

Meret Oppenheim

X = Hase (X = rabbit)

Meret Oppenheim against all Rules of Reason

Nov 02 – Dec 20, 2019

Opening: Nov 02, 2019, 7–9 pm

At the age of only 17, Meret Oppenheim (*1913 Berlin †1985 Basel) wondered, if mathematical equations had roots, where then the rabbits are – and collaged *X=Hase* (X=rabbit) into her exercise book. The artist's entire work and thinking bespeak an independence and resistance that go against all logic as well as academic and social norms. Oppenheim's œuvre is symbolic of the mysterious, the hidden, the unconscious and the unexpected, offering an astonishment that is driven by curiosity – just as in the case of the little girl in the painting *Die Waldfrau*, who alone in the forest discovers a huge, mythical female creature with a dragon's tail. Here, nature becomes a mythical place of human-animal primal forces. Her affinity for the works of psychoanalyst C.G. Jung allowed her early in life to delve into the profound spheres of the human mind and gain an understanding of the unconscious collective structures of the soul.

Oppenheim's search for an autonomous identity and unrestricted artistic expression was based on a ravenous desire for freedom. A desire which caused her to break with the surrealist circle in Paris in the 1930s, celebrating her first big success, the "fur cup" (*Le déjeuner en fourrure*), a key work amongst the surrealist *objet trouvé*. Having been categorized as a muse and cut back in her creative spirit, the artist faced a yearlong creative crisis, that she would only be able to overcome by the 1950s in the lively and creative climate of Bern among like-minded fellow artists like Daniel Spoerri and Dieter Roth. Her personal ideology of overcoming boundaries, which in her early work was shown in the deconstruction of patriarchal femininity, was developed into a holistic thesis about human androgyny – the unity of the feminine and masculine spirit underlying every artistic creation – and thereby revolutionized the image of the – historically trimmed of her male part – female artist.

Oppenheim never wanted to be restricted to an identity, style or medium in any way. Her cross-genre and materialistically diverse works testify to an imaginative, poetic and ironic interplay of free and applied arts, such as jewelry, fashion and furniture designs. Despite the rejection of a stylistic classification, the somatic, materialistic and associative aspects, that Surrealism has pushed into the foreground in the beginning of the 20th century, remained intrinsic to her work: object-like assemblages and ludicrous combinations of materials enter into a play with sensations, corporeality and alienation.

The paintings and drawings oscillate between geometric forms, abstract landscapes and imaginative constructs – ephemeral status reports between dissolution and formation, interior and exterior spaces, mental ideas and tangible forms. The artist furthermore shows herself as a lyricist and poet who with associative word games strives to dissolve the boundaries of the dimensions of her works.

In her game of perception for the eyes, senses and mind, Oppenheim expresses the urge for metamorphosis as a central strategy: dichotomies between nature and culture, masculinity and femininity, spaces, structures and genres dissipate. The expansion of identity constructions facilitates an actuality to Oppenheim's œuvre, especially for contemporary artists. "*Freedom is not something you are given, but something you have to take*", she stated in her speech during the presentation of the Art Prize of the city Basel in the year 1974 – a plea, that preceded its time and is still holding an unabated presence.

Oppenheim received her first major retrospective in Stockholm, followed by exhibitions in Solothurn, Winterthur and Duisburg in 1974/75, the Art Award of the City of Berlin in 1982 and her participation at the documenta 7. In 2013, a further retrospective at the Bank Austria Kunstforum Wien in Vienna, Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin and Lille Métropole musée d'art moderne, d'art contemporain et d'art brut in Villeneuve d'Ascq took place. In 2021/22 another comprehensive retrospective will honor Meret Oppenheim's artistic work, starting at the Kunstmuseum Bern, then moving to the Menil Collection in Houston and ending at the MoMA in New York. The alexander levy gallery honors the artist's eclectic oeuvre and her independent artistic position with a solo show from November 2 to December 20, 2019.