



PSM
Sabine Schmidt
Schöneberger Ufer 61
10785 Berlin
phone: +49 30 75524626
office@psm-gallery.com
www.psm-gallery.com

Iris Häussler ***The Sophie La Rosière Project***

Opening: Saturday, 14. September 2019, 18h-21h
Duration of the exhibition: 17. September – 26. October 2019

The German-Canadian artist Iris Häussler creates works that are strongly anchored in biographies, but not her own. Instead, her works are often created by invented characters, whose lives and works are staged by vivid, site-specific installations in residential buildings, historical houses, or museum rooms. Visitors have to assemble the clues and content they receive from the artifacts and background materials, almost as if they were flipping through a novel - installations that question the viewer's notions of fiction, history, narrative and creative individuality.

For her first solo exhibition at PSM, Iris Häussler shows individual works and materials from the Sophie la Rosière project. Born in 1867, the fictitious French painter Sophie La Rosière grew up as the only child of a factory owner in Nogent-sur-Marne outside Paris. She dedicated her life to art until her death in 1948. Today her estate consists of a total of 292 works. Some of these paintings, drawings and sculptures, which were taken from the artist's studio at the beginning of the 20th century, can now be seen in the gallery rooms in a more open but no less thoughtful form. They evoke a tangle of memories, longings, and secrets that have been analyzed by French and Canadian art historians and psychoanalysts since 2016.

During the First World War, due to economic difficulties, la Rosière used furniture parts as backgrounds for her paintings - everyday objects, especially wooden panels and doors, whose layers of paint seem to conceal the effects of time and use; they are discoloured, bruised, painted over and pierced. For this reason, in 2016, Häussler presented some of these works by means of X-ray scans, which revealed the doors decorated with erotic, Art Nouveau-like paintings but covered with black wax layers by la Rosière after 1918. Elsewhere, the wax was melted and freed from the works, bringing the hidden paintings back to light.

For her works, la Rosière mixed her own colours, experimenting with a variety of natural, readily available materials such as crushed dried petals, minerals, dead insects and blood. This mixture of ingredients gets into the sensual images she has composed: female bodies intertwine. Shells and petals fly around. Nervous systems sprout as spiral ivy. Nipples bloom from breasts. Rivers flow from body orifices. Wombs swell to oceans. The viewer is confronted with a bold and structured expressiveness that moves between love and loss.

The series of works by Sophie la Rosière may be considered atypical for a German conceptual artist with formal training in sculpture, but like the Portuguese writer and poet Fernando Pessoa, Häussler gives legendary historical artists literary and visual form, even if it means questioning their own artistic abilities and goals. Häussler describes her first attempts at painting as follows: "It was as if I could observe my own hands painting. It was the strangest feeling - as if someone else was guiding my hands, not my body, not my mind. The result was a mixture of folk art, art brut and art deco iconography - filled with symbolism and orientalism." She continues: "The works that were created were outside my education and artistic experience. There was no point of reference. Almost as if I were a tool for someone else, not the author of my own artistic practice."

The Sophie la Rosière project was launched in 2009 by Iris Häussler. Further information, the complete catalogue of Sophie La Rosière's works, investigations, expert analyses and official reports on the works can be found in the catalogue *Iris Häussler: The Sophie La Rosière Project*, published in 2016, or at <https://sophielarosiere.org>.

Iris Häussler lives and works in Toronto. She was born in 1962 in Friedrichshafen/Germany and trained at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich. She was a scholarship holder of the Kunstfonds (Bonn) and won the Karl Hofer Prize (Berlin) in 1999. In 2010 she was invited to the Cape Farewell (UK) High Arctic Expedition. Since her immigration to Canada she has received scholarships from the Toronto Arts Council, the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts. Her work has been the subject of solo exhibitions, including Apartment 4 and Tale of Two, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, US (2018) *The Sophie La Rosière Project*, a three-part exhibition by Art Gallery of York University (2016), Scrap Metal Gallery (2016) and Daniel Faria Gallery (2017), and *He Named Her Amber*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, CA (2008-10). Group exhibitions include *Material Tells*, Oakville Galleries, Oakville, CA (2019); *Histories of Sexuality*, Museu de Arte de Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo, BR (2017) *Groupe Mobile*, Villa Vassiliev, Paris, FR (2016); *Kunst Oberschwaben 20. Jahrhundert: 1970 bis heute*, Museum Villa Rot in Burgrieden, DE (2014); *More Real? Art in the Age of Truthiness*, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, US and SITE Santa Fe, US (2013); and *All Our Relations*, The 18th Biennale of Sydney, AU (2012). Her works are in the collections of the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto), the Städtische Sammlung im Lenbachhaus (Munich), the Goetz Collection (Munich).