

VALIE EXPORT

BODY CONFIGURATIONS

PARIS MARAIS

12 Jan 2018 - 24 Feb 2018



**Opening: 12 January 2018, 6-8pm,
with the artist present**

Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac is pleased to present the exhibition *VALIE EXPORT, Body Configurations, 1972-76* curated by Caroline Bourgeois, chief curator of the Pinault Collection. This new exhibition marks the first collaboration with the Austrian artist, represented by the gallery since October 2017.

In 2003, Caroline Bourgeois has organized a monographic exhibition on VALIE EXPORT at the Centre National de la Photographie, Jeu de Paume, in Paris, which travelled at the CAAC, Sévillia; the MAMCO, Geneva; the Camden Arts Center in London, and finally, the Sammlung Essl Privatstiftung in Klosterneuburg, Austria.

The French curator details her concept of the current exhibition:

"VALIE EXPORT has always refused conventions. Rejecting the role of housewife, she turns to art with a sense of urgency. Her first and seminal gesture is when she dubs herself VALIE EXPORT—in all capital letters—to match the strength of an other self who may bear a masculine name. Defining your name instead of enduring your father's.

In 1967 she invents her artist's name in order to export her ideas and works. Later she appropriates a cigarette pack of the Austrian brand Smart Export and names it after her new artistic self. The work presented in the exhibition documents this first action: *VALIE EXPORT-SMART EXPORT-Selbstporträt* (1970).

The exhibition presents major early works from 1968 to 1976. In 1972, VALIE EXPORT invents the concept of the first international woman exhibition *MAGNA. Feminism: Art and Creativity* (Vienna, 1975), which becomes a reference for the feminists of her time and those who follow in their footsteps.

She questions in a nearly phenomenological way the image and role of the female with her series entitled: *Identitätstransfer 1, 2, 3* (1968), where she presents herself "in disguise" to demonstrate the importance of the staging of the female body. This action also stresses the expectations in terms of appearances and the place of seduction in relationships. It is then followed by a tattoo: *BODY SIGN B* (1970) representing a garter on the thigh. This action and its photographic representation speak for themselves. She continues her revolution of the fate of women with: *Identitätstransfer B* (1972), which evokes the question of rape, a subject that still resonates today. In this series she underlines the necessity of appropriating one's own body and taking out the social effects of patriarchal culture. She looks closely into the consequences of these effects on her own body. With these actions, she takes a stance.

Works from the *Body Configurations* (1972-76) series are on view in the ground floor and upstairs rooms. They constitute another type of action taking place in the city, inside an apartment or in nature, where she uses her body in a nearly sculptural way to underline the lines, the spaces, and the powerful constraints of her surroundings. With this, she proposes—ahead of other practices—to appropriate the exterior as a museum, to act outside.

By playing with her body in public spaces, she reveals how power relations inhabit the actual structure of the street and its buildings. She adds a conceptual dimension, where the body becomes like a pencil drawing lines. The insertion of lines and colors on the photograph emphasizes this dimension. This almost pictorial approach to photography is even more present in the works set in nature, which references her conceptual photographs.

VALIE EXPORT also experimented with video, a medium which, at the time, offered a larger space for freedom, and shows how the artist elaborates on and conceptualizes her own work.

Two video works, *BODY TAPE* (1970) and *Remote..., Remote...* (1973), are included in the exhibition. In addition, to recognize the importance of the symbolic inversion of gender codes, posters of *Aktionshose: Genitalpanik* (1969) are displayed on the gallery walls as they once were in the street. VALIE EXPORT seeks in a phenomenological manner something on her body, her place, the question of the artist. I think she has a process, which is close to Bruce Nauman's, where everything must be questioned in order to then exist. Like she says, her nerves spoke and her rebellion became the motor which pushed boundaries, including her own. I think this goes further than a psychological dimension, as it touches on artistic questions both structural and conceptual. She transcends the political with her photographic work, which stuns with its atemporal pertinence.

More than ever before, her work seems relevant. Unfortunately – or fortunately – we must now and always remain in high alert around the question of the place of women in our societies. It's far from being won. I think it's precisely because of work like VALIE EXPORT's that women today are more

able to take on different roles for themselves and others. Like every great artist, she opens doors, widens the field, and transforms the territory. The work of VALIE EXPORT offers us an example of how to invent your own life, while still questioning oneself constantly in order to act on oneself and the exterior.”

Caroline Bourgeois

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