

## PRESS RELEASE

### **BIRGIT JÜRGENSSEN: WORKS FROM THE 1970s** **12 OCTOBER – 14 NOVEMBER 2013** **PRIVATE VIEW: MONDAY 14 OCTOBER 6 – 8 pm**

*"I wanted to show the common prejudices against women, the role models that society ascribed to them, the ones with which I was always confronted – and I wanted to depict everyday misunderstandings."*

Birgit Jürgenssen, 2003

Alison Jacques Gallery presents the first UK solo show of Austrian artist Birgit Jürgenssen (1949 – 2003). This exhibition has been realised in close collaboration with the Birgit Jürgenssen Estate and Galerie Hubert Winter in Vienna and focuses on one decade of the artist's life: 1970 – 1980.

An eloquent but radical counter to the male-dominated Viennese Actionism movement, Jürgenssen's diverse body of work stretched across performance, photography, drawing and sculpture and was heavily autobiographical while simultaneously universal. She powerfully subverted the social stereotyping, fetishism and forced domestication of women and it's only now that her work is being rediscovered and acknowledged for its importance. Recent international museum acquisitions include MoMA, New York and Centre Pompidou, Paris.

The main work in this show is the largest and most complex piece Jürgenssen ever made: an installation titled *10 Days – 100 Photos* (1980). As its title suggests, it's composed of 100 of her performative Polaroids and photographs taken over a 10-day period, arranged asymmetrically through intersecting lines of narrative. What's immediately evident is that, although all the images are self-portraits, Jürgenssen's face is either not included or hidden by a mask behind fur. According to her, 'the identity of the woman has been made to disappear – all except for the fetishized object, which is the focus of male fantasy'.

Another piece that's both central to this exhibition and Jürgenssen's practice is *Amazon* (1974), in which a mother and child stand holding hands like latter-day holy figures on a tall iron chair. The mother's stature as a strident contemporary Amazon is emphasized by her sheath of arrows, her daughter looking up to her in expectation and a colour photograph of a fragile male 'Ophelia' drowning in water and leaves on the chair behind them. By portraying her as the hero, and him as vulnerable, Jürgenssen poetically inverted mid-'70s societal norms.

Among Jürgenssen's most iconic works are her shoe series, made in the '70s and manifested in sculpture and drawings. She made less than 18 sculptures, each created from different materials including porcelain and wax, and less durable media such as rust and bread. In this show, *Relict Shoe* (1976), made from an animal's jaw bone and presented on a silk cushion, is shown alongside *Flyweight Shoes* (1973), two paper thin organza boots with what appear to be perfectly preserved dead flies sewn into the fabric. The shoe drawings, shown alongside the sculptures, reveal a playful but dark humour in her work. This power of humour in Jürgenssen's armoury is also present throughout many other drawings in the exhibition, most notably in a study of three pubis shaped rocks entitled *Beauty Competition* (1978), and a drawing of Marlene Dietrich not only smoking in bed while she holds her iconic pose, but keeping her eye-lash curlers on.

Many of the photographs in the show relate to performances such as *Kitchen Apron* (1974-75) and *Nest* (1979). Some lesser-known performative photographs such as *Nun* (1979) have been hand-coloured by the artist. A black-masked, shrouded Jürgenssen lies prostrate in a theatrical setting in this diptych, which she has then painted in gold, bringing another layer of performance to her process.

Birgit Jürgenssen (1949 – 2003) was born in Vienna and studied at the University of Applied Arts, Vienna (1968 – 1971). Selected solo museum exhibitions include *Birgit Jürgenssen: Retrospective*, Bank Austria Kunstforum, Vienna (2011); *Birgit Jürgenssen*, Sammlung Verbund, Vienna, (2009); and *Schuhwerk. Subversive Aspects of 'Feminism'*, MAK, Vienna, (2004). Notable recent group shows include *XL: 19 New Acquisitions in Photography*, MoMA, New York (2013); *Privacy*, Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (2013); and *elles@centrepompidou*, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2010); Jürgenssen's works appear in a number of museum collections, including MoMA, New York; Centre Pompidou, Paris; MAK, Vienna and Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna. Two major monographs exist, published by Hatje Cantz / Sammlung Verbund edited by Gabriele Schor and Abigail Solomon-Godeau (2009) and by Prestel edited by Gabriele Schor and Heike Eipeldauer (2011).

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