

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Birgit Jürgenssen

12 Rue de Grand Cerf, Brussels
October 23– December 22, 2018
Opening October 23, 6 – 8pm

Gladstone Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of works by Austrian artist Birgit Jürgenssen, featuring drawings and sculptures from the 1970s and 80s. Her practice explores the representation of women's psychic lives as refracted by the dominant systems of labor and commodity. These works illustrate not only the facility with which Jürgenssen engaged with various media, but also exemplify her rigorous commitment to conflating Structuralism and feminist critique with the visual markers of Surrealism. Either as the direct subject in autobiographical self-portraits or the engaged chronicler of both the fantastic and the everyday, Jürgenssen questions accepted constructions of gender through depictions of the female body, sex, and the art historical canon that are both playfully humorous and biting critical.

Jürgenssen emerged during the fecund Viennese art scene of the early 1970s and soon began presenting work that would come to typify the major conceptual concerns of her oeuvre. Many of her drawings examine the ubiquitous presence of the culturally imagined "hausfrau"—the bourgeois woman whose life was circumscribed by domestic labor and consumerism. Jürgenssen investigated the function of power within quotidian life by estranging the commonplace with images drawn from biology and zoology. Her acuity as a draughts-person and embrace of Surrealism situate these images somewhere between satire and fairytale. Her drawings often imply female imperilment, but rather than simply suggesting threats of physical danger, the artist instead opts to represent an escape from the suffocating burden of culturally instituted gender expectations through the possibility of fantastical transformation. A woman's transparent dress becomes the armor defending her own private psychic terrain; a figure in restrictive period costume disappears into a frame escaping the world through the looking glass; chairs and knives becomes tools not of restriction but of connection to primal animalistic strength.

Jürgenssen's sculpture—such as her renowned shoe works—extend surreal images across various media to create searing appraisals of gender codes and their oppressive impact on female agency and identity. Using the heel as a classic metonym for oppression, Jürgenssen used a variety of materials, including cow's tongue, reptile bones, flies, or feathers, to create a series of sculptures that lay bare the sexualization and instability that attend all performances of femininity. Other works, such as Listen to Someone—a ceramic pillow on which miniature hammer, anvil, and stirrup lay—play with the intersection of the senses and how we incorporate inanimate objects to conceptualize understanding our world.

Birgit Jürgenssen was born in 1949 in Vienna where she lived and worked for most of her life until she died in 2003. She is the subject of a solo exhibition I am that opens in November 2018 at Kunsthalle Tübingen, Germany, before traveling to GAMEC, Bergamo, Italy and LOUISIANA Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark. Jürgenssen's work has been the subject of major solo exhibitions at institutions including: Kunstforum, Vienna; MAK, Vienna; Sammlung Verbund, Vienna. Her work has been included in group exhibitions at Museum of Modern Art, New York; Le Monnaie de Paris; Tate St. Ives, England; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Gwangju Biennale 2014, China; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt, Germany.

Keith Haring
515 West 24th Street
November 3 – December 21

Foundation for Contemporary Arts
530 West 21st Street
November 29 – December 15

Victor Man
130 East 64th Street
November 1 – December 22

For further information, please contact Andrew Huff: ahuff@gladstonegallery.com
Brussels gallery hours: Tuesday–Friday, 10am–6pm and Saturday, 12pm–6pm
New York gallery hours: Tuesday–Saturday, 10am–6pm