

# Collection Revisited – 1996–2016

Theo Altenberg, Judith Bernstein, Heidi Bucher, Marc Camille  
Chaimowicz, Graciela Carnevale, Cosey Fanni Tutti, Valie Export,  
Tadeusz Kantor / Eustachy Kossakowski, Anna Maria Maiolino,  
Babette Mangolte, Graciela Gutiérrez Marx, Gustav Metzger, Letícia  
Parente, Luis Pazos, Maria Pinińska-Bereś, Xanti Schawinsky,  
Katharina Sieverding, Alina Szapocznikow, Stephen Willats

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20 – *An Exhibition in Three Acts*  
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Ever since it was founded, the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst has intensively addressed the positions of artists whose work is characterised by the use of performance-based, processual or social-interventionist strategies. This has been demonstrated by solo exhibitions, such as those by Gianni Motti (2004), Spartacus Chetwynd (2007) and Karla Black (2009), and retrospectives on artists like Heidi Bucher (2004), Tadeusz Kantor (2008) and Xanti Schawinsky (2015). Many such artists, who often confront a collection with complex curation issues, have found their way into the collection. The collection presentation *Collection Revisited – 1960-1982* looks at artists from this period who use these artistic strategies to criticise and change social circumstances and the role of women, but also the rules of the art scene and a male hegemonic writing of art history. A new in-depth art-historical reception of many of these artists has taken place just in the last ten years.

This exhibition focuses on works that were produced between 1960 and 1982, and added to the museum collection in the last 15 years. For instance, Gustav Metzger with his auto-creative art (*Liquid Crystal Environment*, 1965-66/1998) and Xanti Schawinsky with his painting experiments, such as *transition* (1960), a painting he produced using a car, are early examples of artists focusing on the process and on experimentation with materials. Metzger's installation in particular, psychedelic colourful projections created by means of heat-sensitive liquid crystals, can be considered a «performance-based» work in the original sense, a work that «enacts» itself and constantly transforms as soon as it is supplied with energy. Many of the exhibited artists are also characterised by their social-interventionist strategies. Stephen Willats (*Learning to Live Within a Confined Space*, 1978) is seen as a pioneer of art that uses research and sociological methods, due to his interest in architecture and the social communities that live within it; he often turns his attention to social housing. This incorporation of socio-political issues is also reflected, for instance, in the work of Judith Bernstein (*Union Jack Off Flag*, 1967), Tadeusz Kantor (*Der Brief*, Warsaw, 1967) and Graciela Carnevale (*Archivo Tucumán Arde*, 1968), who also repeatedly use art as activist, provocative, political denunciation. With issues regarding human existence, gender roles or feminist concerns, the work of Katharina Sieverding (*Transformer*, 1973-74), Anna Maria Maiolino (*Entrevistas*, 1981), Cosey Fanni Tutti (*Life Forms*, 1973-79) and Alina Szapocznikow (*Cendrier d'ambiance*, 1972) make up another key thematic block in this exhibition. Many of the exhibited artists are brought together for the first time in the context of this exhibition, thus conveying the exhibition programmes aspiration to view art history as a moving process that is open to examinations and variations.

**Theo Altenberg** was born in 1952 in Mönchengladbach. While studying at Werkkunstschule Krefeld, he came across the performances of the Viennese actionists. Despite being immediately fascinated by the radicalism of these artistic statements, he first founded a commune in Krefeld. However, this residential project failed as a result of dissatisfaction with the lack of political and artistic anarchy in the day-to-day life of the residential community. His search for a more experimental form of coexistence eventually led him to Otto Mühl's commune near Vienna. He photogra-

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phed life in this commune from 1973 to 1978. These images document one of the most radical experiments with alternative lifestyles. Life in the commune was a life of considerable psychological introspection, cut off from the outside world. A wide variety of forms of free love and sexual culture were put into practice. The potential that this released manifested itself in film scripts, photographic works and paintings. New social utopias and disciplines such as democracy research, linguistic analysis and exchange analysis emerged. The practice of living together with children in the commune was heavily criticised from outside, as was their antiauthoritarian upbringing. Suspicions of sexual assault and child neglect were raised. According to Altenberg, the commune «had the most consistent left-wing practice, because we had achieved collective ownership and had overcome jealousy, because we interpreted revolt hedonistically and combined it with psychoanalytical theory.» This experiment fell apart in 1990 when Otto Mühl's «monarchy» collapsed. Theo Altenberg lives in Berlin.

Since the late 1960s, **Judith Bernstein** (b. 1942 in Newark, USA) has used an iconography characterised by sexual explicitness and based on the visual language of youths, combining this with text fragments. Many motifs in Bernstein's paintings are reminiscent of the scribbling and graffiti that can be found, for instance, in public toilets. Bernstein ventures deep into a male sexist visual culture, so as to level criticism at male-dominated power structures. For instance, she criticises the Vietnam War in the drawing *Union Jack Off Flag* (1967). This drawing shows a US flag, on which the words «Union Jack-Off on Vietnam» are written, alongside two crossed penises. Her combination of sexual aggression, humorous self-empowerment and criticism of violence has led to censorship on many occasions throughout Bernstein's career and has long inhibited her exhibition activity.

**Heidi Bucher** (1926-93, Winterthur) became famous for her latex skinnings of spatial architectures in the 1970s and 1980s. Another equally central aspect of her work is her engagement with the analogy of the dress and the house as carriers of mental and historical residues – as «garments» with the potential to preserve the psychological traces of their wearers or occupants. The cycle of works entitled *Body Shells* (1972-73) comes from the early period in this Swiss artists oeuvre. She worked together with Carl Bucher, her husband at the time, to produce foam sculptures, the exteriors of which had mother of pearl rubbed into them, a substance that the artist would continue to use later. The resulting objects are reminiscent of organic materials or exotic deep-sea life forms on the one hand, while others borrow from the futuristic fashion of that era. The film shown in the exhibition is based on a performance that she staged with her family on Venice Beach in Los Angeles.

**Graciela Carnevale** (b. 1942 in Marcos Juarez, lives and works in Rosario, Argentina) was a member of the Argentine artists collective Grupo de Arte de Vanguardia de Rosario, founded in 1965. In 1968, together with artists from Buenos Aires, she carried out an artistic and political action under the title *Tucumán Arde* (Tucumán is Burning), which thematically addressed the military regimes economisation measures in the province Tucumán, the resulting financial consequences and the radically worsened living conditions. *Tucumán Arde* became a metaphor for a new artistic practice that combined political activism with opposition to established artistic conventions while searching for a new aesthetic. In the project series Ciclo de Arte Experimental, organised by the same artists' group, Graciela Carnevale performed *Acción del Encierro* (Confinement Action) in October 1968, in which visitors to the preview were locked into the exhibition space for over an hour without being notified in advance. In a flyer that she handed out after the action was finished, she declared: «Through an act of aggression, the work is intended to raise the observers awareness of the violence carried out in daily life. (...) The intention is for each and every observer to have the experience of being locked up, of discomfort, of fear, and ultimately the feeling of asphyxiation and oppression that an unforeseen act of violence causes.» The exhibited documents pertaining to this action come from an edited and reproduced version of the archive *Tucumán Arde*, which the artist created and manages to this day.

With his early-1970s installations and performances that thematically revolve around the contrasts between the intimate and the formal, the private and the public, and the associated circumstances of life, artist **Marc Camille Chaimowicz** (b. 1947 in Paris, France) joined the ranks of a new generation of artists who operated far away from art-intrinsic discourses and whose way of working deliberately defied any categorisation. Chaimowicz's room installation *Celebration? Realife Revisited* (1972/2000/2002) was re-exhibited for the first time in the year 2000. The silver walls come across like silver screens and in the objects grouped on the floor, there is the inherent possibility of a sentimental meaning: spotlights make flowers, laundry and masks the centre of attention. The atmosphere is defined, as it were, by reflections from mirror balls and the music of David Bowie and Janis Joplin. In contrast to 1970s minimalist neutrality, *Celebration? Realife Revisited* attempts to create an exaggerated subjectivity, to make an anti-statement: renunciation of the permanent object, in favour of a time-dependent process that gets the observer emotionally

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involved, as well as renunciation of belief in socio-political work that reduces art to mere information. The hypnotically turning mirror ball reflects life in its constant action and rotation. Where the ornaments and relics of a past celebration emerge in a wash of lights, they convey the melancholy impression of the past, of vanishing and of loss.

In her works, **VALIE EXPORT** (b. 1940) puts herself through various (social) experiments, for instance in the form of public performances. Since the early 1960s, she has researched the construction of societally assigned gender roles and experimented with media, such as video and later also film. EXPORT treats the body, often also her own, as an intersection of private and public images of identity. *Metanoia* is both a selected compilation from the collection of EXPORT's film work and a stand-alone artwork, consisting of 29 individual video DVDs. The title of this assembly of EXPORT's historical works on film has Greek origins, combining the words *meta*, meaning after/beyond, and *noia*, meaning mind. This title describes a phenomenon that defies logic, it describes the concept of rethinking and of thinking differently, which was already a distinctive characteristic of EXPORT's artworks at an early stage. This compilation includes documentation of the performances *Mann & Frau & Animal* (Man & Woman & Animal, 1970-73), *Hyperbulia* (Hyperbulia, 1973) and *Syntagma* (1983). Documentation of the legendary work *Tap- und Tastkino* (Tap and Touch Cinema, 1968) is also shown in this exhibition. The artist refers to this street action at Stachus in Munich as the «first direct womens film». VALIE EXPORT uses the means of expanded cinema to thematise (male) voyeurism from a feminist perspective.

**Cosey Fanni Tutti** (b. 1951 in Kingston upon Hull, Great Britain), who has worked as a model for mens magazines and as a professional striptease dancer, draws on these experiences gathered in the sex industry and the associated implications to create her artworks. This artist became internationally famous with the industrial/noise band Throbbing Gristle and, from the early 1970s onwards, as a member of the performance group COUM. This group provoked the British public and the art scene with political and sexual transgressions, culminating in the scandalous and legendary 1976 exhibition «Prostitution» at the ICA in London. Here, Cosey Fanni Tutti exhibited the images from her work as a nude model, which had been published in magazines, calling them «performance art». This elevated the images to the status of an artwork on the one hand, while also serving as a form of art criticism. In her artwork, Cosey Fanni Tutti, whose work as a pin-up model is something that she sees as a role-play, addresses concepts like authenticity, masquerade, and the construction of multiple feminine identities. Cosey Fanni Tutti's work was not appreciated by critics: it was marginalised by male critics and considered counterproductive by feminist female critics.

**Tadeusz Kantor** (b. 1915 in Wielopole Skrzyńskie, d. 1990 in Krakow) is one of the most significant Polish artists of the 20th century. Alongside Kantor's work as a visual artist, he is also seen as a theatre reformer, who oriented himself towards the ideas of avant-gardists like Antonin Artaud and Alfred Jarry, but also Bauhaus theatre. Kantor was interested in breaking the illusion of the traditional theatre, distancing it from the traditional stage situation, and creating an opening towards real life. Kantor was among those 20th-century artists who proclaimed, and put into practice, an open multidisciplinary concept of art. The exhibited happening photographs are by **Eustachy Kossakowski** (1925-2001, Warsaw, Poland), who spent decades photographically documenting Kantor's artwork. One of Kantor's most famous happenings was the Sea Concert (1967) from the multi-part *Panorama-Happening am Meer* (Panoramic Sea Happening, 1967), which took place on the Baltic Sea coast at Lazy near Osiek. A conductor, played by Edward Krasiński, one of the most important representatives of the Polish art scene in the 1960s and 1970s, stood on a platform in the water with his back to the beach and conducted the expanse of the sea. The 1967 happening *Der Brief* (The letter) took place in Warsaw. Seven elderly genuine postmen in postal service uniform dragged a letter, 14 x 2 metres in size and addressed to the Foksal Gallery, through the streets of Warsaw. The audience waited in the gallery. Regular reports on the current whereabouts of the letter came in regularly, until the postmen finally pushed through the throng of people with the gigantic delivery. A tape recording played the surprised reaction of an unknown letter recipient. Prompted by this monologue, some of those present read aloud from personal letters. At the end of the happening, the participants destroyed the letter.

Anna **Maria Maiolino** (b. 1942 in Scalea, Italy; lives and works in São Paulo) is one of her generation's most famous female Brazilian artists. Maiolino's artistic practice is directly linked to personal issues: she researches the relations and processes of life, of personal identity and of the body. Malleable materials, such as clay, and recurring organic forms, such as the egg, make the processual nature of her works visible. In her performance-based photographic work *Entrevidas* (Between Lives, 1981), a person walks between raw eggs that are densely spread over the ground, thus visualising the intangible moment of holding ones balance while walking. This work was produced during the military dictatorship in Brazil and can be read as an image of despotic situations and the associated difficulty of acting in a social context.

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Alongside her work as a camera operator for filmmakers and artists like Michael Snow and Chantal Akerman, and in parallel to her own works on film, **Babette Mangolte** (b. 1941 in Montmorot, France) began to document performances by the New York avant-garde on film and in photographs at the start of the 1970s. In so doing, she focused on performances in the fields of dance, art and theatre. Much of the known visual material from performances in the 1970s and 1980s by artists like Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Simone Forti, Richard Foreman and Robert Wilson, comes from Mangolte. With her installation *Touching* (2008), Mangolte makes part of her comprehensive archive literally accessible: photographs from her collaborative 1970s works are spread out on a table and can be arranged in new typologies. Mangolte is interested in trying out different image types and visual presentations of documentation with the observer; in addition to this manner of presentation, she also uses the iconic single image and the slide show. The film *Collage 2* (2007), which is part of the installation, is a montage of street scenes from 1970s New York and sequences from her films *What Maisie Knew* (1975) and *The Camera: Je Or La Camera: I* (1978).

**Graciela Gutiérrez Marx** (b. 1945 in Argentina) became famous in the mid-1970s, at the start of the Argentine dictatorship, for her collaboration with the artist Edgardo Antonio Vigo under the name G. E. Marx-Vigo. One central aspect of her artwork is that of visualising strategies from mail art: a mobile, decentralised, institution-free form of art production, in which the focus is on communication within a network. In a series of photographs, *Material Metamorphosis* (1981/2013) documents the metamorphosis of a garment worn by her mother for daily (house)work, which was cut into rectangular patches that the artist sent in the mail, then received again and reassembled. Thus, an article of daily use becomes a symbolic object that bears not only physical marks, but also its own new narrative within it. In the work *Mamablanca Treasure* (1981/2013), the artist caused her existing network to «materialise» by asking her mail-artist acquaintances to each send an individual consignment for her mother. The photographic documentation shows the subsequent collective and symbolic burial of the sent objects among her family in her garden.

**Gustav Metzger** (b. 1926 in Nuremberg, Germany) premiered his *Liquid Crystal Environment* (1965–66/1998) at a rock concert by the group The Who at the Roundhouse in London. The kaleidoscope-like structures made of liquid crystals provided a psychedelic stage set. In the 1960s atmosphere of social awakening, Gustav Metzger developed his notion of «auto-destructive art», a type of art that includes and constitutes a self-destruct mechanism, representing his strategy for reclaiming the territory of art. In five manifestos, he has discussed the issue of the conditions and possibilities of art after the Holocaust and Hiroshima. Gustav Metzgers escape from fascist Germany in 1939 showed him the possibility of destruction of ones own existence and still continues to influence this artist of Jewish origins. Metzger later expanded the notion of auto-destructive art by adding the dimension of auto-creative art, to which the *Liquid Crystal Environment* also appertain. The concept behind this, is that of a work that can create itself from itself, without the determining hand of the artist.

**Letícia Parente** (b. 1930 in Salvador, Brazil, d. 1991 in Rio de Janeiro) had a doctorate in chemistry and worked as a lecturer at two Brazilian universities. At the same time, she was also one of the pioneers of video art in Brazil. In her works, her own body is often the subject and object with which she carries out incisive performative actions, so as to free it from cultural, political and sexist ideologies. During a period when physical torture was a genuine day-to-day threat, she countered it with her body art, in order to speak out against discrimination based on gender, skin colour or class. In the video *In* (1975), Parente climbs into an empty wardrobe and symbolically hangs herself up on the only coat hanger inside it, by means of her pullover. In this performance, the artist uses a simple wordless gesture to sum up the feeling of powerlessness in a single image. This acquisition enhances the collection with a video piece by an artist who was part of a specific scene that comprised just a few artists, who were the first to experiment with a Super-8 camera in Brazil at the start of the 1970s. Only shortly afterwards, the resulting artworks defined the canon of video art.

Much of the work of **Luis Pazos** (b. 1940 in La Plata, Argentina) consists of performances and photographic documentation thereof. Pazos instrumentalises the human body, in order to study the political ideologies that are inscribed in it. Among the things that he thus reflects on, is the history of his home country Argentina, which from the late 1960s onwards, was characterised by instability and subsequent dictatorship. *Transformaciones de masas en vivo* (1973) presents photographs of «living sculptures» formed according to Pazos instructions. People use their bodies to make a series of simple, clearly standardised forms, such as arrows, for example. On the one hand, this transformation of living masses into geometric figures describes military drill and, on the other hand, it also describes disciplining within armed resistance organisations. Pazos thus demonstrates political ideologies power to form bodies, whereas their performative harmony becomes a medium for the dominant power structures. Pazos is firmly convinced that art has a

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duty to adopt a position in relation to the reality of the country in which it is produced, and to question every manifestation of authority and violence, while fiercely advocating freedom.

**Maria Pinińska-Bereś** (b. 1931 in Poznan, d. 1999 in Krakow, Poland) was a key pioneer of feminist art and had a major influence on sculptural discourse in Poland. In her sculptures, installations and performances, she made references, in terms of content and form, to the domestic domain that, from a conventional patriarchal perspective, is assigned to women. For instance, she integrated everyday objects like kitchen aprons, dustpans and tea kettles into her works and commandeered lightweight materials, such as plywood, padded textiles and papier-mâché, which can be seen as materials pertaining to handicraft with feminine connotations. In this respect, Maria Pinińska-Bereś did not defy the clichés of traditional gender roles, but instead appropriated them, so as to immediately expose them as constructs. The sculpture *Hot Tears* (1982) was produced in response to the martial law imposed by the Polish communist government from 1981 to 1983. In that era, in which the administration, economy and media were militarised, the life of the general public was characterised by repression and fear of arrest. This experience led to a shift in the content of this artists work, towards a concrete position with regard to the current political situation. During those years, for example, she performed a number of (undocumented) actions, in which she used the forces of nature to dispatch letters with political philosophical content.

Throughout his life, Swiss artist **Alexander «Xanti» Schawinsky** (b. 1904 in Basel, d. 1979 in Locarno) was mainly known for his work in the theatre department at the Bauhaus. In the 1930s, while working as a teacher at Black Mountain College, a legendary art college in North Carolina that provided refuge for many European emigrants during the Nazi era, Schawinsky took his Bauhaus work as a starting point from which to develop his dramatic theory known as «Spectodrama». This involves multimedia productions that represent an early form of the «happening», which would later be made famous at the same institution by John Cage. Schawinskys work as a painter also addresses dissolution of the mediums boundaries and focuses on the process, one case in point being his Track series, which he «painted» with the aid of a car. The underlying concept is that of incorporating the human body in as many different ways as possible, and of going beyond the traditional mode of production that uses the brush, easel, oil paint and canvas.

Thematically, *Transformer* (1973-74) by **Katharina Sieverding** (b. 1945 in Prague, Czech Republic) revolves around the complex and multilayered issue of identity and the exchange between the individual and societys structures. Here, as in many of Sieverdings works, a self-reflective look at her own physiognomy provides the starting point, from which she artistically formulates commentary on contemporary social conditions. The work *Transformer* is a slide installation with eight projectors that produce a captivating comprehensive mise-en-scène with an irregular rhythm. It was created for the legendary eponymous group exhibition at the Museum of Art Lucerne in 1974, which encompassed the theme of transvestism, and in which Sieverding was the only female artist. The slides shown present portraits that differ in terms of lighting, facial poses, and contrasts: by means of double exposure, the artists face is superimposed on that of her partner, Klaus Mettig, resulting in a fictitious, androgynous face that appears sphinx-like and eerie. Each minimal change reveals a new facet of expression, an incessant transformation of shifting identities.

With her semi-figurative amorphous sculptures made of polyester and polyurethane, **Alina Szapocznikow** (1926-73, Poland/France), along with Eva Hesse (1936-70) and Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010), was one of the key female protagonists of 20th-century art who advocated a post-surrealist physicality between poetry and trauma. In the 1970s, she produced several works of a distinctively conceptual nature. The photographic documentation of *Cendrier d'ambiance* (1972), a performance never presented in an exhibition context, was realised for a group exhibition curated by Annette Messager, after the artist had fallen ill with cancer. The simplicity of the experimental arrangement is striking: During the opening, a block of butter was to serve as an ashtray. Here, the glowing cigarette butts penetration of the soft mass becomes a poetic metaphor that can also be read in a socio-political way – as antagonism, fire clashing with water, but also as synthesis, an act of fusion.

Since the 1960s, British artist **Stephen Willats** (b. 1943, London, Great Britain) has addressed socio-scientific theories and methods, studying the ideologies of social communities by reflecting on, but also applying, these approaches. Much like a sociologist, he assembles project teams, conducts interviews that inquire into the respective ways of life, living environments, dreams and realities, analyses these, and presents his (partly subjective) results in the form of questionnaires, audio tapes, Super-8 films, photographs, collages and texts. The diagrammatic collages in *Learning to Live Within a Confined Space* (1978) address the conditions of social residential construction and its restricting effect on the occupants of Friars Wharf Estate in Oxford. This is a residential building complex that is geographically isolated from the surrounding neighbourhoods by a river, roads and car parks. In interviews and photographic documentation, Willats brings the individuality of the occupants to the fore, and asks where the singularities and freedoms of the indivi-

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dual reside. Willats is interested in the mechanisms that the occupants have developed, with which to express their individuality within the buildings uniformity, and also in the resulting forms of self-organisation. In addition to the collages, documentary evidence from the artists work process and interviews with surveyed occupants is exhibited in a display case.

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