

FLORENTINA 21.01. – 18.04.2011
PAKOSTA



FLORENTINA PAKOSTA, *Fist*. From the cycle »My Hands« (5/6), 1980
Private Collection © VBK Vienna, 2011

PRESS INFORMATION

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FLORENTINA PAKOSTA
21.01. – 18.04.2011

The Leopold Museum's first exhibition of 2011 is dedicated to the Austrian artist Florentina Pakosta (*1933). With around 100 works, the exhibition offers a comprehensive overview of this outstanding and unconventional contemporary artist's oeuvre to date. Prof. Rudolf Leopold, who was an admirer of Pakosta's works, had an unrelenting and determined nature himself. It comes as no great surprise, therefore, that the artist should be given this temporary and living memorial at the Leopold Museum.

The exhibition was initiated by Professor Dr. Rudolf Leopold himself before he was taken from this life so suddenly in June of last year. Rudolf Leopold greatly appreciated the painter and graphic artist Florentina Pakosta who, along with Maria Lassnig (*1919) and VALIE EXPORT (*1940), features among the most important Austrian exponents of Feminist art.



FLORENTINA PAKOSTA, Saxophone Player, 1961
Arbeiterkammer Wien © VBK Vienna, 2011

Breaking with the curriculum of the Vienna Academy and the social conventions governing female artistry at the time, Pakosta created authentic sketches in the style of social studies as early as the 1950s, capturing the anonymous characters she encountered in the bars and night clubs around the Wiener Prater with pencil, bistre and sometimes even with her lipstick. Arising out of her continuous fascination with self-portraits, she subsequently created a series of etchings entitled *Paraphrases Based on F. X. Messerschmidt's Character Heads*.

As the artist's financial situation at the time meant that she could not afford expensive oil paints, she focused instead on drawings, developing the cycle *Facial Formations* made up of large-scale, Photorealist chalk drawings with feminist and socio-critical undertones that were entirely new to Austrian art. At the same time she also created satirist works in a grotesque and humorous Pop Art style with which she sought to challenge the gender-specific status quo in a clear-sighted analysis.

In the late 1970s and early 80s, Florentina Pakosta referred to her experience of male dominance in the political and cultural sphere in a cycle of six large-scale, typologizing male portraits in a style associated with the political media culture. During that period she also created an extraordinary series of hand renderings, depicting each hand performing an expressive gesture in a huge poster format.

In her cycles entitled *Human Masses* and *Merchandise Landscapes*, the artist visualized the concept of heteronomy encountered in our everyday lives through mass production in an entirely unique manner, depicting how the individual seems to disappear in our mass society, within consumerism and among the flood of pictures prevalent in today's information media.

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FLORENTINA PAKOSTA, 1992/2, 1992
UNIQA Versicherungen AG © VBK Vienna, 2011

Florentina Pakosta eventually arrived at her current series *Tricolor Paintings* in which she dispenses with representational motifs and re-examines Constructivist principles only ever using three colors at a time. Begun in 1989, the early works pertaining to this cycle were Pakosta's response to the events of the time, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Eastern Block and the end of its associated political ideologies. With these exceptional works Pakosta has made current contributions to Geometric Abstraction that are of international consequence.

Today, Florentina Pakosta's works feature in every major exhibition and publication on Austrian contemporary art and are part of numerous prominent public and private collections.

BIOGRAPHY

- 1933 Florentina Pakosta is born in Vienna
1952-1956 studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague under V. Silovský and M. Holý Paris: first stay and studies at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière
Stays in Venice, Prague and Amsterdam
1956-1960 studies painting at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts under Josef Dobrowsky
1963 studies at the École des Beaux-Arts de Paris
1971 becomes a member of the Vienna Secession
from 1972 Pakosta studies the works of the Austrian sculptor Franz Xaver Messerschmidt (1736-1783)
from 1975 large-scale drawings entitled *Facial Formations*;
starts publishing her own prose texts
1975 Florentina Pakosta is awarded the Theodor Körner Prize
from 1977 avails herself of the stencil technique
from 1979 addresses the themes of "gestures" and *Human Masses*
1984 Pakosta receives the Prize for Graphic Arts from the City of Vienna
from 1987 *Merchandise Landscapes*
1989 *Tricolor Paintings*

Numerous solo exhibitions and participations in exhibitions in Austria and abroad, in Vienna among others at the Vienna Secession, the Albertina, the Belvedere and the Wien Museum, as well as at the Museum of Modern Art Rupertinum in Salzburg and the Austrian Cultural Institute in Rome.

Florentina Pakosta lives and works in Vienna.

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THOUGHTS ON HER OEUVRE

THE HAND AS A MESSAGE



FLORENTINA PAKOSTA, *Fist*. From the cycle
»My Hands« (5/6), 1980
Private Collection © VBK Vienna, 2011

Florentina Pakosta's oeuvre does not make for easy viewing, as most of her works show that the artist does not take life itself very lightly. While many paintings reveal ironic undertones, they always impress the beholder with their inherent seriousness. The central work of this exhibition, the clenched *Fist* from the 1980 cycle *My Hands*, portrays the fighting spirit of a woman who has always followed her own path without making any concessions. Pakosta describes herself as "strict" and "rebellious", as someone who goes against the grain. While the gesture of the raised fist is strongly reminiscent of symbols associated with the workers' movement and of the grandeur of antique sculptures, such as the hand of the colossal statue of Constantine the Great at the Capitoline Museums in Rome, the energy of Pakosta's fist is directed at an indeterminate number of possible viewers. No matter how imposing and forceful it may appear, it is not actually meant to come across as aggressive, but rather is intended as a message, as a solitary and accusatory monolith.

The gestures of the more animated hand renderings pertaining to this series resemble a sort of sign language. In their perfection and eloquence, these drawings call to mind Albrecht Dürer's *Praying Hands* or the central motif of the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*, which depicts the hand of God reaching out to that of Adam, just before Adam receives the spark of life from God. Pakosta's hand renderings are equally invested with a sort of tension from which energy seems to be released.

FIGHT FOR RECOGNITION

While Florentina Pakosta has always fought a very personal battle for artistic recognition, her struggle has ultimately been beneficial to all contemporary Austrian female artists. Pakosta joined the Vienna Secession in 1971 and became that artists association's first female board member in 1975. In 1978 she organized the exhibition *Female Secessionists*, the Secession's first exhibition dedicated exclusively to its female members.

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IMPOSING DRAWINGS: PORTRAITS OF THE “POWERFUL”



FLORENTINA PAKOSTA, Portrait Helmut Zilk, 1984
Wien Museum, Inv. 221901 © VBK Vienna, 2011

What is often most striking about Pakosta’s oeuvre is the sheer size of some of her renderings. Her oeuvre boasts many works measuring up to 1.50m, and while this format may not be unusual for oil paintings, hers are minutely detailed chalk drawings. Pakosta’s large-scale portraits of eminent personalities from the cultural sphere are equally as impressive as her aforementioned series of hand renderings. For this cycle, the artist immortalized influential politicians and artists. Pakosta herself states that she approached this task like a reporter. Certainly, there are sinister connotations to this series of frontal portraits that are almost completely devoid of any kind of emotion and her subtle criticism of male dominance in the political and intellectual sphere is evident. Franz Smola speaks of “a high degree of unfeelingness”, stating that “the portraits appear even more unapproachable owing to their rigid and linear composition”. Cornelia Cabuk calls these portraits “masculine symbols of power” and points to “documentary police shots from the Nazi-era”. However, the artist held all the personalities she thus portrayed in high esteem; but while she liked them, she also found herself to be more or less dependent on each of them. “They were the people who decided whether an exhibition was going to happen, whether a prize would be awarded”, remembers Pakosta. Among these personalities was the publicist, historian and humanist Friedrich Heer, depicted in 1981, who tirelessly fought against latent anti-Semitic sentiments and delivered the laudatory speech for Pakosta’s first solo exhibition at the Vienna Secession in 1979. Helmut Zilk was city councilman for culture at the time that his portrait was created and subsequently became minister for education and the arts that same year. The former director of the Albertina, Walter Koschatzky, had organized an exhibition of Pakosta’s works in 1984, while Viktor Matejka, communist and first city councilman for culture after the war, was in close contact with Pakosta and participated in a discussion during the artist’s exhibition at the Albertina, as did the art theoretician Peter Gorsen (1984), who contributed a text for the exhibition’s catalogue.

REALISTIC SURREALISM

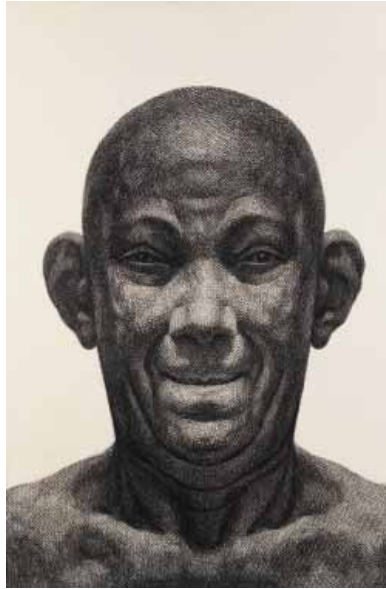
Those paintings by Pakosta which are often referred to as her surreal works are particularly severe and interesting. What is most striking about these paintings is that they could not be more realistic and Pakosta herself prefers to call them “Symbolist” renderings. These works’ protagonists, the bald-headed men in suits with their white shirts and ties, are rendered most accurately and very often appear to be smiling. This smile is reminiscent of archaic statues of male youths, the so-called kouroi, consisting of an almost indiscernible upturn of the corners of the mouth, at times gentle, but sometimes distorted into an outright grin.

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MESSERSCHMIDT AS A KINDRED SPIRIT



FLORENTINA PAKOSTA, *Deep Breaths*, 1988-2002
Ownership of the Artist © VBK Vienna, 2011

Florentina Pakosta studied the works of the late Baroque sculptor Franz Xaver Messerschmidt in great detail, looking upon him as a sort of kindred spirit. While he was once highly esteemed in Vienna around the time of Empress Maria Theresa's reign, he was to be denied a professorship his entire life. In his chosen exile in Bratislava the embittered artist created remarkable, almost manic physiognomy studies, his so-called *Character Heads*, which served as the basis for many of Pakosta's drawings. With her grimacing heads, Pakosta captured various moods that often border on foolishness and absurdity. This series yielded a laughing self-portrait (*Laughter! Self-Portrait*, 1987-2004) which can also be seen as a reference to the artistic outsider Richard Gerstl (*Self-Portrait Laughing*, 1908). Pakosta is indeed cut from the same cloth as Messerschmidt, Gerstl, Schiele, Schwarzkogler and Paul Nestlang, who has yet to be discovered, but whose works were greatly appreciated by Rudolf Leopold. They are all of them geniuses navigating the border between reality and the surreal.

BODY IMAGE

The subject of one's own body is approached in very different ways in Austrian Feminist art. While VALIE EXPORT uses her body in a risqué, aggressive manner, as in her *Tap and Touch Cinema* (1968), Maria Lassnig focuses on mutations of the body (Body Awareness). Pakosta depicted similar mutations of the female body in her early works, for example in her work *Torsi* (1959). In her Prater studies, created in the demimonde of the bars and night clubs of the Wiener Prater, Pakosta depicts women as both active individuals and passive victims. Very soon, she turned her potential for aggression towards male dominance and onto the male figure itself, as was the case in her work *Two Self-Portraits with Trapped Men* (1969). Her sketch *Little Red Riding Hood I* (1968) shows the fairy tale character straddling the wolf, catching him by the throat while holding a knife behind her back.

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MAN AS A JANUS CREATURE



FLORENTINA PAKOSTA, o.T., um 1980
Ownership of the Artist © VBK Vienna, 2011

Florentina Pakosta “avenges” the subtly or openly sexist works of her male fellow artists in her oeuvre, for instance by investing a toilet pan with male features (*Toilet Pan with Silent Flush*, 1981). She depicts men as Janus creatures, with both a human and a canine head, portraying the man as a snappy “kynos” (dog) and as a cynic. Pakosta also unsparingly shows men with scrotal hernias, even altering Leonardo da Vinci’s iconic *Homo Quadratus* in that manner (*Scrotal Hernia*, 1980). The Madonna in her work *Madonna with Scissors* (1970) is prepared to cut off the head (that of an old man) of the baby Jesus with her scissors. In the 1970s and 80s, Pakosta often “adorned” the heads of men with razor blades, clamps, water taps, pokers and many other such objects sticking out of their bodies like growths. She also depicted men with symbols of status and power growing out of their heads and foreheads, such as cars, revolvers or a bull. In a separate cycle, Pakosta shows *Male Genitals* (1976), while she portrays a female body with sharp implements in her work *Needle Brain and Needle Clitoris* of 1985, creating an inverted voodoo doll whose needles point away from the body and are directed at those trying to approach the human doll (who is more human than she is a doll).

MERCHANDISE LANDSCAPES AND HUMAN MASSES



FLORENTINA PAKOSTA, Sich formierende
Männergesellschaft, 1996
UNIQA Versicherungen AG © VBK Vienna, 2011

From the 1980s onwards, Pakosta embarked on a completely new artistic path with her *Merchandise Landscapes* and *Human Masses*. In these paintings, everyday objects such as clothes pegs, shoes and tubes tower on top of each other in dense heaps. These monochrome drawings become two-colored paintings, as is the case with the work *Bundle* (1988). Pakosta was inspired to these renderings by a very personal experience. When sifting through her father’s belongings after his death, she found a large number of old shoes. They had become useless objects, but were not without meaning. To Pakosta, these mass produced items represented contemporary still lifes. For while these articles are produced for billions of people in huge quantities, they are nevertheless rendered unique by their owners who invest them with their own personal story.

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“TRICOLOR PAINTINGS” AS PART OF AN INNER EMIGRATION



FLORENTINA PAKOSTA, 1994/1, 1994
Ownership of the Artist © VBK Vienna, 2011

Pakosta’s most recent works are her *Tricolor Paintings* which depict intersecting and overlapping beam formations that could have been inspired by a scrap yard. They are reminiscent of bridges destroyed in World War II, but are also symbols of the political turmoil that surrounded the fall of the Berlin Wall. Pakosta herself sees these works as a sort of inner emigration. Having left representational motifs behind, the artist has focused increasingly on her writing. While Pakosta does not rule out that she may one day return to a representational manner of painting, she has created something entirely new with these works and has succeeded in bringing this creation to life. As Leonore Maurer quotes from Pakosta’s own texts: “(...) only works that have been seen or read do in fact exist. Once a painting or a text has been finished, the author is

its first consumer, but they must not be the only one.” It is remarkable how Florentina Pakosta has distanced herself completely from representational motifs in her most recent works. The artist has surprised everyone with this development, not least herself.

Klaus Pokorny

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CATALOGUE ACCOMPANYING THE EXHIBITION

FLORENTINA PAKOSTA

German, 256 pages

With texts by Franz Smola, Cornelia Cabuk, Maria Christine Holter,
Leonore Maurer and Florentina Pakosta
Brandstätter Verlag, ISBN 978-3-85033-521-8

Available at the Leopold Museum Shop: EUR 24.90

RECOMMENDED READING

- **Florentina Pakosta, Drehtür**
ed. by Leonore Maurer, Ritter Verlag, ISBN 978-3-85415-442-6
- **Florentina Pakosta, Was man nicht sagen darf**
ed. by Leonore Maurer, Ritter Verlag, ISBN 978-3-85415-359-7

Available at the Leopold Museum Shop!

ACCOMPANYING PROGRAM

- **Guided tours** for this exhibition and the Leopold Collection
are available in various languages!
- **Leo Kid's Studio**
Each Sunday between 2pm and 5pm for children aged 5 to 12 years
Kindly supported by the Vienna Insurance Group



Further information and booking:

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- For information on further events accompanying current exhibitions visit
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LIST OF LENDERS

Albertina, Wien

Albertina, Wien - Dauerleihgabe der Österreichischen Ludwig-Stiftung für Kunst und Wissenschaft

Arbeiterkammer Wien

Bank Austria Kunstsammlung, Wien

Brigitte Borchhardt (-B.)

Courtesy: artmark Galerie

Familie Breicha, Wien

Galerie Suppan Contemporary

Kunstsammlung der BAWAG P.S.K.

Landesmuseum Niederösterreich

MUSA - Sammlung der Kulturabteilung der Stadt Wien

Museum der Moderne Salzburg

Privatsammlung, Wien

Prof. Dr. Peter Gorsen

UNIQA Versicherungen AG

Wien Museum

Wiener Städtische Versicherung

Ownership of the Artist

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HALLTEXTS OF THE EXHIBITION

FLORENTINA PAKOSTA 21 JANUARY TO 18 APRIL 2011

For the first time, the Leopold Museum has dedicated an exhibition to the Austrian artist Florentina Pakosta (*1933). This display of around 100 works offers a comprehensive overview of this outstanding contemporary artist's oeuvre to date. The exhibition was initiated by Professor Dr. Rudolf Leopold himself before he was taken from this life so suddenly in June of last year.

The painter and graphic artist Florentina Pakosta is among the most eminent artists of her generation. Along with Maria Lassnig (*1919) and VALIE EXPORT (*1940), Florentina Pakosta is one of the most important Austrian exponents of Feminist art. Today, her works feature in every major exhibition and publication on Austrian contemporary art and are part of numerous prominent public and private collections.

Pakosta first came to prominence in 1970 with her *Paraphrases Based on Franz Xaver Messerschmidt* as well as her *Facial Formations* which were entirely new to Austrian art at the time. In her *Satirical Heads*, created in a grotesque and humorous Pop Art style, the artist challenged the gender-specific status quo in a clear-sighted analysis. Around 1980, Pakosta referred to her experience of male dominance in the political and cultural sphere in large-scale, typologizing male portraits. At the same time she created the extraordinary cycle *My Hands*. Pakosta visualized the phenomena of mass society and heteronomy in our everyday lives in her series *Human Masses* and *Merchandise Landscapes*. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 prompted Florentina Pakosta's *Tricolor Paintings* which are based on a re-examination of Constructivist principles. These entirely geometrical and abstract renderings have become a second core theme in the artist's oeuvre.

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FEMINIST WORKS

Along with Maria Lassnig (*1919) and VALIE EXPORT (*1940), Florentina Pakosta is among the most important Austrian exponents of Feminist art. In 1971 Florentina Pakosta became a member of the Vienna Secession and in 1975 became the first female board member of this male-dominated artists association. Through the exhibition *Female Secessionists*, which Pakosta organized in 1978 to exclusively showcase works by female artists, she helped to improve the standing of female members of the Secession. During the period between 1968 and 1985, the pivotal years of the female emancipation movement, Pakosta repeatedly addressed feminist issues. 1968 marked not only the year of the international student protests, but also the beginning of a new feminist movement in Western Europe. The following years saw the formation of feminist groups in Europe and North America which fought against violence towards women, marital rape and against patriarchal structures in relationships, families and society as well as the economical disadvantage to women resulting from them. In Austria, these efforts resulted in the passing of legislation allowing abortion on demand up until the third month of pregnancy in 1975 and the introduction of the Equal Treatment Act in 1979, which was further tightened by an amendment in 1985. In Florentina Pakosta's oeuvre, references to the feminist cause can be found above all in her graphic works. By reversing existing female and male roles and the traditional balance of power and by affording an uncensored view of the male genitalia, the artist fought against the constant degradation of women. In their severity, Pakosta's renderings expose women as victims of abuse which she detects not only in the relationship between men and women, but also in the many sexist depictions prevalent in art and the media. Her works can be seen as metaphors for the reversal of power in sexual relationships and acts of violence. In these renderings, the woman is now literally »on top«, dominating events and »inflicting violence« on the man. Pakosta's works also afford ironic insights into our patriarchal worldview.

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FACIAL FORMATIONS

Between 1978 and 1987 Florentina Pakosta created a series of large-scale chalk drawings, her so-called *Facial Formations*, whose motifs were influenced by the famous »character heads« of the Austrian sculptor Franz Xaver Messerschmidt (1736-1783). With his well-known heads created after 1770, Messerschmidt illustrated the extremes of human facial expression, revealing a typology of the unsightly entirely unique for his time. Already in the 1970s, Pakosta created a series of etchings entitled *Paraphrases Based on Franz Xaver Messerschmidt's Character Heads*, a variation of Messerschmidt's physiognomies which had arisen out of her continuous fascination with self-portraits. Similarly to Messerschmidt, Pakosta also explores the possibilities of different moods and sensitivities in her *Facial Formations*. These emotions range from horrified screams to enigmatic smiles. Another striking feature of her monumental head drawings is the technique used to create them. Through dense cross-hatched lines, which appear confusing to the beholder, she created light and dark patches, allowing for the physiognomies to stand out in an almost overly three-dimensional manner. Pakosta's realist *Facial Formations*, which were entirely new to Austrian art, impart a strong feminist and socio-critical message.

HUMAN MASSES

The dominant themes in Florentina Pakosta's oeuvre of the 1980s were those of enforced conformity and heteronomy. In particular, she addressed these themes in her renderings of tightly packed, seemingly uniform male heads, her so-called *Human Masses*. Unlike her previous graphical-linear head drawings, Pakosta created the appearance of printing techniques, without actually applying them. For these heads, which have been uniformly placed next to and on top of each other and which stand out like dark shadows against the white background, are indeed the result of brushwork. The individual heads frequently overlap, further enhancing the impression of a group or a crowd. In her *Human Masses* the artist visualizes the disappearance of individuals within our modern day mass society and vividly illustrates the excessive flood of pictures prevalent in today's information media.

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PRATER STUDIES

Already as a student, Florentina Pakosta had a fascination with anonymous characters who she encountered in the many bars and night clubs around the Wiener Prater. As a woman and student from a middle-class background, Pakosta wanted to experience these shady bars, which were usually reserved to men, and the demimond they were a part of. Too dangerous for a woman to take alone, she was usually accompanied on these trips by her older colleague, the artist Otto Trubel. Pakosta took snapshots of this night life by capturing the scenes around her with pencil, bistre and sometimes even with her lipstick. The unusual themes of these animated and impressive sketches make them unique social studies which at the time were entirely contrary to the curriculum of the Vienna Academy and the social conventions governing female artistry.

TRICOLOR PAINTINGS

The collapse of the Eastern Block and the end of its associated political ideologies as symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 prompted Florentina Pakosta to reinvent herself artistically. Since then, the artist has forgone a representational manner of painting in favor of highly geometrical and Constructivist compositions. Pakosta calls these works *Tricolor Paintings*, as she always only ever uses three striking colors. In these renderings, beam-like elements fan out as in bundles which either form grid-like spatial shapes, continue as infinite lines, change direction in acute angles or create spiky formations. By upholding a coherent spatial orientation, Pakosta makes the beholder feel as though immersed into a virtual space. Her *Tricolor Paintings* can be understood as a metaphor for digital strands of information and data channels that are no longer comprehensible to the modern consumer. Florentina Pakosta's *Tricolor Paintings*, which are based on a re-examination of Constructivist principles, represent current contributions to Geometric Abstraction that are of international consequence. These abstract geometrical renderings have become a second core theme in the artist's oeuvre.

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MERCHANDISE LANDSCAPES

Parallel to her renderings of *Human Masses*, Florentina Pakosta created a series of so-called *Merchandise Landscapes*. In these works, trivial objects such as wooden beams, keys, clothes pegs and shoes tower on top of each other in tightly packed, uniform heaps that fill up half and in some cases the entire canvas. Through precise contours and by consistently alternating between light and dark shades, Pakosta created a sort of decorative pattern which is further emphasized by an artificial chromaticity. The underlying concept of these *Merchandise Landscapes* corresponds to the principle of serial repetition and modification. By multiplying identical objects, Pakosta brings about a depreciation of the individual motifs, causing the uniqueness of the individual to disappear entirely within the masses. Pakosta's *Merchandise Landscapes* thus represent a number of phenomena encountered in everyday life, ranging from mass production and consumerism to heteronomy.

CONTEMPORARIES

Around 1980, Pakosta referred to her experience of male dominance in the political and cultural sphere in six large-scale, typologizing male portraits. The personalities depicted, who the artist refers to as »contemporaries«, are the former Mayor of Vienna and then Federal Minister for Arts and Culture, Helmut Zilk, the former director of the Albertina, Walter Koschatzky, the sculptor Alfred Hrdlicka, the historian and writer Friedrich Heer, the university professor and art theoretician Peter Gorsen as well as the former CEO of the Central Savings Bank Vienna, writer and patron of the arts Josef Neubauer. Further male portraits were to follow. Each of these monumental paintings took Pakosta one to two months to create. Oversized portraits are commonly found in American Pop Art as well as in Photorealism. Andy Warhol, for instance, created large-scale portrait series of contemporary celebrities from the 1970s onwards. What is surprising about Pakosta's male portraits, however, is the unusual drawing technique used to create them and the highly expressive effect they convey. Owing to their huge format, the individual lines drawn by hand appear to be exposed as if under a microscope, documenting the rigid, uniform system which necessitates a complete suppression of the artist's subjective script. The radical nature of this technique serves to heighten the unapproachable appearance of these portraits which, owing to their strong frontality and the complete lack of facial expression, already emanate a high degree of unfeelingness. To some beholders, these portraits even appear decidedly aggressive.

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HANDS

Between 1979 and 1981 Florentina Pakosta created the cycle *My Hands*. Each of the six works on paper which make up this series was created in a large-scale poster format and depicts a single hand making a distinctive and expressive gesture. What is striking and essentially unique about these renderings is not only their monumental size, but also the technique with which they were created. In these works, the artist availed herself of a meticulous cross-hatching technique through which she succeeded in carving out the hands' plasticity solely by creating a mesh of fine chalk lines. Another important feature of these works is that they portray the artist's own hands. They can therefore be seen as encrypted self-portraits of the artist in which the facial expressions are transferred to the hands, while the hands' gestures convey emotions and emphatic messages. The hand is thus made to represent existential sensitivities. Pakosta conceived an entire exhibition on the subject of hands, the concept for which she outlined in a text written in 1981. In this text, the artist described in great detail how the hand drawings were to be accompanied by noises made by manual work. At the same time, male and female voices were to incessantly repeat certain words containing the term »hand« in different constellations, such as handicraft, hand towel, handle, hand gun, etc.

SATIRICAL HEADS

Since the 1970s, Florentina Pakosta has created renderings depicting human heads and bodies in combination with odd objects to which they appear inseparably linked. With such montages, she achieves a bizarre effect that transcends reality. These works, which the artist has termed *Satirical Heads*, reveal three main focal points. Firstly, many of the renderings appear as visual metaphors, depicting certain character traits and types and illustrating the works' expressive titles. Secondly, the renderings often feature strange organic hybrid formations with limbs growing out of heads or multiplied body parts. Finally, it is striking that the works' protagonists are commonly confronted with especially dangerous-looking, pointed or sharp objects. Pakosta's *Satirical Heads* can furthermore be understood as politically involved works created in a grotesque and humorous Pop Art style, in which the artist challenges the gender-specific status quo in a clear-sighted analysis.

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FLORENTINA PAKOSTA IN QUOTES

The »pictures« in my head tend to become aggressive if I don't quickly convert them into actual paintings.

Florentina Pakosta

To closely perceive the world around me and to try and grasp it is the source of my work and the reason for it. I reject the concepts of birth, life and death.

Florentina Pakosta

Florentina Pakosta has never »euphemized« her self-portraits, rather the opposite. Her style is austere, resistant and profound. In her work she neither concedes nor denounces anything. She doesn't seek to prove or claim anything other than her own uniqueness in an austere and aloof manner.

Otto Breicha

Society is essentially a male society that is also accessible to women.

Florentina Pakosta

»Why do you depict men?« I was often asked. Why not? I ask myself. Was it not women who for centuries were the most common model in the fine arts? I advocate equal rights for both men and women.

Florentina Pakosta

Pakosta escapes the danger of losing her identity as a woman by strongly and pointedly condemning patriarchal structures and by isolating and distancing herself from the world that she portrays.

Hilde Schmörlzer

If it is possible for a human being to be portrayed with a bird-like beak instead of a mouth, as is the case in Messerschmidt's works, then why shouldn't it be possible for a hand, a watering can or any other object to grow out of a head?

Florentina Pakosta

The heads from this series are in fact an expression of a subversive identification with the aggressor, who is exposed through the subtle means of her art.

Cornelia Cabuk

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Those who are »always armored and are laughing inside about everything and everybody« (Wilhelm Reich), who remain silent out of fear or out of defiance and who are conspicuous with their overly polite, correct, submissive or shy demeanor are represented as equally as aggressive and offensive characters.

Peter Gorsen

Judging the character of a person based solely on their features can lead to unexpected and unpleasant surprises. A gentle person can have a harsh-looking face, while a murderer might look friendly.

Florentina Pakosta

Self-portrait and mirror image: aside from the images on movie screens and on television, one's own reflection is the most realistic type of image. It can be seen as a self-portrait, intrinsically linked to the person it reflects. Vital emotions, the expansion of consciousness and personal development can all be influenced by it.

Florentina Pakosta

The role portrayal has been carried to gender-specific extremes, to the Archimedean point where the male philosopher coincides with the technocrat, the cultural politician with the hypocrite and the intellectual with the macho.

Klaus Albrecht Schröder

In these large-scale canvases, Florentina Pakosta has approached political dimensions more directly than ever before, undisguised, without incorporating her own symbolism, but still from a distance.

Manfred Wagner

My portrait reportage (six large-scale drawings belonging together) is a commentary on influential personalities of the art scene from the early 1980s.

Florentina Pakosta

»Come closer and draw«, with a friendly but firm tone, the minister invites me into his study. He is standing in front of a large mirror, combing his hair and eyeing himself critically by holding his face very close to the mirror and then drawing it back again.

Florentina Pakosta, »Drawing a Minister« (1983), in: "Was man nicht sagen darf" (2004)

Via microphones, the sounds of manual work are audible from all sides, such as tapping, punching, sawing, playing the violin, playing the piano, chopping wood, typing on a typewriter, sewing on a sewing machine, scraping, slicing, grinding, drilling, etc.

Florentina Pakosta

My early still lifes developed into pictures from the world of »human material« and consumer goods – Human Landscapes, Merchandise Landscapes.

Florentina Pakosta

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The nature of objects is just as mysterious as the human psyche. For objects, whose life-span can outlast many human generations, speak of the past with the detachment of an unbiased existence.
Florentina Pakosta

The cliché of the classical »nature morte« with pitchers, fruit and draperies has long become far too narrow to capture our current attitude towards life. Today, millions of items fill the shelves and windows of enormous supermarkets, and after they have served masses of consumers, they end up on landfill sites – the abattoirs of objects.
Florentina Pakosta

I work with numbers because they are a part of life, and, if they are correct, a part that can be relied upon.
Florentina Pakosta

These tricolor paintings seem to me to be coming from a storage that is now empty, but that clearly has once been full; not carrying the memory of it, but rather signifying it.
Elfriede Jelinek

My tricolor paintings require the beholder to be emotionally flexible, to have the ability to form associations and to dispense with romantic concepts. For reminiscences and ideals, which I once credulously tried to incorporate into my work, are to be absent from these paintings. I renounce gestural lines and shapes and relegate them to the realm of sketches and ideas for paintings.
Florentina Pakosta

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