

Out of Hiding

The Bernese artist Meret Meyer Scapa (*1930) is a great intimate of the art and dance scene. Among the many contacts she cultivated are names like Daniel Spoerri, Harald Szeemann, Meret Oppenheim, Jean Tinguely, or Niki de Saint-Phalle. She realized for herself only her own artistic career as a painter, draftsman, and sculptress. To date, she only once could be persuaded show her work in a small solo exhibition. The artist is now stepping out of hiding on the occasion of her 85th birthday with a concentrated view of more than sixty years of art production and her comprehensive oeuvre spanning this period.

Meret Meyer Scapa's enormously versatile and rich oeuvre comprises performances, paintings, collages, as well as small and large-format works in clay.

An influential artistic environment

Her father was the Bernese publisher Hans Meyer-Benteli, who was, as Paul Klee's friend, of great service in regard to the legacy of the artist. It was through her father that Meret Meyer-Scapa was an intimate among the illustrious circles of the international art scene already early in life, and later of course also through her husband Ted Scapa, who expanded the Benteli family enterprise into a leading art-book publishing company. She grew up in a home that maintained personal relationships with the great figures of 20th-century art, notably Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky. Otto Nebel was a key inspiration for her, and she frequently visited the Bernese artists Victor Surbek and Max von Mühlenen. In the early 1950s, Meret Meyer studied for two years at the college of arts and crafts in Zurich. Her teachers there were Johannes Itten, Emil Mehr, Hans Finsler, and Luis Conne, all of whom left a lasting impression on her. Subsequently, she moved to Paris where she enrolled at the Nouvelle École de Paris. There she became familiar with Roger Bissière's lyrical abstraction as well as Jean Dubuffet's primitive new objectivism. The crowning part of her stay in Paris was her time as a student of Fernand Léger, until he unexpectedly died in 1955. It was in his studio that she discovered the impulse to start modeling sculptures. She also assisted him in the execution of monumental wall paintings and mosaics, which later inspired her to paint out the interior of her studio at Murtensee. Additionally, an important part of her artistic development comprised her early fascination for Oceanic and African tribal art and that of the Aborigines and Inuit, all of which she collected herself and studied.

Absolute self-realization to the exclusion of the public eye

Meret Meyer Scapa intentionally never subjected her art to public judgment. Thus she created an oeuvre without any influence from the outside world, making it all the more authentic, enigmatic, and harder for us to fathom. Her motifs are distinctly personal, each work is a frozen image from her dreams. Everything she paints is undergoing a process of continual metamorphosis: flowers, landscapes, enchanted gardens, houses, animals, people, and archetypal hybrid beings unceasingly change their appearance. Meret Meyer Scapa is constantly probing the basic themes of surrealism in her own highly individual style. There is not a single public collection that can boast possession of a work by this artist. With the presentation at the Kunstmuseum Bern, we are, for the very first time, showing a selection of her paintings and sculptural works to the public. The volume *Meret Meyer Scapa. Ein Leben für die Kunst (A life dedicated to art)* is providing further insights into the life and work of the artist. It will be published simultaneously with the exhibition of her work at the Kunstmuseum Bern. Meret Meyer Scapa only unwillingly consented to the show, which her husband and her daughter Tessa Scapa wanted as a gift for her on her 85th birthday. Thus the view of this exceptional Bernese artist's oeuvre only gives us only a narrow glimpse of her artistic production, but provides a convincing impression of how she has developed her ideas over time and structures her subject matter.

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The Publication



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