

Irma Hünerrfauth
13 November - 16 December 2025

*"The delicate, the precious — as in a jeweler's work — is meant to be set in motion.
The viewer is confronted with the moment when a composition begins to fall apart.
They are to touch it themselves, to make the fine structures tremble and rattle;
they are to experience the unease of the destruction of the 'beautiful' as an act of awareness."*

Irma Hünerrfauth

The exhibition is the first in the UK devoted to German artist Irma Hünerrfauth (1907–1998) since 1983, bringing together two seemingly disparate bodies of work—the artist's early abstract paintings from the late 1950s and early 1960s, and her later kinetic multimedia *Vibrationsobjekte* (Vibration Objects). It traces how Hünerrfauth's post-WWII concerns with alienation, violence, militarization, and environmental pollution unfold across a diverse oeuvre shaped by play, participation, and aesthetic contemplation, revealing a recurring motif of tension: a state of suspension between force and stillness, motion and stasis—that animates both her painted and mechanical works.

Throughout the 1950s, the Munich-based artist developed a body of paintings, drawings, and prints in close dialogue with her mentor Conrad Westphal—a key figure of art informel in postwar Germany after his return from exile—works that include *Helle Felder* (*Bright Arrays*, 1959–60) and *Untitled*, 1960 on view here. The latter, as its verso label suggests, was conceived for the refounded Neue Darmstädter Sezession, an exhibition held in conjunction with the Darmstädter Gespräche symposium, which featured thinkers such as Theodor W. Adorno and the art critic Franz Roh, discussing the shape of society, art, and science after the Nazi regime. Roh—influential in Munich's postwar art scene, a city that at the time was still grappling with embracing abstraction, previously condemned as "degenerate"—became one of Hünerrfauth's early advocates. Her canvases, he observed, "possess no spatial depth," instead achieving a balance of linear structures and color fields that reveal an early preoccupation with the interplay of gesture, structure, and surface. Roh described these works using the term *Feldspannung* (tensions of excitation), in which linear forces circulate around color fields, forming eccentric yet finely balanced compositions: a fragile equilibrium mirroring the tensions of modern everyday life itself.¹ Even in this ostensibly non-objective phase, Hünerrfauth wove into her practice subtle marks of the profane and everyday—a sensibility that became especially visible in her experimental graphic work.

Hünerrfauth co-founded the artist group *Gruppe K*, which worked primarily with large printed editions—a medium that reflected the broader postwar impulse toward the democratization of art through reproducibility and open distribution. Gruppe K also staged collaborative performances, including a 1968 project with the German-Danish composer Ilja Bergh at the Haus der Kunst, Munich, where they presented optical-acoustic collages, that deepened Hünerrfauth's fascination with sound, feedback, and movement, explored through technical objects and their material properties—ultimately leading to her decisive break from painting. Reflecting the social and political upheavals of 1968, she began to see traditional artistic media as inadequate to express the realities of her time. As she later recalled, paint "squeezed from a tube" seemed a limited medium compared to the "expressive potential of discarded materials, scrap metal," and remnants of consumer products—elements that embodied both the excess and the tension of modernity manifesting in experiences of alienation: "Distanced from one's own desires, constrained to follow the desires of others, or constrained to fit into structures established by others without your participation (...)" Hünerrfauth counteracts this feeling of being held at distance in both her painterly and object-based works and intertwines it with a poetic reading of how Western modernity's idea of progress is bound up with extraction and destruction.

In the early 1970s, after completing a welding apprenticeship in collaboration with her husband, the engineer and amateur inventor Franz Führer-Wolkenstein, Hünerrfauth began developing her first *Vibrationsobjekte* (Vibration Objects)—interactive sculptures designed to respond to human touch. Calling her work an "artistic program," echoing the cybernetic and systems-oriented ideas circulating in art at the time, Hünerrfauth's process began with observing the simplest material functions: for instance, "the rocking of steel wires under different loads." These wires and other scrap-metal parts were then welded onto motherboards from discarded computers, mounted on a heavy steel plate. These "*Spielkästen*" (game boxes), as she once called them, were arranged by "subdividing the sequence of wires and setting disharmonious accents that create a densification of the composition." Activated by the viewer's destabilizing touch, each work sets in motion an intricate play of movement, alteration, and tension—a composition that continuously (un)- makes itself: objects trembled, clinked, and sometimes collapsed under touch. At a moment when game theory had become a key tool for understanding, modeling, and managing natural and social systems—from economics and politics to biology—Hünerrfauth's poetic work resonated with broader artistic experiments in play and participation. First presented in so-called "meditation booths," these objects invited direct engagement: after experiencing them, viewers were asked to verbalize their impressions on cards, providing feedback that would then become part of an open discussion. Nevertheless, Hünerrfauth conceded, "I am aware that my works are not easily accessible to a mass society."

From the 1970s onwards, Hünérfauth began to incorporate spoken word, lyrical, and overtly thematic elements into electrically lit boxes she called *Sprechende Kästen* (Speaking Boxes). These compositions can be read as confronting what Paul Virilio termed the “integral accident” of modern technology: progress and destruction existing in a perpetual tension, feeding an expanding industry of simulation—born from the unholy alliance of postwar science and the military-industrial complex. This is also mirrored in the latest work in the exhibition, *Krieg, Auch Tiere leiden* (War—Animals Suffer Too, circa 1981). While Hünérfauth’s works explore the unraveling of perception, community, and nature beneath the relentless velocity of technological existence—where circuits of narration, sound, and electronic light come alive at the viewer’s touch—she positioned herself against this culture of simulation and estrangement by working as IRMANipulations, a moniker she adopted after using it as the title for her 1983 solo exhibition at the Goethe-Institut London, setting out her own “game instructions”:

*“The game begins. Reach into the sound screen and pull the ball downward several times.
At the same time, observe how the things inside the box sway softly, following their own natural vibration—just as a gust of wind quietly moves through nature.
Breathe deeply, keep playing with the little ball, watch, listen, let your thoughts connect.
Take the freedom to dream, forget your everyday life.
Free yourself from the ‘rightness’ of society.
Free yourself from the ‘rightness’ of criticism.
Free yourself from the ‘rightness’ of science.
They are overrated kinds of rightness.
Breathe deeply, play yourself free.
Simply be yourself.”*

Irma Hünérfauth

Text by Elisa R. Linn & Lennart Wolff

¹Franz Roh in *Peintures et sculptures: Hünérfauth* (Lausanne: Galerie Kaspar, 1962), exhibition catalogue.

²Peter Lufft, “Hünérfauth und Wolkenstein,” in *Irma Hünérfauth: IRMANipulations* (Munich: Verlag Antje Kunstmann, 1990), 55.

³Irma Hünérfauth, Artist Catalog, n.d. (self-published).

⁴Marina Vishmidt, “Relatable Alienation: The Logic and History of an Idea,” in *What the Fire Sees: A Divided Reader*, ed. Eleanor Ivory Weber and Camilla Wills (Brussels: Divided Publishing, 2020), 86.

⁵Irma Hünérfauth, Artist Catalog, n.d. (self-published).

⁶Irma Hünérfauth, Artist Catalog, n.d. (self-published).

Irma Hünérfauth (b. 1907, Donaueschingen - d. 1998, Kreuth) During her lifetime, Hünérfauth had solo shows at BMW-Galerie, München und Berlin, DE (1986); Kulturzentrum am Gasteig, Munich, DE (1984); Goethe-Institut, London, UK (1983); Goethe-Institut, Brüssel, BE (1977); Kunstverein, Munich, DE (1974); Kurfürstliches Gärtnerhaus, Bonn, DE (1974); Haus der Kunst, Munich, DE (1971); Galerie Christa Moering, Wiesbaden, DE (1967); Galerie Kaspar, Lausanne, CH (1962); Kunstverein, Munich, DE (1962); Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich, DE (1961); among others.

Most recently, her works were shown as part of group exhibitions at Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, AT (2025); Mudam, Luxembourg, LU (2024); Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin, DE (2019); Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich, DE (2018) Simian, Copenhagen, DK (2023); 15 Triennale Kleinplastik, Fellbach, DE (2022); Markus Lüttgen & Drei, Mönchengladbach, DE (2021); Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin, DE (2019); and Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich, DE (2018).

Hünérfauth’s work is included in public collections such as, Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich; Staatliche Graphische Sammlung Munich; Bayerische Saatsgalerie; Pfalzgalerie Kaiserslautern; National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington. She was awarded the Prix d’Unions des Femmes Peintres in 1959.

Elisa R. Linn is a curator, writer, and scholar. **Lennart Wolff** is an architect and curator. Together, they have run the curatorial collective km temporaer since 2012. They have extensively exhibited the work of Irma Hünérfauth, including group exhibitions such as *Straying from the Line* at Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin (2019) and *Fire demands its Fuel* at Markus Lüttgen & Drei, Mönchengladbach (2021). In 2023, they curated *Speaking Boxes*, Hünérfauth’s first posthumous solo exhibition, at Simian in Copenhagen.



1. Irma Hünerfauth
Glasstäbe (Glass rods), 1985
Found objects, circuit board, glass, Perspex, steel and chrome 180.5 x 50 x 50 cm (71 x 19 3/4 x 19 3/4 inches)
2. Irma Hünerfauth
Regen (Rain), 1971
Found objects, circuit board, Perspex, steel and chrome 183 x 50 x 50 cm (72 x 19 3/4 x 19 3/4 inches)
3. Irma Hünerfauth
Krieg – auch Tiere leiden (War, animals suffer, too), 1981
Found objects, garden soil, acrylic, wood, Perspex and sound amplifier 180 x 50 x 50 cm (70 7/8 x 19 3/4 x 19 3/4 inches)
4. Irma Hünerfauth
Glasstäbe (Glass rods), 1984
Found objects, circuit board, Perspex, steel and chrome 171.5 x 50 x 50 cm (67 1/2 x 19 3/4 x 19 3/4 inches)
5. Irma Hünerfauth
Spiegelobjekt (Mirror object), circa 1971
Found objects, circuit board, Perspex, steel and chrome 165 x 50 x 50 cm (65 x 19 3/4 x 19 3/4 inches)
6. Irma Hünerfauth
Helle Felder (Bright Arrays), 1959 - 1960
Dispersion on canvas, artist's frame 174 x 141.5 x 2.2 cm (68 1/2 x 55 3/4 x 7/8 inches)

Works in the office:

Irma Hünerfauth
Untitled, circa 1960
Dispersion on canvas, artist's frame
135.4 x 166.5 x 2 cm (53 1/4 x 65 1/2 x 3/4 inches)