



clockwise from left

Isa Genzken
floor
Nofretete 2018
wall
Basic Research 1991

Anna Winteler
Horizontal Waltz for Left and Right
Handcameras 1989 video

Marianne Eigenheer
installation view
Von Bartha Gallery

Ida Applebroog
installation view
Kunstmuseum Thun

and Himmelsbach in 2011. At the Kunsthaus Baselland, Ines Goldbach has offered not only Winteler a platform, but also staged one of Marcia Hafif's (1929-2018) last exhibitions in 2017, with a survey of Simone Forti's (b1935) performance being a main attraction this summer. Yet institutions do not operate in a vacuum but within an art system that enables some exhibition projects and offers scant support for others. The fact that galleries, and the market, now find this generation and gender combination not just palatable but even profitable must, unfortunately, have a role to play. Applebroog, for example, only started working with Hauser & Wirth in 2010. The death of Basel artist Marianne Eigenheer (1945-2018) came as a bolt from the blue for most people who had encountered her in recent years; it had seemed as though she would be stomping merrily up to her garret studio for decades to come. Von Bartha gallery in Basel showed her work this spring; she had joined the gallery not long prior, though she herself voiced reservations about how her endeavours fitted within an otherwise predominantly macho, male artist roster. On the whole these artists have been working consistently, yet the narrative – or the promotional spiel – of several such exhibitions is the discovery of a previously little-known yet mature practice. (Of those mentioned, Genzken has, of course, maintained a high-profile practice for a number of years.) Women who have managed to survive into old age while maintaining a practice that we contemporary viewers can read without straining ourselves too much are not only agreeable but even in short supply – a win-win for the market.

What is perhaps most peevish about this market-driven framing is how the artist is viewed like Cinderella in rags, waiting gratefully to be discovered. It is a retrograde fairy-tale ending that robs these artists of agency over their own careers

and does little to upset the predominant model of the male hero artist who is under pressure to remain visible throughout their development. (We might also consider the relative prominence and respect for artists who teach, with Phyllida Barlow, say – Interview *AM335* – an outlier for her visibility.) Look beyond birth years, sales and CVs, and few of these women artists make and exhibit work that manifests gratitude or obedience. Sadly this in turn underlines another double bind in play: quotidian female life – in which maternity may well feature – is underrepresented and rarely regarded as suitable subject matter in contemporary art. (Paternity is scarcely a popular theme either, though it is traditionally less inconvenient.) When a female artist is plucked from obscurity in old age she transcends that commonplace and can be an extraordinary exception, a sage elder.

Maybe this is why one painting by Margot Bergman haunts me: like most works in the show, *Lee*, 2001, is a rough, rude portrait painted over a found canvas. Lee Miller is unmistakable. The bright red mouth signals that she is striking and model-beautiful, made for the camera. The right side of her face, however, is in shadow; a piercing gaze returns ours. The shadow and the landscape that simmers below it are saturated with an active inner life that the red smear would obscure. ■

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