

PHILOSOPHER OF HER OWN RUIN

This exhibition and its attendant research follow the path of an entity, once a person, who passed from a moment of hyper-visibility into invisibility at a critical juncture in their life. It was in this later moment of life, when their body had undergone a previously unknown transformation, that a new freedom came to them. This new freedom then allowed an entirely novel path of self-realization to occur.

The poet Lisa Robertson calls this self-realization an “undocumented corporeality,” where new “scintillating research” can begin for the entity. It is not that a new life begins as much as a new mode of operating begins. This operation is done from the margins, in secret and also in plainview. This new body plays with the dereliction of value – they don’t need anything you have to offer.

Robertson’s proverbs are used as a soft-launching pad for the conception of the exhibition, which brings together works by artists from varying historical and geographical backgrounds.

The exhibition begins with the Japanese photographer Toyoko Tokiwa (1928–2019). Her work attests to life’s transformation as it is registered in the subjects of her investigations. She presents the form of this new body after it has passed from a time of hyperfixation to near invisibility.

Like all the artists included, Tokiwa’s work in the exhibition is not hinged upon her identity or nationality. Her photographs initiate this presentation of an exhibition that is conspicuously concerned less with ‘who’ is doing the work, and instead concerned with ‘why’ are they doing the work. Like the works presented, the person (artist) attached to the creation of the work is no longer just a person or identity, as they are placed in focused communication within a larger study of this unforged path to self-realization.

Works by Dusti Bongé (1903–93), Rosemarie Castoro (1939–2015), Anna Bella Geiger (born 1933), Susan Hiller (1940–2019), Miyako Ishiuchi (born 1947), Bertram Schmiterlów (1920–2002), Sydney Schrader (born 1987), and Linda Semadeni (born 1985) fulfill this path.

Ultimately, this path is one of obsolescence, as their evaluation of previous operations of living did not meet their expectations. However, by becoming obsolete, they remain durable and steadfast. In alignment with Zen principles, they are emptied of their former selves and are now made anew and unbreakable.

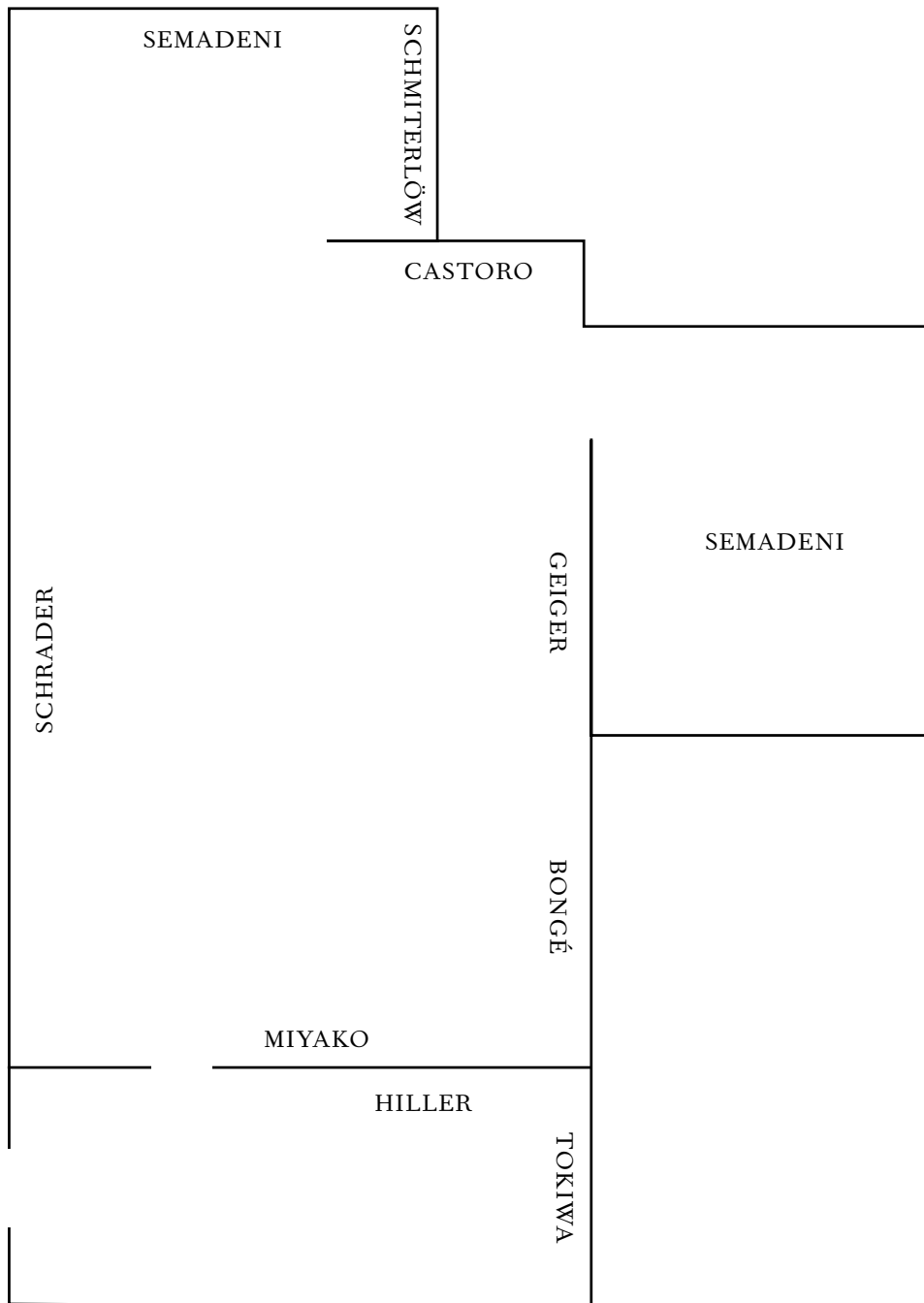
Works in the exhibition by these artists focus on the space between the violent tumult of this transformation and the peace afforded upon passing to the other side. Loneliness is a virtue of the works, as they operate in the area of invisibility. But their bodies are still recognized, their doubts and sensations still fully lived. These new entities demand more from the lives they lead before, as they offer an alternative interpretation of necessity.

The exhibition presents an intimate display of works not only to encounter but to drift amongst. This presentation offers a promenade of experiences, ornamented by lives that have shed the remand for use-value foisted upon them by society. A loss through which the bodies discover a new autonomy of equally substantive pleasure and ruin.

Alan Longino

PHILOSOPHER OF HER OWN RUIN

Bonner Kunstverein
23 February –27 July 2025



Dusti BONGÉ

Untitled (Peach and Purple Abstract), 1991, watercolor on joss paper, 12.7 × 14 cm

Untitled (Brown, Orange and Black Abstract), 1984, mixed media on joss paper, 16 × 14 cm

Untitled (Black Multicolor Abstract), 1987, watercolor on joss paper, 12.7 × 14 cm

Modernist painter Dusti Bongé (1903–93) lived and worked in Biloxi, Mississippi for much of her life. Her work and biography exemplified what Lisa Robertson writes in her *Proverbs of a She-Dandy*: “She demonstrates with her stance, her skewed accessories, her spiritual fortitude, her occupation of the park bench, that the only real worthiness is in the theatrical augmentation of the ignored human fragility.” Losing her husband early in her life and raising their son alone, Bongé was largely self-taught and approached painting not as a therapeutic path, but one that demonstrated such a fortitude and skewed position. From the mid-1940s to the 1970s she showed in a number of exhibitions at Betty Parsons in New York, continuously renegotiating her style and approach to painting.

Her joss paper works of the 1980s are the focus of this exhibition. Bongé created hundreds of these small works on joss paper, also known as “ghost” or “spirit” money, a thin rice paper that has a gold or silver foil square at its center and are traditionally burned in Chinese deity or ancestor worship ceremonies. Watercolor, acrylic, and ink are splashed across the surface of the paper, presenting the vibrancy of life, concentrated in and emanating from the center of the foil squares. There is a central focus of the work, but also a chaotic dance that extends out from it. This play and movement in the joss works presents a stage across which colors – as actors – move and communicate together. While play is important, it is their ability to promenade – to move in a novel fashion – that is most pronounced in this exhibition.

Rosemarie CASTORO

Sarcophagus Self-Portrait, 1994, welded stainless steel, 173 × 6 × 15 cm

Working in a lineage of Conceptual art, Rosemarie Castoro (1939–2015) created environments through sculpture and mediation. Often these spatial propositions involved carving out, tearing away, or placing new forms into older structures. These practices were focused on creating situations with the artworks where the visitor could reflect on the political, historical, and energetic qualities of their surroundings. Castoro’s work continuously divides an environment into positive and negative space. Crossing over these planes amounts to crossing over into another life. Her *Sarcophagi* series from the 1990s trace the contours of a silhouette (often her own) and are fastened perpendicular to the wall. These outlines of the bodies, or the shadows of bodies, play

with the figure's absence, just as the title refers to their entombment. Castoro's work is a reminder that though a body may appear certain, it is a permeable, shifting, and ultimately vanishing mass.

Anna Bella GEIGER

Passagens 1, 1974,
video, (black and white, sound)
9:55 min.

The videos of Anna Bella Geiger (born 1933) deal with the uncertainty of the body under state power. In *Passagens 1*, a camera follows her as she walks through the interiors of her home, down alleyways, through cobblestone streets, and up flights of exterior stairs. The videos are simple and slow, filming only her walking, but in each step taken there is a certainty and declaration of forward movement. While this work was shot in Rio de Janeiro on a Sony Portapak in 1974 under dictatorial rule, others from the series capture Geiger under different circumstances, including her life in New York following her husband's appointment at Columbia University. Geiger presents herself alone in these films, and though she carries nothing, there is an apparent weight that rests on her shoulders.

Susan HILLER

Painting Block (10): 1974/84,
36" × 54", 1980, oil on canvas,
cut and bound with thread
into block, 7.6 × 16.5 × 8.3 cm

Painting Block (1): 1974/5,
48" × 48", 1980, oil on canvas,
cut and bound with thread
into block, 15.9 × 15.9 × 4.2 cm

The work of Susan Hiller (1940–2019) has been associated with personal and collective memories and their conjuring through a variety of media, including painting, sculpture, film and installation. In 1972, Hiller began multiple series of works that 'recycled,' as she put it, her past paintings, refashioning their forms through processes of disassembly, transubstantiation, and reconfiguration. In the *Relics* series, decades of her paintings underwent a ritualistic firing or cremation, and the resulting ashes and burnt remnants were exhibited in glass containers. Her series of *Painting Blocks* consist of previously-exhibited works on canvas unstretched, cut up and sewn together, with the size and dating of the originating works printed on the face. These sculptures treat painting as a double-agent, one that becomes less concerned with representation and more attuned to presence. In many of the objects, distillations of a career or life can be considered through them. Here, Hiller's works contain their past lives; yet through this change in state, a clear transformation has occurred.

Miyako ISHIIUCHI

Mother's #54, 2002,
C-type print, 107.5 × 73.5 cm

Since the late 1960s, Miyako Ishiuchi's (born 1947) color and black-and-white photography has focused on items that are left behind, passed over, or hidden from sight. In 2000, Ishiuchi began photographing her mother, creating a body of intimate close-up images of her hair and skin, including her scars. After her mother's death, the artist began documenting her belongings: lipstick, perfume bottles, shoes, dentures. This work captures the material and psychological residue of the passage of time, emphasizing the simultaneously quotidian and monumental changes many undergo later in life. Often isolating singular objects, Ishiuchi's photographs function like portraiture. These objects stand alone as surrogates for a body, connected with a person as a fixed referent.

Lisa ROBERTSON

Poet, novelist, and essayist Lisa Robertson's (born 1961) text *Proverbs of a She-Dandy* is pivotal for the curator's framing of this exhibition and has been reprinted in the adjoining publication. It is exemplary in the way it re-conceptualizes loss, or what is culturally framed as gendered decline: it discovers in the experience and history of menopause a new form of freedom. The post-menopausal body, no longer of service to the economy of reproduction, becomes a testing ground for the reevaluation of value as such. From the standpoint of dereliction, the world becomes a stage for the "theatrical augmentation of the ignored human fragility." Her introductory "To the Reader" elucidates a parallel emergence between the dandy and the menopausal woman in the 19th century, both coming into being within an industrial society set on the regulation of value. The kinship between these figures is their defection and their non-productivity.

Bertram SCHMITERLÖW

Sömmen [The Sleep],
c. 2000, oil on canvas,
102 × 162 cm

For much of his life, Bertram Schmiterlów's (1920–2002) paintings hedged towards an academic style of portraiture and landscape. Yet even in their moderation and conservatism, Schmiterlów's paintings suggest a dreamlike world lay behind his sitter's eyes and beyond the landscapes he painted. Later in his life this dreamlike sensibility took over in the work, becoming moodier in tone and more existential

in content. Bodies float in space or awaken from sleep in fits. An equilibrium presents itself in the work, which can be appreciated when we take into account that life is neither chaotic nor complete. Reality is something that one both confronts and floats through.

These paintings, exhibited for the first time in Germany, consider the states a body passes into through age. The body and figure take on a denuded and less identifiable form. While the figure's sex is retained, their identity and conformity to it are not.

Schmitterl w's images offer a psychological counterbalance to the other works in the exhibition, presenting a somber understanding that even as we may find freedom in aging, finite time rushes at us nonetheless. This sets off a cyclical reaction of increased desire to live freely and unchained, as well as to account for and create lasting meaning.

Sydney SCHRADER

Untitled, oil on linen,
2025, 90 × 88 cm

Untitled, oil on linen,
2025, 100 × 81 cm

Untitled, oil on linen,
2025, 98 × 84 cm

Emil, stainless steel
and stainless steel cord,
2025, 77 × 49 × 21 cm

Untitled, oil on linen,
2025, 61 × 77 cm

Untitled, oil on linen,
2025, 115 × 110 cm

This series of untitled paintings by Sydney Schrader (born 1987) represents a discrete set of poses inspired by visions of a figure in an indeterminate space. Leaning, sitting, and extending open arms, it appears to be discovering a strange and newfound corporeality. The figure poses awkwardly but is rendered with a sense of generosity, joy, and play.

The stainless steel sculpture *Emil*, created for this exhibition, draws the eyes upward through both its physical presence and metaphorical consideration. Simultaneously vulnerable and threatening, it supports itself entirely from its own weight on a single screw affixed to the wall. Its precarious nature – fragility even – removes the mask of Minimalism as strong and hard-edged.

Additionally, as part of *Philosopher of her own Ruin*, Schrader is making an off-site work in New York City that takes the form of a public bathroom.

Linda SEMADENI

Schrank, 2017, unfired clay,
wax, marker, pigments,
pencil and colored pencil,
11 × 22 × 8 cm

a feeling, a feeling, a feeling,
a feeling, 2025, mixed media,
installation, dimensions variable

For the past four years, Linda Semadeni (born 1985) has been creating drawings that could be considered diaristic or forms of note-taking. Each drawing revolves around a sentence Semadeni picked up in her life that states “I Am Not a Nice Girl.” The work, titled *a feeling, a feeling, a feeling, a feeling*, dissects this sentence by breaking it down

into its individual words, twisting and repeating them, and sometimes focusing on the simple repetition or accentuation of a letter. The works also play with the visual similarity between the words “hot” and “not.” “I aim to treat the sentence, in all its possible interpretations, as a kind of readymade, including each individual word,” Semadeni writes. “To me, the sentence and its words are like social and cultural artifacts – elements that we live in and are educated by.”

Completed in a diverse array of materials, including felt pens, gouache, acrylic, ink, pencil, colored pencil, marker, stickers, hair, screws, glitter, tape, staples, found objects, fabric, toilet paper, aluminum foil, cutouts and collage; and printing and pasting on a wide range of different papers; these drawings – now numbering 500 – collapse the what and who of the sentence.

While letters and sentences are easily found, the more complex language that can be inferred is: what challenges are faced in the midst of constant change, and how can one remain – on the exterior – a person while transformation occurs intensely within their interior?

Toyoko TOKIWA

Oroku's Room, 1968,
Inkjet print, 32.4 × 48.5 cm

Oroku's Room, 1968,
Inkjet print, 24.5 × 35.3 cm

Documentary photographer Toyoko Tokiwa (1928–2019) is most known for her 1957 book *Dangerous, Fruitless Flowers* (危険な毒花). This publication focused on women's work in Japan – nurses, models, prostitutes, and wrestlers – and was published the same year that she was included in the landmark *Eyes of Ten* exhibition. This was the first survey of photographers working in the postwar period. Many of these artists such as Eikoh Hosoe, Ken Domon, and Shohei Tomatsu would go on to be considered Japan's pioneers of the camera in this time. Tokiwa was the only woman included.

The works presented in *Philosopher of her own Ruin* feature one woman, Ms. O or Ms. Oroku (お六さん). These black-and-white images focus on the life she lived as a sex worker in Yokohama in the years following 1945. While Tokiwa initially began photographing in the red-light district in secret, she gradually built relationships with her subjects. These images depict Ms. Oroku in her room, surrounded by a world of her own making.

Alan LONGINO

Curator, writer, and art historian Alan Longino (1987–2024) was born and raised in Biloxi, Mississippi. He worked across the Rhineland and New York before landing in Chicago, where he pursued a Ph.D. in art history at the University of Chicago. He ran the space Longino I.A.H. in a room on campus in Cobb Hall from 2023–24. His academic research focused on postwar Japanese conceptual art. As an independent curator, he organized the exhibition *Nöle Giulini* at 15 Orient (New York, 2022). With the art historian Reiko Tomii, he co-curated exhibitions on the artist Yutaka Matsuzawa at Empty Gallery (Hong Kong, 2021), Gallery G (Hiroshima, 2021), the University of Hawai'i (O'ahu, 2020), Midway Contemporary Art (Minneapolis, 2019), Nonaka-Hill (Los Angeles, 2019), and Yale Union (Portland, 2019). The Yale Union exhibition was accompanied by the republication of Matsuzawa's 1988 manuscript *Quantum Art Manifesto*, which was the first printing of the text outside of Japan. Kazuna Taguchi curated Longino's writing and artwork into the group exhibition *A Reflection on the Sublime* at the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art (Hiroshima, 2024).

Philosopher of her own Ruin

Bonner Kunstverein

23 February – 27 July 2025

Curated by

Alan Longino

Realised by

Fatima Hellberg

Andrew Christopher Green

Martha Joseph

with

Dusti Bongé

Rosemarie Castoro

Anna Bella Geiger

Susan Hiller

Ishiuchi Miyako

Lisa Robertson

Bertram Schmitterlów

Sydney Schrader

Linda Semadeni

Tokiwa Toyoko

With special thanks to Denise Longino and the Longino family, Kazuna Taguchi, Paul Levack, Sabrina Tamar, Allison Crain, Timothy Kelly, Luke Herrigel, Anna-Sophie Berger, Teresa Schmitterlów, Ligia Romer, Gabriel Coxhead, Dragana Vujanovic Östlind, Arnaud Lefebvre, Chelsea Foxwell and Trevor Brandt.

This project would not have been possible without the generosity and trust of the artists, estates, and contributors. We would also like to express our gratitude to the expanded network of friends and colleagues who have been part of realising this project. Finally, we would like to thank the team and board of Bonner Kunstverein for their invaluable support, in particular Janice Mitchell, Kerstin Fischer, Günter Maria Wagner, Felix Miebach and Dora Cohnen.

Realised with the generous support of The Jenni Crain Foundation, Kunststiftung NRW, Pro Helvetia, the Karin & Uwe Hollweg Stiftung and a circle of supporters who generously have committed to this project, including Stephen Cheng and Alexander Lau, James Cahn and Jeremiah Collatz, Ines Knauber, Julius Woeste, Shelby Jackson and 15 Orient, Manoucher Khoshbakht, Antonia Nolte, Max Mayer, Maxwell Graham, Jan Kaps, Christian Wirtz, Piotr Drewko, Miguel Abreu, and Carol Greene.

Kunststiftung
NRW

swiss arts council
prohelvetia

/ KARIN UND
UWE HOLLWEG /
STIFTUNG


Hasselblad Foundation

