

“Moi, Non-Moi!” or Parable Academy

**GALERIJA
VARTAI**

June 5 – July 27 2018

Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010, France)

Maria Lassnig (1919-2014, Austria)

Maria Helena Vieira da Silva (1908-1992, Portugal)

Curator: Amer Abbas

For the first time, the exhibition “Moi, Non-Moi” (Me, Not Me) or “Parable Academy” in Gallery Vartai brings together a selection of drawings by Louise Bourgeois, Vieira da Silva and Maria Lassnig.

This exhibition is a collaboration with the Árpád Szenes-Vieira da Silva Foundation in Lisbon, the Maria Lassnig Foundation Vienna and the Collection of António Gomes de Pinho.

The three artists deal with a period of time in the twenties of the last century and that for Bourgeois and Lassnig lasted until a few years ago.

Their artistic attitudes, however different they may be, have a texture in their drawings that can be judged as a consequence of independent intuition. Their “aesthetics” is more an expression of personal will than a formal adaptation.

In relation to the medium of drawing, a new aspect is important here: to leave the didactic legacy of the medium as a “study” and to make radical use of its marginality at this point.

It is suggested that the three artists have given a special performative touch to the medium of drawing. Their artistic contribution also marks an important point in the quietly approaching process of breaking away from the canon of classical modernism and ushering in the transition to contemporary art.

Likewise, the medium of drawing benefits from this tendency to oppose classical modernity with its own means of expression. With them, drawing moves into the center of artistic reflection, on an equal footing with its main media: painting by Da Silva and Lassnig and sculpture by Bourgeois.

A first curatorial approach can be linked to this. The second understands itself as an associative approach based on three considerations:

Subtext 1

“Moi et Non Moi” is the linguistic expression of the French-Lithuanian philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, in whose native country this exhibition takes place. He explains how the “I” stands in relation to the “other” and vice versa or what ethics demands this relationship.

Levinas sees spatial relations very broadly. The artistic “event”, the work of art itself according to his philosophy, is one of the special performance spaces of the “Moi” and at the same time the “Non Moi” (the Other). The work of the three artists could be considered from this aspect because of its special performative point of view.

A second subtext forms a curatorially constructed associative reading, which here comes to bear the name “Parable Academy”. The three women attended art academies with the intention of becoming artists: Bourgeois in Paris from 1936-1938, Da Silva in Lisbon in 1927 and Lassnig in Vienna from 1939-1945.

Attending an art academy at that time guaranteed even less than today as regards these young women ever becoming artists and didn’t promise any sort of a career. In these institutions they had to learn their craft and this began after academic practice in the discipline of drawing. In this they were very good, thanks to their talent being nurtured from childhood.

Academic education has always been considered a basic condition for becoming an “artist”. An academy puts forward a particular scheme of how to achieve mastery through the perfection of technique or style. This canon is taken from the Renaissance and is based on Greek culture.

New concepts are taught that define “mastery”. At the very top is the term “contrapposto” (opposition). It describes the creation of the soul of a figure by rotation from inside to outside, which makes the figure look alive.

The construct “Parable Academy” builds on this pattern in order to interpret artistic accents in the graphic work of these artists.

A third subtext is the relationship of these artists to “classical modernity”, having had direct contact with some of its representatives (André Breton, Fernand Léger, etc.).

These artists had a certain reserve towards the “completed” canon of modernity. They absolutely wanted to overcome this and develop their own “style”. Therefore, one can speak here of a “pre-feminist” approach with its own formal idiom.

Let the artists speak for themselves and introduce their relationship to the medium of drawing:

“I work on drawings at night in bed, resting on pillows. Maybe with some music, or I just listen to the sounds of the street. I pay careful attention to my drawings. They relax me and help me fall sleep. Drawings are fields of thought, they are ideas that I catch in the middle of a flight and put on paper. All my thoughts are visual”.

LOUISE BOURGEOIS (in Passage Dangereux by Jens Ullheimer, 2010)

“Sometimes I was completely alone and sometimes I was sad, even very sad. I took refuge in the world of colours and the world of sounds.... I believe that, for me, all that got mixed up into a single thing”.

“With what I knew of life and with what I knew from books, I still made things up. And I tried to draw them (...). Today in me there is this thing that continues to exist in me (...).”

VIEIRA DA SILVA

“My drawings have more freedom and agility than oil paintings because I can better place a sheet of paper that needs to be on a hard surface, on my knees, on my stomach in bed, on the table, on the floor, on the chair, and I myself can take all sorts of positions, which is not or hardly possible with a stretched canvas.”

MARIA LASSNIG

When choosing the drawings for this exhibition, I noticed some formal as well as content-related aspects:

Bourgeois, Da Silva and Lassnig had an unorthodox view of “space”. It helped them develop a playful sign language instead of rigidity.

Instead of conforming to formal hierarchies, they pursued marginal states. Thus, their experimental sign language developed into a self-reflection and the motor of their growing artistic attitudes.

Da Silva is concerned with the metaphor of spatial resolution as a deeply felt intimacy. Bourgeois sees the infinite “fabric” as freedom from formal space. Lassnig, as an artist, dares to think that the “space” takes on the distortion of her body.

As a result, drawing slowly acquires an artistic “theme”, a texture related to the present, and its own context throughout the artistic work.

Let’s take a few examples from the work shown here and let us look at some elements of these “contemporary textures”.

The exhibition “Hang on” of Bourgeois drawings from 2005 will be shown in this show. It is an edition of 9 series and each series consists of 17 sheets.

The series refers to performative installations with sculptural figures who seem to have lost their power and to collapse. They stay where they are.

The theme of balance, how they work, the balance of power, the contrasts and their dramatic effect on our perception and feelings, permeates the entire work of Bourgeois.

Each sheet combines a “drawing”, something visually alive and a text - “the invisible poetry”. The formal “drama” insists on a coexistence between text and drawing.

The space is infiltrated by graphic events. The “Hang on” series describes an artistic “space” with an artistic theme, overwritten by a “sculpture programme”. The focus is on “hanging” as a sculptural code, which opens out in these sheets as scenes and hints.

In the sheet “Contemplate a finished and concentric world like a rose” the leaves of the rose have been arranged with a schematic appearance. Held by a twisted stalk. The text put on the right part of the sheet speaks with an inaudible, but “imaginary” resonance.

In the Parable Academy, the sculpture is a figure of “contrapposto” ... the pose gives life to static figures.

“Hanging”, as a physical act, becomes an artistic act, a moment of identity, of “Moi”. The drawing is the space in which the “Non-Moi” viewer inscribes himself or herself. In the space these drawings the „Sfumato“ (to evaporate like smoke) rises .. and through „Pentimento“ many pages are orchestrated.

In the drawing “Man is still a poor animal” by Maria Lassnig from the year 1997, we feel the irony of the artist in full evidence. The body is compared to a naturalistic startled animal. This figure left a state of consciousness a long time ago. It is a higher, more dramatic level of self, the “Moi”, as an artist.

Lassnig’s main theme and her formal idiom are found in the body-consciousness images that dominate both her painting and graphic work. Obviously, Lassnig is not satisfied with the concept of “space”, as it has been defined in art so far.

The space must cover itself artistically and graphically with the body itself. It takes on its form and becomes concave. The “Moi” is the artistic body and the artistic consciousness. This performative aspect is novel and anticipates the question of the identity of the Other “Non-Moi”.

Lassnig initiated an unprecedented dialogue between the viewer and her body-consciousness images.

After the “Parable Academy” there is also a heaviness, the rough as “impasto”, that has come into the picture, not only the “sfumato” as light and beautiful.

Da Silva saw the search for her identity in the management of formal approaches to painting. She wanted to overcome the prevailing conventions in painting. This was centered in a theme. The yearning for death was the focus of her reflections. This, as a constituent of her “Moi”, penetrates her painting.

She invented “dissolution”. The matter of the colours unfolds into a network, sometimes in a spirally and sometimes simply in a flat form. It is a room in front of a threshold, which will someday finally transgress the ego “Moi” and the network dispensed with.

In the drawing “Desenho anatomico” from 1926 Da Silva has used ink and watercolor on a bone. The sheet contains one of her handwritten texts on anatomical explanations. It symbolizes the fragment “non-finito”.

Throughout her artistic career, Da Silva was keen to shape a theme that came solely from the discipline of painting and drawing. An equivalence to the great “nostalgia”.

The colours dissolve in a network. This technique also keeps them consistent in the drawings and collages. Here Da Silva sees signs of a “theme”. Her view of the world artistically receives a conceptual touch that creates practically a whole new and unused aspect. It coincides with her big theme “Death longing”, in which the “Moi” is reflected.

The “non-moi” of the “other” is facing a “conceptual contribution”. Da Silva is also found in the Parable Academy. The bone and its reflection form the pelvic bones of the „contrrapposto“.It is strongly reminiscent of the conceptual in the “non-finito” - the fragmentary style and in the recurrent “pentimento” ... What we have here is a repentance, which dissolves.

Amer Abbas 2018

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