

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Deborah Wilk, "Brigit Jürgenssen," *Modern Painters*, November 6, 2014

MODERN PAINTERS



NEW
YORK

**Birgit
Jürgenssen**

Fergus McCaffrey //

November 6–December 20, 2014

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THE ART WORLD'S CURRENT reexamination of art by women entails the usual wonderment over the practitioners' exceptional consideration of process, formalism, and conceptual rigor in the face of underrated valuations by academia and the market alike. So as the latest round of recognition adjusts the gender needle a fingerbreadth closer to parity, one reason the projects of women artists fail to produce sustained enthusiasm remains overlooked: the regular refusal by female practitioners to maintain focus on a single investigation, resulting in a lifetime of work that is often deemed too diffuse or diluted to be properly resolved. It's through this lens that the recent presentation of work from the 1980s and '90s by the late Viennese artist Birgit Jürgenssen, known for her feminist work of the '70s, is best viewed.

Occupying the second floor of McCaffrey's elegant Chelsea space, the show offers an impressive tour through Jürgenssen's broad studio practice, including photographic experimentation, fabric and metal work, and sculpture. The modernism of the 20th-century artist's personal vernacular emerges through surreal photographic compositions configured into grids that evoke the sentimental and nostalgic. A sinister edge, however, comes through courtesy of hand-wrought iron frames as well as a top layer of translucent fabric that effects a mechanized, nearly digital sheen on the works' surface. More experimentation is found in Jürgenssen's "painted photo" method, in which she manipulates the chemical interactions, then scratches the surface of the picture plane, forcing evidence of the artist's hand into the seamless mechanical process. Talismanic 3-D works of papier-mâché, wax, hair, and wire and detritus profess to bring the project into the realm of the profoundly personal. But even amid these seemingly pure investigations of expression, it's likely that the artist's feminist conceptualism, which examines both the body and its role in society, heightened the fortitude she brought to her more intimate work. The seeds of broader meaning make a clear point: The personal is political. —**Deborah Wilk**