

Press Release

## BIRGIT JÜRGENSSEN

28 June – 3 August

Opening Thursday 27 June, 6-8pm



Birgit Jürgenssen, *Untitled*, 1988 © Estate Birgit Jürgenssen, Vienna

*My works are a jig-saw puzzle about the causes of erotic manipulation and their relationship to self-confidence. A game of self and the other, about subject and object, private and public. It is also the confrontation of one reality with another vision of the same reality.*

– Birgit Jürgenssen, 1992

Alison Jacques presents an exhibition of work by Austrian artist Birgit Jürgenssen (1949-2003). Her practice examines women's interior lives refracted in exterior systems of power. Many of Jürgenssen's works focus on the domestic life of a mythic figure, the 'hausfrau': an ideal bourgeois Austrian housewife.

This exhibition showcases the conceptual and material diversity of Jürgenssen's work, including lesser known drawings and photographs from the 1970s and 1980s alongside previously unseen collage and painting.

The works in the exhibition trace Jürgenssen's varied yet constant critique of prevailing hierarchies, namely the male-dominated Viennese Actionism movement, and honours her artistic avowal 'to use all the media that were available'. A major work within the show

# ALISON JACQUES

relates to Jürgenssen's 1988 portfolio of twenty-four drawings for Wolford, the Austrian textile manufacturer, producers of luxury hosiery and underwear. The works depict women's disembodied legs and shoes, a recurring motif throughout the artist's practice. Jürgenssen handles her conceptual concerns with humour and material dexterity, working within tenets of Surrealism to subtly undermine both gender hierarchies and the art historical canon. While the Wolford drawings were never actually commissioned, the series marks an important moment in Jürgenssen's wider practice, where labour, the feminine, and the object intersect.

A distinct system of uncanny codes and metaphors extends throughout the exhibition; hair, leaves, shoes, screens, masks and mirrors function as tools to explore female identity and the act of image-making. Acanthus leaves mask certain parts of the body in photographs, figuring Jürgenssen as a natural, feminine being. Other self-portraits distort the body, as masks isolate faces and concave mirror trickery creates impossible corporeal configurations. As Jürgenssen states: 'The identity of the woman has been made to disappear - all except for the fetishized object, which is the focus of male fantasy'. Throughout the exhibition the female body appears - not simply as a physical presence, but as a medium for experience - offering, as Jürgenssen described, 'another vision of the same reality'.

Born and educated in Vienna, Jürgenssen studied and went on to teach at the University of Applied Arts, and the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna. Jürgenssen lived and worked in Vienna until her death in 2003. In 2022, her work was exhibited at *Milk of Dreams*, the 59th Venice Biennale, curated by Cecilia Alemani, and was the subject of a major retrospective at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk in 2019, which also toured to Kunsthalle Tübingen, and GAMeC, Bergamo. Group exhibitions include *The Beguiling Siren Is Thy Crest* at MoMA, New York (2017); *Women House* at Monnaie de Paris (2017); and *Virginia Woolf: An Exhibition Inspired by Her Writings* at Tate St Ives, Cornwall (2018). Museum collections include Centre Pompidou, Paris; MAK, Vienna; MoMA, New York; Museum der Moderne, Salzburg and Tate, London. Jürgenssen has an upcoming two-person exhibition at ICA Milan, curated by Maurizio Cattelan and Marta Papini (2024), and is included in *The Traumatic Surreal* at the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds (2024).

## For further information:

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