

Fergus McCaffrey presents an exhibition surveying the works of innovative Austrian artist Birgit Jürgenssen

Fergus McCaffrey, Tokyo
September 28 – October 27, 2018

Fergus McCaffrey is pleased to present a solo exhibition of works on paper and photography by innovative Austrian artist Birgit Jürgenssen (1949–2003), on view at the gallery's Tokyo location beginning September 28, 2018. *Birgit Jürgenssen* will highlight the artist's concern for material and process, featuring nine drawings and three rarely exhibited multimedia collages created during the seventies, as well as a selection of photographs and photo-based collages from the late eighties and early nineties. Together, these works demonstrate Jürgenssen's decades-long exploration of representation, irony, and originality, celebrating the ways in which her inventive drawing and photographic practices informed each other.



Jürgenssen applied her academic training in drawing and graphics to engage contemporary issues, including feminism, psychoanalytic theory, and Structuralism. After graduating from the University of Applied Arts, Vienna in 1971, she found herself out of place in the Viennese art world, which was dominated by the Viennese Actionists' violent, transgressive masculinity and the socially conservative Austrian bourgeoisie. Jürgenssen immersed herself in a private studio practice, developing an extraordinarily rich and prolific oeuvre of drawing, performance, photography, and sculpture.



In the early 1970s, Jürgenssen began creating dreamlike drawings, using the visual language of Surrealism to engage contemporary conversations around gender, domesticity, and social life. She borrowed imagery from a wide array of sources: silhouettes of nude classical sculptures, stills lifted from popular Hollywood films, images found in books and magazines, and cut-out portions of her own photographs. Fergus McCaffrey's exhibition explores previously unrecognized affiliations of Jürgenssen's practice with the Pictures Generation, a group of artists working in New York in the late 1970s and early '80s who self-reflexively examined the imagery of popular culture and mass media. Hafif's attitude toward sampling and recombining images points to her deep engagement with questions around representation, originality, and appropriation.

A selection of works on paper from 1971–78 on view trace threads of formalist abstraction and Surrealist iconography in Jürgenssen’s practice. The artist uses classical drafting techniques to deeply engage the rich art historical tradition in Vienna: for example, *The Echo in the Mountains* (1977) is evocative of works by Egon Schiele and Gustav Klimt in its delicate mark-making, innovative approach to the human figure, and deliberate use of line. *To Cut Through the Knot* (1976) similarly complicates representations of the human form, demonstrating the complexity and irony with which Jürgenssen treated feminist cultural critique. Here, she explores the line as both a compositional and thematic element. In classical draftsmanship, the line is associated with reason, demonstrating man’s ability to give definition to objects and bodies in space, while color is considered more amorphous and subjective, and is associated with embodied experience and femininity. *To Cut Through the Knot* shows an arm in the process of transfiguring into a knife to cut through the linearity of a cord: the will of the body disrupting the cold rationality of the mind.



Jürgenssen employed a variety of experimental processes to create the photographs included in the exhibition: multiple exposures, chemical manipulation, and light projection allowed her to meld rendering and photographic techniques. In photo collages from the early nineties, rational grid formations of photographs are overlaid with mesh fabric that resembles stockings. Mediated by this layer of transparent material, the images are imbricated in a play of illusive opticality, their appearance shifting depending on the viewer’s position. In a group of 1988 photographs printed on linen, ghostly outlines of the human form interpenetrate appropriated images; in *Untitled*

(my nephews) (1988), the bodies of the subjects are implicated only in their absence. Figure and ground collapse into amorphous gradations of shadow and light, outline and detail.

In a group of three photo and drawing collages included in the exhibition, the artist similarly explores the complex relationship between representation and abstraction, mining the visual language of Surrealism and applying it to Structuralist theories of language. In these collages, Jürgenssen presents the viewer with a stable, fixed image in the form of a photograph, only to destabilize the image’s constitutive elements in drawing. This approach is clear in *Untitled* (1976), in which she subtly deconstructs a photograph of an idyllic savanna landscape: rendered in the artist’s hand, the elephant’s skin appears absent of the animal’s body, and is instead wrapped, garment-like, around a tree branch, which in turn sprouts tusks as appendages.



Birgit Jürgenssen is the gallery's fourth exhibition of the artist since 2013, and the third exhibition in Fergus McCaffrey's recently inaugurated space in Tokyo. The exhibition will be on view through October 27, 2018, and immediately precedes a major retrospective of Jürgenssen's work on view at the Kunsthalle Tübingen from November 10, 2018 to February 17, 2019.

About the Artist

Born and educated in Vienna, artist **Birgit Jürgenssen** (1949–2003) played an instrumental role in the international feminist avant-garde of the 1970s. Her artwork received scant attention during her lifetime; however, recent monographs by Gabriele Schor and Abigail Solomon-Godeau have begun to spread awareness of the depth and breadth of Jürgenssen's artistic achievement. Jürgenssen studied at the University of Applied Arts, Vienna, in 1968–71. A solo exhibition of her drawings took place at Graphische Sammlung, Albertina, Vienna, in 1978. Between 1980 and 1997, she lectured in Vienna at the University of Applied Arts and then the Academy of Fine Arts. Understanding of Jürgenssen's work has been nurtured by Galerie Hubert Winter, Vienna, since 1981. A major retrospective of Jürgenssen's practice, *ICH BIN / I AM*, will be on view at the Kunsthalle Tübingen from November 2018 until February 2019; another exhibition of the artist's work will be on view at the LOUISIANA Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk in summer 2019.

About Fergus McCaffrey

Founded in 2006, Fergus McCaffrey is internationally recognized for its groundbreaking role in promoting the work of postwar Japanese artists such as Sadamasa Motonaga, Natsuyuki Nakanishi, Kazuo Shiraga, and Jiro Takamatsu. The gallery also exhibits the work of emerging and seminal Western artists such as Marcia Hafif, Birgit Jürgenssen, Richard Nonas, Sigmar Polke, and Carol Rama.

In keeping with the gallery's commitment to Japanese art and culture, we are pleased to announce that Fergus McCaffrey opened its Tokyo outpost this past March with an exhibition of paintings by Robert Ryman, followed by an exhibition of works by Tetsumi Kudo and Carol Rama in June.

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Images:

1. Birgit Jürgenssen, *To Cut Through the Knot*, 1976. Pencil, colored pencil on handmade paper, 17 5/8 x 24 5/8 inches (44.9 x 62.6 cm). © Estate Birgit Jürgenssen, Vienna; Courtesy Galerie Hubert Winter, Vienna
2. Birgit Jürgenssen, *The Echo in the Mountains*, 1977. Pencil, colored pencil on handmade paper, 24 5/8 x 17 3/4 inches (62.5 x 45 cm). © Estate Birgit Jürgenssen, Vienna; Courtesy Galerie Hubert Winter, Vienna

3. Birgit Jürgenssen, *Untitled (my nephews)*, 1988. Black and white photo on linen, 38 1/5 x 38 1/5 inches (97 x 97 cm). © Estate Birgit Jürgenssen, Vienna; Courtesy Galerie Hubert Winter, Vienna
4. Birgit Jürgenssen, *Untitled*, 1976. Collaged photo, colored pencil on Schoeller handmade paper heightened with white, 17 1/4 x 24 3/5 inches (43.8 x 62.5 cm). © Estate Birgit Jürgenssen, Vienna; Courtesy Galerie Hubert Winter, Vienna

Gallery Map:

