritable apotheosis of the marginalized. Her distortion of ordinary perspectives, true perspectival breaks, and reversals of circumstances suggest carnivalesque situations or recall escapades of mannerist exaggeration. Nothing is unworthy of being depicted. To Beresin, there are no wrong gestures, is no wrong painting, and the speed of her working process along with the eloquent force of her artistic expression underline the autonomy of the painterly act.

Beresin's works contain repeated instances of exposure where boundaries of shame between the intimate and the public are stretched, with rarely formulated but indeed dominant laws of decency understood by the artist as hers to enthusiastically unhinge. The evident interplay between concealing and revealing is also reflected in her imagery's oscillation between abstraction and figuration, with its murky figures emerging ghostlike from the background, raucous menagerie of critters, and outsized naked feet evoking hearty laughter in more than a few.

Exhibition Texts

Eva Beresin

Thick Air

In describing the artworks of Eva Beresin, one might speak of an encounter between beauty and horror—or of a marriage between the fantastical and the terrifying. The painterly and graphic worlds of this Hungarian artist, who has lived and worked in Vienna since 1976, are filled with hybrid creatures, grotesque figures, and curious imaginary beings. Beresin frequently depicts her human subjects engaging in animal-like behaviors, while the numerous bona fide animals that populate her paintings bear positively human traits. Her broad thematic palette, tinged with both the existential and the tragicomic, features everything from medieval-seeming cruelties to everyday banalities and humorous episodes.

Beresin's oeuvre embodies a universe that has gone off the rails and celebrates having done so with sly humor and shenanigans. Instances of nonsense coalesce in a veritable apotheosis of the marginal. The distortion of ordinary viewing angles as well as perspectival breaks and reversed circumstances suggest carnivalesque situations or recall escapades of mannerist exaggeration. To Beresin, nothing is unworthy of depiction—there is no false demeanor, no false habitus, no “wrong painting”—and the speed of her working process along with the eloquent force of her artistic expression underlines the autonomy of the painterly act and the liberation to be found in the gesture.

The instances of exposure in Eva Beresin's works repeatedly push against boundaries of shame between the intimate and the public. The artist seizes upon and enthusiastically unhinges rarely formulated but indeed dominant laws of decency. The interplay between concealing and revealing is also reflected in imagery that oscillates between abstraction and figuration. Murky figures emerging ghostlike from the ground or background, a raucous menagerie of various and sundry critters, and outsized naked limbs evoke hearty laughter in more than a few who see them.

Alter Ego

In her paintings, Eva Beresin underlines the direct relationship between the artist and her art. A maximum degree of identification is reflected in the self-depictions that she integrates into nearly every one of her paintings, thereby setting up a contrast with the classic self-portrait genre's far greater beholdenness to reality. These self-depictions can be understood as tantamount to a signature or trademark of the artist, in the manner of authorial branding or a sign of presence. They also, however, have to do with the formation of the self by artistic means. Beresin's typical alter ego is naked with red lips and red nails—a hyper-stylization of her persona that clashes with her everyday bearing and uncommonly modest understatement. The viewer sees her either embedded in sprawling narratives with numerous protagonists or as a singular subject filling the image space: Eva absorbed in self-observation, surrounded by animals, or simply somewhere—kneeling, equipped with headphones, painting her toenails, grooming herself, making her toilet, or engrossed in a video call on her cellphone.

A Handful of Concrete ...

Eva Beresin's figures have recently begun to peel out of her paintings, seemingly coming to life. It is by way of a near-animated act that these figures—born of painting—shift somewhat more into the realm of plastic reality. The artist, feeling an urge to know how her two-dimensional creations would look from other perspectives, recently began translating them into sculptural equivalents of their painted images—formed by her own hands, as their titles (which often begin with *A Handful of Concrete...*) indeed suggest. She begins by shaping manageably sized miniatures, which she then has scanned, digitally enlarged, and produced as 3D prints. To these she applies paint. This process gives rise to animals such as dogs, bears, and a rhinoceros as well as a crying baby, a romantic couple, and other miniature scenarios. And, of course, to self-portraits where the ever-same figure, presumably an alter ego, is shown in a series of poses and motions—thinking and contemplating, lolling about, etc.—signifying emotional states. The artist has also reincarnated in a green plastic recycling bin on which a vulture has already taken up its perch, and—better still—as a curvaceous and entirely relaxed figure in *Resting in Ecstasy*.

Thick Air

Thick Air, the title of this solo exhibition by Eva Beresin at the Albertina Museum, is also the title of one of her paintings. Here, the artist transforms a figure of speech into a work in oil and acrylic in order to imbue this metaphor with new meaning. Or, conversely: we see a painting that has been metaphorically charged and/or encoded. At the center of this work, which is densely populated with hybrid figures that appear part-human, part-animal, sits the naked artist wearing a conspicuous mask on her face. In front of her is a table with a teacup as well as a vase containing an orgiastic array of colorful flowers at the level of her genital area. The starting point for this work was the COVID-19 pandemic, which the artist took as an opportunity to ruminate on the experiences of lockdowns and art production as such, isolated from other people and alone at the studio—an echo chamber of the creative self. Thick Air addresses the relationship between isolation and conviviality that became so precarious during the pandemic and left many with no air to breathe. It contrasts diametrically opposed character traits such as extro- and introversion and lends new meaning to the relationship between the internal and external worlds—a relationship that defines the tension present in a great many of Beresin's works.

Under My Skin

In every single one of her works, Eva Beresin highlights the might and force of the unconscious mind—as seen in *Under My Skin* and *The Crushing Wave of Unconsciousness*. In these large-format paintings, figures appear as if dreamy apparitions, as manifestations of the past, as specters put to canvas by the artist. Psychoanalysis and the study of psychodynamics are central to understanding Beresin's output, which accords considerable space to emotions, fears, and desires. The unleashing of creative powers that occurs when the barriers between the ego and the drives of the id are lifted and when mental blocks are dissolved is owed here to the artist's engagement with her own terrifying family background. It was only following her mother's death in 2007 that Beresin discovered diaries written following her escape from Auschwitz—and it was only by reading them that Beresin learned of the loss of countless family members in Nazi concentration camps. This reemergence of the repressed past touched off an artistic reorientation that evokes the mythological story of the phoenix rising from the ashes. Beresin's art touches on the unbearable aspects of existence, the tragic and traumatic dimensions of life.

Press images

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

Please note: The images may only be used in connection with reporting on the exhibition.



Eva Beresin
The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success, 2022
Oil on canvas
250 × 400 cm
Private Collection, Courtesy of Fundación La Nave Salinas
© Eva Beresin
Photo: Peter M. Mayr



Eva Beresin
Thick Air, 2021
Oil and acrylic on canvas
200 × 300 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna
© Eva Beresin
Photo: ALBERTINA, Wien



Eva Beresin
Under My Skin, 2022
Oil and acrylic on canvas
250 × 320 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – Acquisition
with funds from the gallery funding of the
BMKÖS 2022
© Eva Beresin
Photo: Peter M. Mayr



Eva Beresin
The Joys of Physical and Mental Pain, 2022
Oil on canvas
180 × 300 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – Haselsteiner Family
Collection
© Eva Beresin
Photo: Peter M. Mayr



Eva Beresin
Puppies Are Gonna Be Dogs, 2022
Oil on canvas
120 × 145 cm
Private Collection
© Eva Beresin



Eva Beresin
A Look in the Mirror, 2020
Oil on canvas
70 × 50 cm
Private Collection, Vienna
© Eva Beresin
Photo: Peter M. Mayr



Eva Beresin
Absorbed by Digestion, 2023
Oil and acrylic on canvas
180 × 280 cm
Edwin Oostmeijer Collection
© Eva Beresin
Photo: Jean-Baptiste Maitre



Eva Beresin
Resting in Ecstasy, 2023
Acrylic on 3-D Print (PLA)
100 × 95 × 55 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – Haselsteiner Family Collection
© Eva Beresin
Photo: The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna