

At Barbara Gross Galerie I saw a postcard from the 1980s which read: “I’m not searching for an identity, I have too much identity.” It was quoting Louise Bourgeois. The way that she inverted the infamous search for identity from the 1980s from “too little” to “too much” immediately seemed programmatic to me. Not only of Bourgeois’s work, but of that of a whole series of female artists with whom Barbara Gross has worked over the years. A loose group, organized around different forms of that “‘female’ aesthetic” whose existence was interrogated by Silvia Bovenschen in the mid-1970s. An aesthetic that developed out of the social territories that had been defined as female, but here were brought to public attention: in body parts, in family constellations, in mythologies. A purposeful aiming at “too much” female identity. An aesthetic of revelation rather than withdrawal, in which one’s own attributes—the imputed, the discovered, and the fictional alike are tightly consolidated: into Spero’s present-day mythologies, Lassnig’s unique viewpoints, or Bourgeois’s psychological interior spaces. A far-reaching artistic publication of what society had privatized as interiority.

Barbara Gross’s connections to Louise Bourgeois, as well as to Maria Lassnig and Nancy Spero, go back to the early 1980s. The first solo shows in her gallery occurred in 1988 and 1989. Even though at that time the artists’ oeuvres already dated back several decades, they had remained largely ignored by the public and institutions. They were only received regionally, and lacked a broader audience. It was not until feminism attempted to de-privatize women’s lives in society overall that also their work became more visible. Thus, their works of art appear within the frame of feminism, even beyond the issue of the artists’ own convictions, because it was feminism that made them visible.

Considering that they have now been long established, and seen from the perspective of their legacies, it seems hard to imagine that their works were once out of the public eye. Now that the artists are dead, we look back at their oeuvres, which developed, dovetailed, and particularized over a period of decades. By showing their works all together once again, the exhibition *Another Normal Love* attempts to seek out what once appeared to be disconcerting in their works. In all three cases, this is owed not least to the openness, with which overtly sexualized bodies determine the painterly and sculptural spaces. Neither Lassnig’s cumbersome exteriors of her own façade, nor her almost furniture-like abstractions—shown here in four drawings and paintings—aestheticize the female body. It does not appear as a complete whole, as an artistic unity, but as a singularity, the awkward life of its individual elements.

In contrast, Nancy Spero does not break up the unity of the body’s image; rather, it is the liberation of the female body from its function as a decorative element of cultural history that comes to an end

here. In the hand-printed collages mythological figures and writing, outcries and narrative are added to the nude female bodies. They obtain a world of their own, a context that confronts their viewers. It is this confrontation that is common—in different ways—to the works of all three artists.

With Louise Bourgeois's work—of which three drawings and two sculptures are on display—it is also primarily re-contextualization that determines her works of art. Bourgeois's artistic exaggeration of psychological constellations—seen here as dangling, strung up, and hypersexualized bodies hanging in the space—thwart the separation of the private and the public most obviously. *Another Normal Love* presents three female artists who publicized a socially private identity before society itself did so.

— Kerstin Stakemeier

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