

VALIE EXPORT

BODY POLITICS

SALZBURG VILLA KAST

23 Nov 2018 - 19 Jan 2019



**Opening: Friday, 23 November 2018, 6pm
with the artist present**

Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac is delighted to announce a major exhibition in Salzburg of works by VALIE EXPORT titled *Body Politics*, presenting her photography, photo collages and films dating from 1968 to 1983.

Following the announcement of the gallery's representation of VALIE EXPORT in October 2017, the close collaboration with the artist was inaugurated with an exhibition in Paris curated by Caroline Bourgeois. The forthcoming exhibition in Salzburg will focus on works from her series of *Körperkonfigurationen* [Body Configurations] (1972-82), the three-part photographic work *Identitätstransfer 1-3* [Identity Transfer 1-3] (1968), documentations of the performances *HOMOMETER* (1973) and *HOMO METER II* (1976), two showcases on the theme of *Hand Figurations* and *Body Configurations* (1972-82), the photo collage *EXTREM / ITÄTEN DES VERHALTENS* [EXTREM / ITIES OF BEHAVIOUR] (1972), the video installation *Body Tape* (1970), as well as the videos/films *Body Politics* (1974), *Syntagma* (1983) and *Bewegte Bilder über sich bewegende Personen* [Moving Pictures about Moving People] (1973).

»The filmic, actionist, photographic representations of the 1960s and 70s emphasise particularly that a body may belong to diverse systems of representation«, said VALIE EXPORT in a recent interview. This summarises a basic tenor of the works shown in Salzburg.

In the photographic series *Body Configurations*, VALIE EXPORT reflects the relationship between constructed body language and the surroundings, focusing on the visible externalisation of inner states of mind.

»Parallels such as landscape and mind, architecture and mind, are mediated by the body, partly because the parallels have their origin in every extreme opposition of body and mind, and partly because the body is a revelation, as is landscape. Landscape is a revelation of space and time, or, more precisely, the arrangement of its elements, such as trees, rocks, hills, etc. are that. Arrangements of the body's elements are postures, revelations, or expressions of inner states; this analogy between arrangements of landscape and body, these common forms of revelation, have served visual art from the beginning as surfaces for projecting expression: external configurations, whether in the landscape or in a picture (which thus becomes landscape) serve as an expression of internal states. [...] In the paintings of past times, unobserved, an archive of bodily postures has been collected which is of great expressive and informative value in examining the emotional states and mythologies of their eras. It turns out that these frozen motions of the body represent a canon, a doctrine. When I imitate these old postures I try more or less to perform an operation to draw out the expression, to make it independent, by assembling the postures with contemporary materials, thus trying to reveal these expressions« (VALIE EXPORT, 1976).

In the three-part work *Identitätstransfer 1-3*, she deals with the social stereotypes of femininity and masculinity in the form of self-portraits and self-staging – a decade before this kind of aesthetic found its way into the work of other (American) female artists.

The performance *HOMOMETER* was first staged in 1973, and will be represented in the current exhibition by photographic documentation. In the performance, the artist ties two large loaves of bread to her legs in order to deliberately hinder her progress. As a source of sustenance for centuries, bread symbolises nourishment and the earth from which wheat grows, as well as links to the human body and motherhood which now becomes a burden. VALIE EXPORT illustrates how symbols may be interpreted in different ways. She starts from the assumption that the language of images is different from that of words: what the photographs express contradicts the significance accorded to bread in our spoken language.

»Bread, considered as foodstuff, is much inferior to rice. We in the western world live on bread; our existence depends on this drug, the principal element of which is putrefaction, which we are obliged to modify with a poison to render it less unwholesome. [...] It requires a prodigious amount of work and the cruellest dependency. The monopolies and abuses it necessitates render it a hundred times more lethal than it is beneficial as an aliment. As far as morals go, I see that enslavement, despondency, all manner of baseness in inferiors, despotism, the unbridled passion of destructive pleasures, contempt for mankind in superiors – these are the inseparable accompaniment to the habit of eating bread, and arise from the same furrows in which the wheat grows.« (Simon N.H. Linguet, 1774)

The photo-series *EXTREM / ITÄTEN DES VERHALTENS*, which focuses on the artist's bitten fingernails, was developed in parallel to that of *Zwangsvorstellungen* [Obsessions]. Hands are a frequently recurring motif she uses as a means of expression: hands and their condition can reveal much about a person. In this series, VALIE EXPORT is concerned with states of mind and emotional suffering is externalised, made visible on the

body.

In the 20-minute film *Syntagma*, VALIE EXPORT links the results of her decades of research in the field of *Expanded Cinema*. Her exploration of progressive film techniques is evident both in the multi-media film and her examination of the female body. *Syntagma* centres on a woman and her body. Using a split-screen technique, the motifs are divided in two. The double views express both unity and difference, thus visually confirming VALIE EXPORT's *Multiple Body Theory*, according to which a single body may belong to diverse systems of representation.

Feet and hands touch and feel a sheet of glass, a tongue is pressed against a transparent wall, an ear listens at the cold surface. In a four-minute video installation entitled *Body Tape*, each conceptual gesture shows VALIE EXPORT's examination of the screen monitor together with words like *touching, boxing, feeling, hearing, tasting, pushing* and *walking*. She illustrates these terms using her own body and a sheet of glass, a transparent wall that is transferred to the monitor screen. She visualises words and examines their relationship to the actual operation. Viewers are encouraged to interact with the monitor screen, mirroring the artist's actions by also pressing their ear to the screen or lapping it with their tongue.

The means of inter-gender communication, VALIE EXPORT maintains, are predetermined in our society. The politics of behaviour, as imposed on man and woman in our society, can be physically demonstrated. In five sequences, the twin-track escalator at the centre of the video *Body Politics* becomes the stage for a five-phase communication system, with man and woman linked by a cord.

The 16mm film *Bewegte Bilder über sich bewegende Personen* reflects VALIE EXPORT's dialogue with the medium of film. »At the time, I was studying intensively the question of how to use this small device to capture on celluloid things with different formal, artistic and performative-sequential properties: cross-fading, rewinding, starting from the beginning over and over again, without having a clear picture. In this project, I was interested in repeatedly moving towards the camera and then away from it«, she says.

Born in Linz, Austria in 1940, VALIE EXPORT lives in Vienna. After attending the Arts and Crafts College in Linz (1956-59), she enrolled at the Design Department of the Higher Federal Teaching and Research Institute of the Textile Industry in Vienna, where she studied until 1964. Following her Diploma in Design, VALIE EXPORT started working in the film industry and co-founded the *Austria Filmmakers Cooperative*.

In 1967, she decided on the name VALIE EXPORT as an artistic concept and logo with the requirement that it always appears in capital letters.

Since 1968 VALIE EXPORT has taken part in many important international exhibitions, including documenta 6 and 12 (1977 and 2007) and the Austrian Pavilion at the Biennale di Venezia 1980. She has taught at numerous international institutions, including the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, the San Francisco Art Institute and the University of the Arts in Berlin. From 1995/96 to 2005 she was professor for Multimedia and Performance at the Media Art Academy in Cologne.

VALIE EXPORT is today considered one of the most important artists in the field of performance and new media. Her practice includes video environments, photography, installations, performances, films, documentaries and sculptures, as well as texts on contemporary art and feminism. In recent years, the Neue Berliner Kunstverein (2018), Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz (2017), Kunsthaus Bregenz (2011), Vienna Belvedere Museum (2009), Israel Museum Jerusalem (2009) and Centre Georges Pompidou Paris (2007) have devoted major solo exhibitions to VALIE EXPORT's work.

With the purchase of VALIE EXPORT's premature legacy, the VALIE EXPORT Archive was founded in Linz in 2015. Thus the city of Linz has laid the foundations for the VALIE EXPORT Center, an international research center for media and performance art.