

Media release

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Drawing Today Recent Additions to the Collection

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Curator: Anita Haldemann

The Kunstmuseum Basel's Kupferstichkabinett (Department of Prints and Drawings) holds around 300,000 works from seven centuries. Through donations and acquisitions, this collection continues to grow. An exhibition now showcases around 200 contemporary drawings, the majority of which were added to the collections in the past ten years, including works by Michael Armitage, Martin Assig, Silvia Bächli, Miriam Cahn, Róza El-Hassan, Pélagie Gbaguidi, Leiko Ikemura, Renée Levi, and Maja Rieder.

The drawings reveal manifold facets. They are abstract or figurative, carefully considered or spontaneous. They probe questions of individual and collective identity amid differences of culture and religion. Or they boast broad strokes and rich colors, ignoring the line that divides the medium from painting.

The exhibition *Drawing Today* offers insight into the Kupferstichkabinett's collection-building strategy, which is exemplarily illustrated by the selection of works: one central goal is to compile larger bodies of work that let beholders gain a profound understanding of an oeuvre. This strategy contrasts with the so-called encyclopedic collection, which aims to gather comparatively few works by as many artists as possible. The corpuses patiently assembled at the Kupferstichkabinett make it possible for the exhibition *Drawing Today* to dedicate entire rooms to individual artists.

The foundations of the Kupferstichkabinett's extensive collections of art by Silvia Bächli, Miriam Cahn, and Leiko Ikemura were laid in the early 1980s. They have grown not only through acquisitions, but also through joint exhibition projects, ongoing dialogues with the artists over the years, and longstanding close relationships with collectors and foundations. The smaller bodies of work by Renée Levi and Maja Rieder, on the other hand, are recent additions to the collections.

In the past few years, the Kunstmuseum Basel has also made a concerted effort to diversify its selection of artists. Michael Armitage and Pélagie Gbaguidi, for instance, have African roots. In very different ways, their figurative drawings bring intercultural questions into play.

Neubau

Room 1:

The Basel-based artist **Renée Levi**'s (b. Istanbul, 1960) drawings are expressions of the gesture performed on the paper by the hand holding the tool. Rather than the execution of a mark that Levi already sees before the mind's eye, her line is a manifestation of movement. In a group of works created in 2011/12, the artist used a brush to apply ink and watercolors to the paper and then made the liquid media flow with horizontal movements of the sheet. The resulting drawings, that is to say, are the products of a play with chance and control.

Room 2:

Maja Rieder (b. Niederbipp, 1979), who lives in Basel, describes her art as drawing. Her works demonstrate that the division between graphic art and painting is thoroughly obsolete. Wielding broad brushes, she applies aqueous media like ink and gouache to large sheets of paper in multiple layers. The larger the surface, the more intense her whole-body engagement with her creation becomes. Rieder devotes particular attention to the paper, a material that, no less than color and the brush, takes a turn in the spotlight of her art. She folds it, drags it over wooden frames, and does not unfold it again until after the drawing process.

Room 3:

The Basel-based artist **Silvia Bächli** (b. Baden, 1956) has been hailed as a leading exponent of the *métier* of drawing. In the course of several decades, she has continually created drawings in which the intervals between the lines are no less important than those lines themselves. *Ist die schwarze Köchin da?* (1988), an early 18-part work, is based on the graphic assimilation of everyday impressions, and illustrates that omitting some features was even then a central aspect of her method. In her later work, Bächli has increasingly abandoned figuration. The process of drawing and the artist's movements that underlie it leave brushstrokes that capture the beholder's attention as such.

Room 4:

The Japanese-Swiss artist **Leiko Ikemura** (b. Tsu, Mie Prefecture, 1951) lives in Berlin. She began her career as a graphic artist but has more recently gained renown for her

paintings and sculptures. She does much work with aqueous paints that she allows to run. In her early oeuvre, she often chose ambitious formats, whereas smaller sheets now predominate. Ikemura's depictions are ambivalent. The girls are recognizable as such yet remain intangible. Her fusions of human and nature, of dream and reality reflect her roots in Japan.

Room 5:

The Kenyan-British painter **Michael Armitage** (b. Nairobi, Kenya, 1981) lives in Nairobi and Bali. Working with great ease, he uses a brush to apply ink to small-format support media. His motifs are taken from everyday life, but also from the internet. Scenes from traditional rituals or street protests he observes constitute a collection of materials into which he taps for complex paintings.

Pélagie Gbaguidi (*1965 Dakar, Senegal), who lives in Brussels, identifies as a Beninese artist. Drawing is her primary medium, which she practices on large walls and paper. For the series *La chaîne humaine* (2022), she worked on pages torn from an encyclopedia about the flora of Katanga (a former province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo). As a member of the African diaspora in Europe, Gbaguidi employs the motif of the human chain to articulate her hopes for solidarity between nations and cultures. Armitage's and Gbaguidi's works reveal affinities with those of **Róza El-Hassan** (b. Budapest, 1966). The artist's Hungarian-Syrian roots inspire her engagement with themes of migration and cultural conflict. Her drawings, which unfold in a dynamic interplay between ornament and figuration, always also raise the question of her own identity.

Room 6:

Miriam Cahn (b. Basel, 1949) now lives in Grisons. A celebrated painter, she made her start in drawing, and her work in the medium has been represented in the Kupferstichkabinett's collection since 1981. In bold and haunting charcoal drawings she presents as series or wall installations, Cahn insistently brings war and violence, especially sexual violence against women, and the body's vulnerability into focus. In the 1990s, the Balkan wars and the Gulf War became major subjects of many of her drawings.

Hauptbau

Graphic art cabinets on floor 1:

Martin Assig (b. Schwelm, Germany, 1959) lives and works in Berlin and Brädikow. His art grapples with spirituality, with death and his own mortality. Working with brush and ink, he proceeds rather tentatively, producing scattered lines and, less frequently, surfaces. He sketches fragments of human figures, rendering only, say, the torso or

heads without faces. The creatures that inhabit them are more important to him than the bodies. Receptacles and clothes are likewise vessels for bodies that are the organic dwellings of souls. The material and visible, to Assig, is merely an attempt to think the immaterial.

Imagery related to the exhibition

www.kunstmuseumbasel.ch/en/media

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