



06 Oct – 22 Dec 2023

WOMEN OF THE '20s

Opening reception: Thurs 05 Oct, 6–8pm
 Frieze week programme to be announced.

Artists:

Coco Crampton
 Agata Madejska
 Hanna Mattes
 Devin T. Mays
 Sadie Murdoch
 Lydia Ourahmane with Daniel Blumberg
 Ronit Porat
 Anna Wachsmuth
 Ines Weizman

Belmacz's Autumn 2023 exhibition, *Women of the '20s* celebrates artistic practices that jazz the known. Echoing the radical freedom often associated with the 'twenties,' a sense of innovation, desire and sparky new found life, the artists ensembled [sic] here each utilise processes of subversion in order to shake up ways of seeing. That is, through covert operations, observations, re-re-stagings, exchanges, and vivacious plays each of the artists in *Women of the '20s* embraces epochal subversion. And in this way, their works metaphorically sidestep what has come before, demanding that we feel the beat in life's shift changes.

We are not in the business of looking back with fondness nor nostalgia. And neither are the artists in this exhibition. Their artworks do not operate through fantasy or romance. Rather, embracing syncopation and artistic porousness, their works speak beyond arbitrary material categories and positions. Here, the grains of media and mediums shift and shake, not knowing where to stop, they writhe with a gold-tipped energy becoming their own after-glow, their own recumbent sound and legacy.

From their investigations around historical figures and radical modernist movements the works of Sadie Murdoch and Ines Weizman appear to set the tempo for *Women of the '20s*. The visual remains of archival history are given new life through Sadie's inkjet photo print. Here, working with an iconic photograph of the Bauhaus' weaving department, Sadie uses

21st-century processes of image enhancement to give the lives held in the monochrome pages of the canonical archive a new sense of aliveness, one that glitters close by but that retains the starlit-quality of temporal mystery. In this way, Saide's work repositions the off-hidden eminence of Modernism's female protagonists. Ines' video essay (first installed as part of her exhibition at the Biennale Architettura 2023, Venice, Italy) traces Joséphine Baker's militant connections in North Africa and the Middle East. Co-opting the freedom afforded to her as a performing body, Baker's underground activities for the anti-fascist Allied forces in the region operated through entertainment. Held in relation to contemporary events, both bodies of work convey the radicality offered through a performative sleight of hand.

Sculptural gestures by Agata Madejska and Coco Crampton echo something of this performativity. Each artist operates through a distinct set of aesthetic references, often meaning their works don a particular face, be this cool (Agata) or playful (Coco). Rather than being definable however, the way each artist deploys material subversion allows their works to speak in pointed double talk. For Agata, this subversion arrives in this exhibition through a fabric-based work. Echoing both the language of architecture and that of the body, this light form fundamentally questions the way a political surround effects ways of life. Also displaying a fabric-based work, for Women of the '20s Coco takes the associative history of knitting to create a performance caprice, a bodily portrait of herself alluding to domestic norms and gendered positions entrenched in conservative society.

A conceptual collaboration, materially divergent artworks by Lydia Ourahmane and Daniel Blumberg appear together in this exhibition. At an interpretive level, both artists work through process. For Lydia process can be seen as the almost forensic logging of exchanges, how arcane trades and translations operate across differing socio-cultural contexts, so as to call out the space of the human body in autonomous systems of power, whilst for Daniel process has more to do with the way a body can record its glimmering presence. Rather than depicting a caricature of life, his figurative drawings teeter the line between what is seen and what is felt. As an experiment in process, and in recognition of their intimate proximity, for Women of the '20s both artists were given an almost exact length of 18 ct gold through which to produce a work of art. Shown together these differing records of that transaction's afterlife riff off one another to convey the agency of bodies once free from didactic means of production.

Contingency and the potentials for juxtaposition are given a materially loaded form in the works of Anna Wachsmuth and Ronit Porat. In this exhibition, part of Anna's 2022 installation Eiche Brennt [Oak Burns], two aluminium frames holding lengths of raw pebbled concrete, are affixed to the gallery's walls. In their jutting presence, this heavy pair hover counterintuitively haunting the space with something of its material fabrication, its history. Ronit's cut-up photomontages echo something of this haunting. Composed from archival photographs, these images have a surreal presence, one that is strangely inviting, harrow and quiet. Often working from traces of history, Ronit's images allude to the voices sequestered or effaced by the churning of time. Here, they linger in our present as twisted reflections, not myths or legends but as evidence of lost narratives.

For Hanna Mattes and Devin T. Mays lingering with the everyday has a particular power. Working with seemingly natural phenomena, the landscape (Hanna) and the sun (Devin), each of their lens-based works present us with a vision of existence that is softly stilted. Hanna's photographic works picture the horizon, the meeting of swathes of water and sky, bubbling. Looking at these scenes closely, it becomes apparent that these are not records of a singular place. Hanna's images are composites, seas and skies from elsewhere brought together to manufacture a sense of tranquillity. And in this way, they question a human desire to render the world linear and known. Devin's ambient video depicts an orb of glowing yellow light tentatively touched by a green-tipped beam. Like a moth circling a flame or a solar flare, this green vessel tiptoes around its burgeoning companion. Alluding to the artist's wider practice of wandering, a practice of encountering, here this simple recording becomes a melodic gesture, a revelatory intervening, something sparking life.

Artist biographies

Coco Crampton (b.1983, London, UK), studied at Norwich School of Art and Design before graduating from the Royal Academy Schools in 2014. Co-opting craft traditions through playful gesture, Coco's work breathes new life into historical forms, ranging from Victorian furniture to 20th-century design icons. Weaving together function and fiction Coco's work embodies a performativity, activated in the imagination of the viewer.

Agata Madejska (b.1979, Warsaw, Poland), graduated from Folkwang University of the Arts, Essen in 2007 and the Royal College of Art, London in 2010. Through post-(and)photographic processes, sculptural interventions, and installation, Agata delves into the multiple ways in which power can be manifest. With their liquidus feel, her works question the smooth façades of language, architecture, and public agreements — forms that hold associative or symbolic value. In turn, Agata poses deeply philosophical questions which demand viewers to think and re-think how we have come to know not only our world but ourselves in this world-space — how and why.

Hanna Mattes (b.1980, Munich, Germany), studied Fine Arts at Gerrit Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam and Linguistics at Freie Universität zu Berlin. With an interest in that which lies beyond optical capture — be this screen or lens, the filmic or the celestial — Hanna takes photographic processes as a point of departure. Through different modes of direction and documentation, her work expands fantasies, creating multiverses, where a viewer is led to question notions of 'real' and 'fallacy'. Surpassing 'the photographic,' Hanna's recent work employs sound and her body to make explicit the tensions between these notions and their effect on psychosocial behaviour.

Devin T. Mays (b.1985, Detroit, USA) originally studied Business Administration at Howard University (Washington, DC) before completing his Master of Fine Arts at University of Chicago in 2016. Devin's practice is an attempt to trust in materials. Often working with found objects, in his works the materials being used do not present themselves as anything other than what they are. And in this way, Devin highlights how the physicality of a thing transforms through one's mental engagement with it. For Devin this process of transformation is more akin to intuition and revelation, than to invention and revolution.

Sadie Murdoch (b.1965, Hexham, Northumberland) studied at Chelsea College of Art and Design and Leeds Metropolitan University. She was a student on the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Programme, New York from 2003 – 2004, and an Abbey Rome Scholar at the British School at Rome in 2002. In Sadie's photographs, she often appears as an incarnation of a historical character or event. She is part of the work in a material sense, in the re-enacted gestures and poses, the making and marking of the objects and surfaces. The registers of the drawn, the photographed and the real merge and force a consideration of how we construct and are constructed by, our encounter with the archival.

Lydia Ourahmane (b.1992, Saïda, Algeria) she studied at Camberwell College of Arts (London) before completing her studies at Goldsmiths University, London in 2014. Spanning video, sound, performance, installation, sculpture, Lydia's multidisciplinary work is imbued with spirituality, contemporary geopolitics, colonial histories, and migration. Drawing on personal and collective experiences and narratives, she questions institutional structures such as surveillance, logistics and bureaucratic processes, and the way they exercise authority.

Daniel Blumberg (b.1990, London, UK) is a musician and visual artist. In 2016 he was awarded a scholarship to study at the Royal Drawing School. Embracing the ancient technique of Silverpoint, his drawings are often of a figurative nature. Describing his practice, the curator Hans Ulrich Obrist wrote Daniel's drawings "moves very delicately between the two worlds - between music and art." Without a discernible narrative Daniel's works appear as joyous, conveying the rhythmical movements of a life.

Ronit Porat (b.1975, Kibbutz Kfar Giladi, northern Israel) studied at Hadassah College in Jerusalem, before completing her MFA at Chelsea College of the Arts, London, in 2006. Embracing photography, her work blends archival materials and biographical texts to create installations as well as two-dimensional works. Her artist book *Hunting in Time* (Sternthal Books) will be published in late 2023. In this, Ronit draws from a trilogy of exhibitions about a mysterious crime committed in Berlin at the turn of the century to tell an overlooked history through the medium of collage.

Anna Wachsmuth (b.1989, Minden, Germany) after studying Photography and Media at Fachhochschule Bielefeld, and Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design Jerusalem, in 2015 she moved to Glasgow to study Painting and Printmaking at Glasgow School of Arts before completing her MFA at Goldsmiths University in 2022. Often working through installation, Anna's work revolves around a cross-disciplinary reflection on a materials and forms, think about formalities can reveal differing cultural histories.

Ines Weizman (b. Leipzig, Germany) is an architect and theorist whose method 'Documentary Architecture' studies the material history of buildings, media and technology artefacts. Ines was trained as an architect at the Bauhaus University Weimar and the Ecole d'Architecture de Belleville in Paris, Cambridge University, and the Architectural Association where she completed her PhD thesis in History and Theory in 2005. She is currently the head of the PhD Programme at the School of Architecture, Royal College of Art, London.