

Meredith Rosen Gallery

Meredith Rosen Gallery is pleased to present *The Paris Years*, the first United States survey of Swiss painter Irène Zurkinden (1909-1987). The exhibition opens on August 16 and remains on view through September 30.

The Paris Years brings together paintings, works on paper, and early sketchbooks spanning Zurkinden's groundbreaking practice during her formative years spent in Paris in the 1930s. Born in 1909 in Basel, Switzerland, Irène Zurkinden received a grant in 1929 which allowed her to travel to Paris to train as a fabric designer and enroll at the Académie Grande Chaumière. In Paris, Zurkinden became immersed in the avant-garde artistic community where she befriended Meret Oppenheim and the Surrealist group while studying under Arnold Fiechter and Toulouse-Lautrec. During this time she married the Black jazz musician Kurt Fenster, with whom she had two children. Zurkinden was simultaneously active in the Paris art circles revolutionizing gender, sexuality and artistic production. Zurkinden lived between Paris and Basel throughout the 1930s where she developed romantic relationships with both men and women while raising two children. She returned to Basel in 1942 and became part of the anti-fascist artist Gruppe 33, where she took part in several artist-led exhibitions. Zurkinden continued to return to Paris following the war and later traveled extensively throughout Europe and Africa, continuing to paint and develop a painting technique based on various phases of Impressionism, which later shifted into a deconstruction of the figure and urban landscapes. Throughout her life, Zurkinden was in constant tension between the demands of motherhood at home in Basel and her artistic community in Paris, with whom she shared an intellectual and artistic kinship.

Zurkinden's unique portrayal of her female companions beginning in the 1930s was a significant precursor to successive generations of artists invested in deconstructing the figure, such as Cecily Brown and George Condo. In Zurkinden's work we are initiated into her tight, poised figurative portraits and still-lives which give way to more gestural marks as the pictures become more erotic. In these works, we can also trace a thread to later developments in feminist art, wherein the female body is portrayed with sexual agency. Zurkinden's work has seldom been shown outside of Europe, as her erotically charged portraits challenged the socially accepted subject matter for a female artist at the time.

Irène Zurkinden was born in 1909 in Basel, Switzerland and died in 1987 in Basel. In 1982 she received the Prize of the Regio Basiliensis for visual arts. Important solo exhibitions include Kunstmuseum Basel (1985); Galerie Beyeler, Basel (1979); Galerie Riehentor, Basel (1974); and Kunsthalle Basel (1959). Her work has also been included in group presentations at Kunsthalle Basel (1983); Galerie Wolfensberger, Zürich (1959); Galerie Kléber, Paris (1950); and Galerie Bettie Thommen, Basel (1930). Her work is held in the collections of the Kunstmuseum Basel; Kunsthau Aarau; Basel Public Art Collection; Art Credit Basel-Stadt; Swiss National Insurance Company; and the Swiss National Library, Graphic Collection. Zurkinden also designed stage sets and costumes for theaters in Basel. In 2014, the city of Basel honored the painter by naming a public, tree-lined square "Irène Zurkinden-Platz". This is Zurkinden's first presentation in the United States and with Meredith Rosen Gallery.