

## Fergus McCaffrey, St. Barth

**Birgit Jürgenssen**  
**6 February – 26 March, 2016**

Fergus McCaffrey is proud to present its third exhibition of the work of *Birgit Jürgenssen* (1949–2003). The show of drawings, cyanotypes, and other photographic works will be on view at Fergus McCaffrey, St. Barth, on 6 February – 26 March, with an opening reception on 6 February from 6:00 to 8:00 PM.

Born and educated in Vienna, Jürgenssen died prematurely at the age of fifty-four. 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.



*“Birgit Jürgenssen is the missing link that is finally being discovered not only for Austrian feminism between Maria Lassnig and Valie Export, but also for the international women’s art movement from Francesca Woodman to Cindy Sherman. As a result of her Surrealist and Structuralist tradition within this spectrum, she occupies a universal position. In order to better understand her status: Birgit Jürgenssen represents a contemporary position in the line of Meret Oppenheim and Louise Bourgeois.” — Peter Weibel*

While she is perhaps best known for her connection to the Austrian feminist movement of the 1970s, equally important is her engagement with Surrealism and her concern for materials and processes.

Jürgenssen's portraits often expose gender codes and roles: for example, *Frog Shoulder Belt*, 1974, presents the female body modified and armored; *Untitled*, 1971, shows a group of women looking directly at the viewer and lifting their skirts, as if confronting the viewer with the idea that the role of women is to be seen as visual pleasure. Jürgenssen's art does not focus exclusively on gender issues, though. In the 1970s, her subjects expanded into the realm of the surreal with dreamlike vistas. Within the exhibition, one of her drawings depicts a larger-than-life hand with a gun floating over the tips of its fingers, both suspended over a mountain ridge (*The Echo in the Mountains*, 1977). In another work, a modern train soars from the top of a mountain-scape in the distance into another train's open window (*Untitled*, 1973).

Her series *Stoffarbeiten* (Fabric Works), created from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, consists of experimental photographic prints mounted on canvases, which are screwed to iron frames she herself constructed. Thin, translucent fabrics such as gauze are stretched over the surface, veiling and slightly obscuring the images. The photographs themselves are created through a range of processes, including photograms, solarization, and multiple exposures. The sculptural presence of many of these works is striking. The juxtaposition of hard welded iron frames and delicate textile further emphasizes their materiality.

In another series, Jürgenssen employed the cyanotype technique, one of the oldest contact-printing processes, in which the blue hue creates an ethereal effect. The blur of the subject reduces figures to silhouettes, rendering portraits as simple features, adding an enigmatic element. Elsewhere, Jürgenssen used multiple overlays, which complicate the works, increasing the sense of otherworldliness and distortion. Jürgenssen's adaptation of this method points to the botanist Anna Atkins, who is considered the first woman to create photographs and the first to publish a book of cyanotype illustrations.

Jürgenssen studied at the University of Applied Arts Vienna in 1967–71, and from 1980 to 1997 she lectured first at that university and then at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Her works have been recognized and shown by Galerie Hubert Winter, Vienna, since 1979. They have also been featured in recent museum exhibitions, including *XL: 19 New Acquisitions in Photography*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2013–14; the Gwangju Biennale, 2014, Gwangju, South Korea, curated by Jessica Morgan; and *Woman: The Feminist Avant-Garde of the 1970s; Works from the Sammlung Verbund, Vienna*, at BOZAR (Palais des Beaux-Arts), Brussels; Mjellby Konstmuseum, Halmstad, Sweden; and Hamburger Kunsthalle, 2014–15.

### **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 Jack Early, Marcia Hafif, Richard Nonas, and Sigmar Polke.

Image:

Birgit Jürgenssen, *Untitled*, 1988/89. Cyanotype, 5 1/4 x 3 3/4 inches (13.3 x 9.4 cm). sp159  
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