



**Amy Sillman is an important voice in contemporary painting. Between 20 September 2024 and 2 February 2025, the Kunstmuseum Bern is showing the artist's first major institutional solo exhibition in Europe. Sillman's powerful and allusive artistic language refers time and again to the history of painting. In her presentation in Bern, she is involving works from the collection of the Kunstmuseum Bern.**

The American painter Amy Sillman (b. 1955) has consistently interrogated her medium since the 1990s. Her works include drawings, prints and texts, as well as objects and animations. Sillman's complete devotion to processes of transformation, reversal, reconfiguration and re-examination is characteristic of her painterly explorations. Her quick serial drawings and multi-layered paintings move deftly between abstraction and figuration – now they are multicoloured, now monochrome, now they show complex forms, now figures or body parts. And they are always filled with delight in painting.

*"We would die if we no longer had humor. That would be total submission."*  
Amy Sillman

### **Images x words**

Inspired by her lengthy travels in Japan and the USA, in 1975 Amy Sillman moved to New York to study Japanese. Always fascinated by language, she took classes in calligraphy with a view to becoming a journalist or translator once her studies were completed. It was in this context that she first discovered her passion for the interplay between word and image, abstraction and figuration. Impelled by this enthusiasm, in the late 1970s she switched to the School of Visual Arts in New York to study illustration, but quickly found like-minded people in painting. She was shaped to a considerable degree by the New York art scene of those years.

Not only has she retained her background in illustration and her affinity for language and writing into the present day, but she has made them an integral part of her art. Her works take their bearings from traditional formats such as landscape and portrait, and from concepts such as abstraction or cartoons, but also from the fascination with the emergence of form during the painting process, which she explores experimentally.

The enthusiasm and care with which she paints, speaks and thinks about painting, are apparent both in her writings and in her many teaching assignments, as well as in the way she looks at art and the presentation of her works. Sillman has written about art for many years – both about her own and about historical artistic positions. Her references are as varied as her works, and include both anecdotes from her everyday life and art-historical treatises, often with an interest in practical work and form.

Sillman probes the roles of the figurative, of cartoon-like styles and abstraction, always driven by the question of whether something abstract can convey emotions, and whether a language can even form out of it. This is apparent, for example, in the 200 or so drawings in the series *UGH for 2023 (Words / Torsos)* on show at the Kunstmuseum Bern. Bodies and words are broken down into lines and guttural sequences of letters, becoming an experimental collage of changing emotional states. Shown side by side and above and below one another, they reveal a sense of process as well as the construction of an emotional texture: the forms and planes merge, double and change and, in their sequence, assume the appearance of a storyboard or a flipbook. But Sillman's preoccupation with painting does not stop when she sets down her brush. She makes digital animations which, like her series of paintings, document the development of the abstract forms, imitate the dynamic of the process of composition and at the same time prompt emotions while often reproducing comical stories.

*"I always cut, ruin, dub over, erase, add, scrape, bring back, continue, reverse. The digital just gave me a useful tool in being able to go both forward and backward in time [...] not just accumulatively forward as in a painted surface."* Amy Sillman

At the same time Sillman is reflecting on world events, as in the series of *Election Drawings*: stick figures, black on a blank white background, lie curled up on the ground: sometimes cowering, sometimes in bed, sometimes throwing up. The black lines are robust, but also rough and above all angry. The series of 23 graphite drawings on paper was made in 2016 after the electoral victory of Donald Trump. Taking inspiration from protest placards, Sillman is concerned with the emotions which call people to action at such a moment, but which also render one incapable of acting.

### **Oh, Clock!: about the exhibition**

Amy Sillman's powerful and allusive work is presented at the Kunstmuseum Bern with selected groups of works from the past fifteen years. The exhibition includes three series of drawings encompassing between 70 and 400 drawings, some 30 paintings and five animated films. It is conceived as a large installation of different forms of work which engage with time. Co-curated with the artist, it is marked by deliberate encounters between densely composed paintings and extensive series of drawings, object-like series of prints, video works with poetic soundtracks, wall-paintings, animations and installation-style interventions. These include the monumental work *Untitled (Frieze for Venice)* which Sillman made for the Venice Biennale in 2022.

The particular focus on the moment of time in painting arises from the artist's lavish method: Sillman constantly applies paint, draws, paints, scratches or wipes away, overpaints until a work reaches the point where it expresses something and crystallizes a meaning from it.

Her art strives towards film and poetry, in which time can be compressed or expanded. Furthermore, for Sillman time is also tangible in the space that she allows for the process of painterly pictorial development, as well as for finding gestures through the act of drawing.

Here her critical revision of Abstract Expressionism becomes understandable as a contemporary struggle for the communicative potential of abstract painting freeing itself from the claims to mastery and heroic phrases of past generations, and, with its fragile and ludicrous futility, opening up new emotional terrain. Sillman's turn towards the clumsy and the awkward lends painting a new currency and credibility at a time when the subjective in art seeks to be articulated in a hybrid, fluid and process-based way.

The presentation of her work is also particularly important to the artist. The exhibition demonstrates how strongly Sillman tends to work within the space and in a space-related way: she alters the architecture with unfamiliar displays, she blurs the spatial structure through painting and calls the boundaries of the image into question. Through the unusual form of presentation of her paintings and drawings, she undermines expectations of a conventional painting exhibition, and brings the creative process into the foreground.

### **Amy Sillman x Kunstmuseum Bern**

As a special extra, Amy Sillman involves works from the collection of the Kunstmuseum Bern in her exhibition, thus establishing a dialogue with her own works. In this way, from her viewpoint she questions the established patterns and relative weightings in art history. She does not allow herself to be constrained by such categories as canon or history, but skilfully uses narrative and pictorial languages to suggest a new vision of connections: she does not group works chronologically or thematically, but rather by forms, colours, compositions or very personal sensations. So, for example, next to well-known paintings by Augusto Giacometti she also hangs small-format drawings by Louise Bourgeois, which she juxtaposes with her own works, staging them with artistic vision.

### **Exhibited artist from the collection of the Kunstmuseum Bern**

Adnan, Etel (1925–2021)  
Altorfer, Esther (1936–1988)  
Amiet, Cuno (1868–1961)  
Arp, Hans (1886–1966)  
Baer, Monika (\*1964)  
Bächli, Silvia (\*1956)  
Bailly, Alice (1872–1938)  
Beckmann, Ericka (\*1951)  
Boltanski, Christian (1944–2021)  
Bourgeois, Louise (1911–2010)  
Churchman, Leidy (\*1979)  
de Niederhäusern, Auguste (1863–1913)  
de Staël, Nicolas (1914–1955)  
Dijkstra, Rineke (\*1969)  
Dorazio, Piero (1927–2005)  
Eggenschwilder, Franz (1930–2000)  
Eichwald, Michaela (\*1967)  
Fischli/Weiss (1979–2012)  
Fisher, Joel (\*1947)  
Frecon, Suzan (\*1941)  
Fries, Pia (\*1955)

Gerhard, Tatjana (\*1974)  
Giacometti, Augusto (1877–1947)  
Hirschhorn, Thomas (\*1957)  
Kirchner, Ernst Ludwig (1880–1938)  
Koether, Jutta (\*1958)  
Kollwitz, Käthe (1867–1945)  
Kovachevich, Thomas (\*1942)  
Kubin, Alfred (1877–1959)  
Krasner, Lee (1908–1984)  
Lassnig, Maria (1919–2014)  
Léger, Fernand (1881–1955)  
Meyer-Amden, Otto (1885–1933)  
Oppenheim, Meret (1913–1985)  
Perret, Mai-Thu (\*1976)  
Polke, Sigmar (1941–2010)  
Ray, Man (1890–1976)  
Rosenkranz, Pamela (\*1979)  
Schubiger, Irene (\*1948)  
Seligmann, Kurt (1900–1962)  
Taeuber-Arp, Sophie (1889–1943)  
Valie Export (\*1940)  
van Dongen, Kees (1877–1968)  
von Jawlensky, Alexej (1864–1941)  
von Wulffen, Amelie (\*1966)  
West, Franz (1947–2012)

**Opening**

The opening of the exhibition will take place on

**Thursday, 19 September 2024, from 18:30.**

Admission to the exhibition is free on this evening.

**Curator**

Kathleen Bühler

**Assistant Curator**

Nina Liechti

**Cooperation**

The exhibition is a cooperation between the Kunstmuseum Bern and Ludwig Forum Aachen, where the exhibition will be on display from 14 March until 7 July 2025. It has been developed by Kathleen Bühler (Kunstmuseum Bern) and Eva Birkenstock (Ludwig Forum Aachen) together with the artist.

**With the support of**

Kanton Bern, Burgergemeinde Bern, UBS, Stiftung GegenwART, Dr. h. c. Hansjörg Wyss

## Media preview

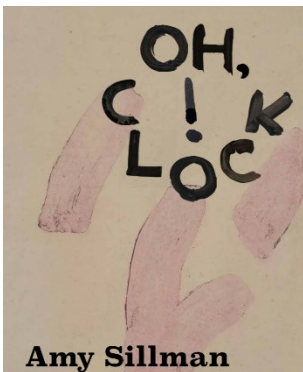
We cordially invite you to the media preview with Kathleen Bühler, curator of the exhibition, on **Wednesday, 18 September 2024 at 10:00 at the Kunstmuseum Bern. The artist will be present.**

Please register via [press@kunstmuseumbern.ch](mailto:press@kunstmuseumbern.ch).

## Individual visit of the exhibition



We are looking forward to your individual visit to the exhibition. Admission to all exhibitions at the Kunstmuseum Bern is free for media representatives with a valid press card. Please fill in the digital accreditation form which you can either access via [kunstmuseumbern.ch/media](https://kunstmuseumbern.ch/media) or by screening the QR-Code before your visit.



Catalogue

### **Amy Sillman. Oh, Clock!**

Published by Eva Birkenstock, Kathleen Bühler and Nina Zimmer

With contributions by Eva Birkenstock, Julia Bryan-Wilson, Kathleen Bühler, Sabeth Buchmann, Rose Higham-Stainton, Michelle Kuo and Jenny Nachtigall.

224 pages, 22 × 27,5 cm, numerous illustrations in colour

2024: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, Köln  
ISBN: 978-3-7533-0698-8

CHF 29

## Digital Guide

There is a freely accessible Digital Guide to accompany the exhibition. It can be accessed from Wednesday, 18 September 2024 via QR code or [guide.kunstmuseumbern.ch/en/amy-sillman](https://guide.kunstmuseumbern.ch/en/amy-sillman).



## Accompanying programme

### **Let's talk about painting!**

Saturday, **21 September 2024**, 14:00

Guided tour through the show with painters Amy Sillman, who also curated the collection display, and Monika Baer, whose work is included in the collection. In conversation with Kathleen Bühler, the artists talk about their work, artistic practice, ways of curating painting and dialogues with art history.

### **Public guided tour in English**

Sunday, **26 December 2024**, 11:30



Photo: Amy Sillman

## Biography

Amy Sillman (b. 1955, Detroit) is a New York-based visual artist. She is known for her process-based paintings, which switch between abstraction and figuration and involve unconventional media such as animation, zines and installations. Sillman has made a considerable mark on the field of painting with her consistent practice and writings over the last few decades.

As an influential figure in the painting of the 21st century, she has engaged constructively with the legacy of Abstract Expressionism, switching seamlessly between different media and integrating elements such as collage, drawing and printmaking into her working practice. Her work refers to art-historical tropes, particularly the American gestural painting of the post-War period, which she uses both as influence and contrast. She engages with feminist critiques of discourses of mastery, genius and power, in order to introduce such qualities as humour, awkwardness, self-irony, emotion and doubt into her artistic practice. Over the last three decades she has probed the language and practice of painting, reassessed its history and extended it to include new mechanical and digital processes.

Sillman views drawing as the starting point for all her works. She paints and draws in countless layers, none of which can be seen in the final product, but all of which are apparent in the active surface. She explores other gestural modes of production in her printed canvases and zines and in her animated iPhone videos.

In the 1970s, Sillman moved from Detroit to New York, where she gained a BFA at the School of Visual Arts. She engaged intensely with current debates and the future viability of contemporary painting and, as assistant to the artist Pat Steir and member of and contributor to the feminist zine *Heresies*, she joined the city's feminist and counter-cultural movements. Later Sillman was awarded an MFA from Bard College (1995), and joined the college's art faculty in 1996. She taught from 1997 until 2013 on the MFA painting programme, and from 2002 until 2013 she was chair of the painting department. After that she taught at the Städelschule in Frankfurt, Germany. Over the past few years Sillman has written many articles about her own production as well as the works of her colleagues.

A comprehensive presentation of Sillman's paintings on paper was shown at the 2022 Venice Biennale. Sillman has exhibited worldwide in major international institutions, including solo exhibitions in the Arts Club of Chicago (2019), the Camden Arts Centre, London (2018) and the Kunsthaus Bregenz (2015), as well as group exhibitions in the Lenbachhaus, Munich (2018), the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2016), Tate Modern, London (2015) and MoMA, New York (2015). Her first institutional exhibition, *one lump or two*, opened in 2013 in the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. Her works are represented in many museum collections in the USA and Europe, including the collections of MoMA, New York, the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Tate Modern, London, the Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris, the Moderna Museet, Stockholm, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Art Institute of Chicago and the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. In 2019 she curated the artist's choice exhibition *The Shape of Shape* at MoMA.



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01  
**Amy Sillman**  
*UGH for 2023, 2023–2024*  
Series of 195 drawings (*Words / Torsos*)  
Acrylic and ink on paper  
81,3 × 55,9 cm each  
Courtesy of the artist and  
Gladstone Gallery



02  
**Amy Sillman**  
*Fatso, 2009*  
Oil on canvas  
231,1 × 213,4 cm  
Udo and Anette Brandhorst  
Collection  
Courtesy of the artist



03  
**Amy Sillman**  
*Mouth, 2011*  
Oil on canvas  
129,5 × 124,5 cm  
Private collection  
Courtesy of the artist



04  
**Amy Sillman**  
*Election Drawings, 2016*  
8 selected drawings of a series of  
23  
Charcoal on paper  
76,2 × 58,4 cm each  
Courtesy of the artist

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05

**Amy Sillman**

*Song Cave*, 2017

Acrylic on linen

190,5 × 167,6 cm

Private collection

Photo: John Berens

Courtesy of the artist and Tajan  
SA



06

**Amy Sillman**

*Pat*, 2017

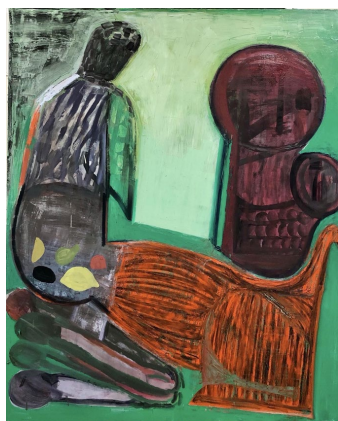
Acrylic on linen

335,3 × 190,5 cm

Photo: John Berens

Collection of Kathy and Steven  
Guttman

Courtesy of the artist



07

**Amy Sillman**

*She/They*, 2021

Oil on linen

177,8 × 152,4 cm

Photo: David Regen

Courtesy of the artist



08

**Amy Sillman**

*Paradise Drawings*, 2021

8 selected drawings of a series of  
9

Acrylic and ink on paper, mounted  
on panel

76,8 × 57,2 cm each

Courtesy of the artist and  
Gladstone Gallery



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09

**Amy Sillman**

*Sad meets Mad*, 2021

Acrylic and oil on canvas

182,9 × 165,1 cm

Paris Musées / Musée d'Art  
moderne

Courtesy of the artist



10

**Amy Sillman**

*Untitled (Detail aus Frieze for  
Venice)*, 2021

32 drawings on paper, 71

drawings on panels

Acrylic, ink, silkscreen, watercolour  
and pencil on paper

Approx. 152 × 106 cm / 29 × 36  
cm each

Courtesy of the artist and  
Gladstone Gallery



11

**Amy Sillman**

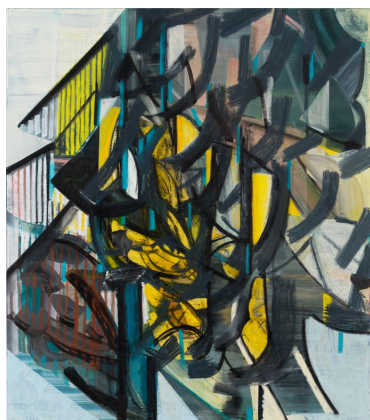
*Little Elephant*, 2023

Acrylic and oil on linen

129,5 × 124,5 cm

Photo: David Regen

Courtesy of the artist and  
Gladstone Gallery



12

**Amy Sillman**

*The Banana Tree*, 2023

Acrylic and oil on linen

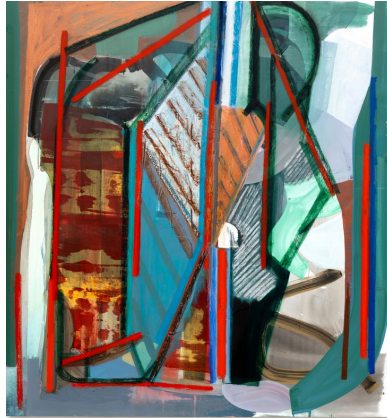
190 × 167 cm

ASOM Collection

Courtesy of the artist

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13

**Amy Sillman**

*oh, Clock, 2023*

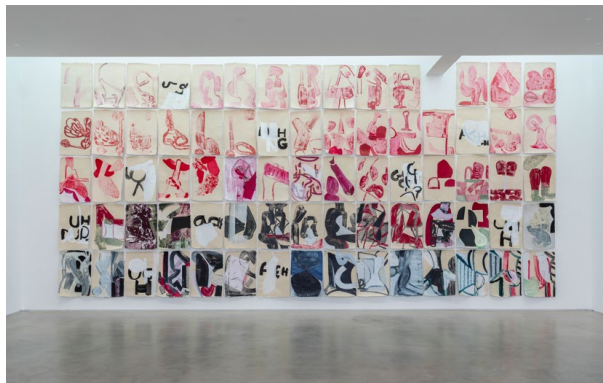
Acrylic and oil on linen

149,9 × 139,7 cm

Photo: David Regen

Collection of Andrea Olshan

Courtesy of the artist



14

**Amy Sillman**

*UGH for 2023 (installation view),  
2023*

74 selected drawings from *UGH for  
2023* (series of 195 drawings,  
*Words and Torsos*)

Acrylic and ink on paper

81,3 × 55,9 cm each

Photo: David Regen

Courtesy of the artist and

Gladstone Gallery



15

**Amy Sillman**

*Harpie, 2023–2024*

Acrylic and oil on linen

190,5 × 167,6 cm

Photo: David Regen

Private collection

Courtesy of the artist

## **Current and upcoming exhibitions at the Kunstmuseum Bern**

Chaim Soutine. Against the Current  
until 1 December 2024

Kunstmuseum Bern of the future. The architectural competition  
until 24 November 2024

Amy Sillman. Oh, Clock!  
20.9.2024–2.2.2025

Kahnweiler & Rupf. A friendship between Paris and Bern  
22.11.2024–23.3.2025

### **Opening hours**

Tuesday  
10:00–20:00

Wednesday–Sunday  
10:00–17:00

Monday closed

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