

LARSEN WARNER

THE BODY ELECTRIC

20 January – 16 March

Gertrud Arndt
Raghav Babbar
Sara Berman
Alexander Calder
Francesco Clemente
Cecilia Edefalk
Léonard Tsuguharu Foujita
Alberto Giacometti
Chantal Joffe
Alex Katz
Joy Labinjo
Elsa Rouy
Guy Yanai

Larsen Warner is excited to present the group exhibition *The Body Electric*. The exhibition is an extraordinary opportunity to view the work of legendary 20th Century artists such as Alberto Giacometti, Alexander Calder, Francesco Clemente, Gertrude Arndt and Léonard Tsuguharu Foujita alongside some of the most exciting contemporary artists utilising the figure and portraiture within their practice. These include Alex Katz, Chantal Joffe, Raghav Babbar, Joy Labinjo, Sara Berman, Elsa Rouy, Cecilia Edefalk and Guy Yanai.

The exhibition title takes inspiration from the poem *I Sing the Body Electric* written in 1855 by the American writer Walt Whitman. In the poem, Whitman celebrates the glories of existence through exploring the body as a whole as well as its individual elements; the interconnectedness of body and soul and how all people are linked irrespective of our race, gender or sexuality. *The Body Electric* aims to share in this celebration; offering new perspectives on one of art's oldest genres by presenting changing approaches to portraiture from the 1930's to the present day.

From ancient times to now, portraiture has told us fundamental truths about humanity and identity. Some of the earliest examples of portraiture can be found in the tonal portraits of the ancient Egyptians that adorned the lids of mummy cases, and the sculptural busts or death masks created in ancient Rome. Both examples describe an enduring set of ideas central to the portrait: to memorialise a subject and to capture a likeness. Across Western art history, portraiture has functioned as a record of powerful and important people. Portraits were often commissioned and so artists long grappled with the idea of representation. During this time portraiture was frequently used as a symbol and tool of power, authority, status and beauty. From the mid 1800s the advent of photography changed the nature of portraiture. Artists no longer needed to accurately record their sitter's likeness as this could be more easily achieved with a camera. As a result artists became increasingly more concerned in the psychological dimensions of the subject they were depicting which opened up new pathways of expression within portrait painting. The works presented in *The Body Electric* span a breadth of stylistic and conceptual approaches that celebrate this freedom, with the works on view demonstrating how the figure within portraiture has been reimagined and reconfigured by modern and contemporary artists of diverse backgrounds and traditions.

The exhibition gives the audience unique opportunity to view a rare intimate double portrait drawing by Alberto Giacometti and Alexander Calder. Created in 1952 during a dinner between the artists in Paris, the drawing contains a portrait of Giacometti by Calder, and a Calder portrait executed by Giacometti. The work serves as a testament to their combined mastery, offering viewers an insight into the harmonious confluence of two influential artistic forces. Also included in the exhibition is *Self Portrait with Skull*, 2002 by Francesco Clemente that was included in the landmark institutional exhibition *The Naked Portrait* at the National Portrait Gallery of Scotland in 2007 and *Vivien*, 2000 by the renowned American painter Alex Katz. Presented alongside these important paintings and drawings is *Masken-Selbstportrait*, 1930 by the photographer and designer Gertrude Arndt. Through her iconic series of self-portraits Arndt created playful and absurd reinterpretations of such feminine tropes as the widow, socialite, and little girl. Arndt is considered to be a pioneer of female self-portraiture with her work echoing in that of Cindy Sherman and Sophie Calle.

Within the work of a new generation of contemporary painters such as Sara Berman (*Boy Girl*, 2023) Raghav Babbar (*Shower in the Motel Room (Self-Portrait)*, 2023) Elsa Rouy (*Bodybuilder Beauty*, 2023) Guy Yanai (*Theo Looking at Isabelle*, 2023) Chantal Joffe (*Self-Portrait in a Striped Top*, 2015) and Joy Labinjo (*Francis Barber*, 2022) the portrait is re-contextualised and re-imagined, displaying a commitment to documenting all aspects of the human condition with power, sensitivity and empathy. The works propose diverse and often unconventional ways of representing an individual. Through their varied takes on the portrait, the artists presented in *The Body Electric* raise provocative questions and reflect a variety of perspectives that challenge who we are and how we perceive and record ourselves and those around us. They are more than just artworks; when we gaze upon the diverse faces, limbs and bodies of the works presented we are experiencing an encounter with that person; that is the true power of portraiture.

