

MASI Lugano

Museo d'arte
della Svizzera italiana,
Lugano

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Rita Ackermann

Hidden

12 March – 13 August 2023

Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana, Lugano
LAC Venue

Curated by Tobia Bezzola with Chiara Ottavi

PRESS RELEASE

Lugano, 20 February 2023

"Things can be freer and rise higher when they conceal themselves."

Rita Ackermann

MASI Lugano presents "Hidden," one of the largest museum retrospectives to date devoted to the work of Rita Ackermann (Budapest, 1968, lives and works in New York). The exhibition traces the last three decades of this exceptional artist's career in a selection of around fifty paintings and drawings created in New York from the 1990s onwards.

Produced in collaboration with the artist, the show presents a number of works dating to shortly after her arrival in the city - works in which the female figures are clearly visible – in dialogue with more recent pieces from the "Mama" series she began working on in 2018, whose figures are concealed under lines and layers of colour. It also includes a selection of paintings created for the occasion, on the topic of war. The layout of the MASI exhibition shows how the artist, after starting out with a figurative aesthetic that was immediately accessible to viewers, later came to rethink the figures that inhabit her works, going so far as to cover them with layers of paint. While the early works are small or medium-sized and mainly on paper, the more recent series, on large format canvases, present a bold, expressive gestural quality. This transition, this process, is emblematic of a category-defying path that has enabled the artist to remain unseen and free; "hidden", as per the title of the exhibition.

Ackermann's artistic career has been shaped by the continuous paradox that characterizes her life, starting from her move from Hungary to America in the early 1990s. Rejecting academic trends, the artist developed her own personal practice as an independent painter, in close contact with the art scene of the Lower East Side. When she arrived in the United States, she found herself facing a vital, significant challenge, which led to her integrating different cultures and aesthetics in her work, blending Eastern European and American culture. This fusion of two cultures, from the very first paintings and drawings she produced in New York between 1993 and 1996, can be seen in the exhibition in the sections "Sketchbook Drawings" and "Early Paintings". Small- and medium-format

drawings on paper depict denuded adolescent girls, figures that are multiplied and deliberately put on display in each composition, portrayed engaging in a variety of self-destructive activities. The extremely spontaneous, insouciant attitude of these young women projects a kind of idyllic serenity onto a constantly precarious atmosphere. These ambiguous early works communicate with the viewer on an immediate level, and effectively bridge the gap between high and low culture, just like the myths and folktales the artist often takes inspiration from. This imagery also draws on the broader world of visual culture, philosophy and cinema, particularly classic films about recalcitrant adolescents by directors such as Uli Edel and Peter Brook.

The vivid figures that dominate her early works channel an embryonic feminine energy that twenty-five years later blossoms into the "Mama" series, begun in 2018 and represented in the exhibition with several large-format paintings on canvas. In these paintings the artist abandons defined figures for a practice in which lines, gestures, motifs and forms enclose and conceal one another, gradually becoming more and more evanescent. With its complex layering of visual languages, "Mama" oscillates between figuration and abstraction. The bodies concealed in the images vanish the moment they are perceived: they exist because they merge into gestural elements before their story becomes legible. In contrast to the early works of the 1990s, in which the figures give themselves completely to the viewer's gaze, in this series the artist relinquishes all the imagery that might be mistaken for self-referential, thus preventing her own artistic path from being categorized.

The exhibition ends with three paintings from the new series of "War Drawings," created for the exhibition at MASI. In oil, china marker and acrylic on raw canvas, these are shattered compositions in which the figures dissolve and the lines are scraped away. Each painting appears dominated by disaster, which comes across as a potential purifying force, paving the way for a future harmony.

The artist

Rita Ackermann was born in Budapest in 1968, and lives and works in New York. Between 1989 and 1992 she studied at the University of Fine Arts in Budapest and The New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture. She has had numerous solo exhibitions in major institutions, including the Konsthall in Malmö (Sweden), the Sammlung Friedrichshof di Zurndorf in Burgenland (Austria), the Museum of Contemporary Art in Miami, the Ludwig Museum in Budapest, the Swiss Institute of New York and the Chinati Foundation in Marfa (Texas). Her works can be found in major public collections, including the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York, the Maria Leuff Foundation and the Hessel Foundation (also in New York), the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Dallas Museum of Art, the Het Domein Museum in the Netherlands, and the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art.

The catalogue

The exhibition will be accompanied by a bilingual catalogue (in Italian and English) published in collaboration with MOUSSE Publishing. It will feature reproductions of the paintings on show, along with an essay by Pamela Kort and an interview with the artist by Donatien Grau.

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Exhibition venues

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Via Canova 10
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Press images

01.

Rita Ackermann

Sketchbook Drawing 3

1993

Ink marker on paper

© Rita Ackermann. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth



02.

Rita Ackermann

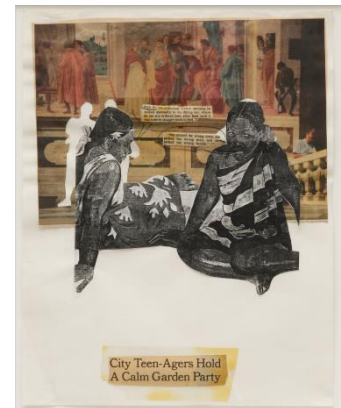
A Calm Garden Party

1994

Printed paper, glue and ink marker on paper

© Rita Ackermann. Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth

Photo: Thomas Barratt



03.

Rita Ackermann

Where did we come from? Where are we going?

Who are we?

1994

Acrylic on denim

© Rita Ackermann. Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth

Photo: Thomas Barratt



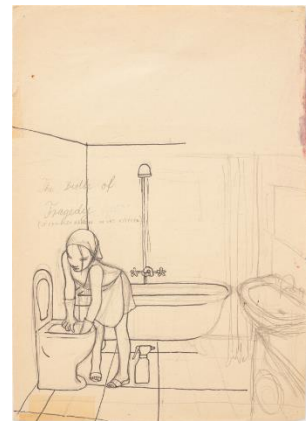
04.

Rita Ackermann
We Mastered the Life of Doing Nothing
1994
Acrylic on canvas
Private Collection
© Rita Ackermann. Courtesy of the artist and
Hauser & Wirth
Photo: Thomas Barratt



05.

Rita Ackermann
The Birth of Tragedy
1995
© Rita Ackermann. Courtesy of the artist and
Hauser & Wirth
Photo: Thomas Barratt



06.

Rita Ackermann
Mama, Safe Crossing
2019
Oil, pigment, acrylic, china marker, and pastel on
canvas
Burger Collection, Hong Kong
© Rita Ackermann. Courtesy of the artist and
Hauser & Wirth
Photo: Thomas Barratt



07.

Rita Ackermann

Mama, Yves's Mask

2021

Acrylic, oil, pigments and china marker on
canvas

Daniel Xu and Flora Huang Collection

© Rita Ackermann. Courtesy of the artist and
Hauser & Wirth

Photo: François Fernandez



08.

Rita Ackermann

Mama, Good Samaritan

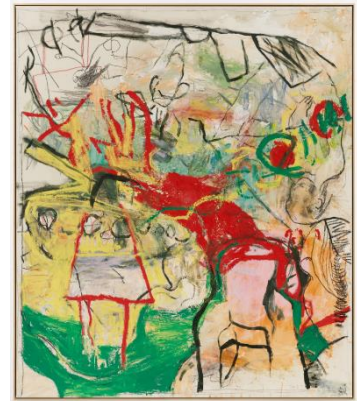
2021

Acrylic, oil and china marker on canvas

Collection of Lisa Watson and Mike Krupka

© Rita Ackermann. Courtesy of the artist and
Hauser & Wirth

Photo: Thomas Barratt



09.

Rita Ackermann

War Drawings, Coming of Age

2022

Acrylic, oil and china marker on linen

© Rita Ackermann. Courtesy of the artist and
Hauser & Wirth

Photo: Thomas Barratt



10.
Rita Ackermann
Photo: Daniel Turner

