

Anne Jud, Tony Just, Marita Liiten, Tamar Magradze,
Alex Müller, Xavier Robles de Medina, Stephanie Stein
June 23 - August 31, 2023

The biographical is slippery and malleable, like wet clay. It is a material, and a medium among others, to be deployed self-consciously. The exhibition 'Biographicality' is about the phenomena of addressing (or choosing not to address) the biographical in art. This topic suggested itself because when I write about art, the question always arises to what extent the artist's biography impacts our understanding of what they do. I have always felt drawn to biographies with breaks, curls, or half-truths. It is hard to square contradictory notions of the biographical currently at work in contemporary art. This makes it worth examining, especially as the biographical is often the quickest point of access to a work. (*'Where are they from? How old is he? Where did she study? Who does she work with? Why do they paint?'*) Traditional art history began with the inclusion of artistic biographies and established the idea of the artist with a character and flaws. Along the way, though, notions of 'high art' pulled in a contrary transcendental direction, above the fray of the artist's particular subjectivity and socio-political circumstances. Then the author died but became multiple subjectivities, each needing articulation. Now personalised, auto-fictional, biographical approaches to art again signal progressiveness and activism. But we are also permanently encouraged to confess for attention and economy. Understandably, some artists (even those with biographies that have much truth to speak to power) prefer to obfuscate the biographical to claim the space of high art. All the artists in this multi-generational exhibition have a strong connection to Berlin as a home of choice. Beyond that, the exhibition aesthetically embraces a multiplicity of voices, styles, genres and forms.

Anne Jud (1953-2016) was a protagonist of the West Berlin art scene in the late 1970s and 1980s. A founding and only female member of legendary Kreuzberg artist space Galerie am Mortizplatz (1977-1981), her work had three main outlets – a series of actions and performances, art objects made from clearly faked US dollar notes, and her work as a costume designer for ground-breaking and experimental theatre and film. This is the first extensive display of her work in Berlin for many years. Painter Tony Just's most recent solo exhibition of abstract paintings soaked with personal experience – 'I am Pleasure' – just closed at Efremidis. His spatial intervention in this exhibition has to do with release and dispersal. His four spirit paintings hover over the exhibition like dark angels or gargoyles, reimagining the gallery as a medieval meeting hall. Painter Marita Liiten was born in Finland and came to Berlin with a friend on the train in 1968, where she then studied design and visual communication. Discovering there was no market at all for her ecological and feminist work, she ran a home-made jewellery business trading on the Ku'damm while painting privately in her studio for decades. This is the first exhibition of her lush evergreen work in many years. Tamar Magradze hails from Georgia. Her work encompasses both film and painting. Her video *Au pair* (2014) lampoons stereotypes about young women from Eastern Europe. Painting, the artist told me, is what she does to decompress from the gruelling process of getting a documentary film made. This seemed to me to be the most honest and original reason to paint I have ever heard. Her paintings often summon up mystic, stoically independent energies, like fictitious ancestors there to guide and fortify. Alex Müller, like many artists in Berlin, has a long history of making and showing with a strong emphasis on the self-initiated. Her painting

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and objects are at turns playfully absurd (particularly in response to their own materials) or imbued with cultural references, for example, to silent film. Simultaneously with this exhibition she has a survey exhibition 'Bis die Zeit Vergeht' at Kunsthalle Nuremberg. I recently visited a corner of Berlin with Alex and discussed the biographical at length, starting at her grandfather's grave. Xavier Robles de Medina comes from an artistic family in Suriname. He works with archival images, painstakingly translating them into mesmerising paintings. In this exhibition his works address his own history and impulse for making, as well as the fate of a village swamped by a hydroelectric dam project. The components of Stephanie Stein's precision sculptural installation *Devices To Enter A Space* (2018) insert themselves like surgical instruments. They have an inside of pure graphite and an eggshell outside which can become visible or not, depending on your point of view. Her corner piece *Not what I am, Not what I know* (2018) might be a black mirror or is a safe haven for an introvert?

Extending the exhibition on Sunday 27 August 2023, 3-5 pm – will be an afternoon of readings. Kirsty Bell (author of 'The Undercurrents', Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2022) will read from her current work, distinguished London-based author Jennifer Higgie will present her latest book 'The Other Side' (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2022), and daniel ward will read from their poetry in a free response to the exhibition.

– Dominic Eichler, Berlin 2023

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