

secession

Vereinigung bildender KünstlerInnen Wiener Secession
Friedrichstraße 12, A-1010 Wien
T. +43-1-587 53 07, F. +43-1-587 53 07-34
office@secession.at, www.secession.at

Press release

Suellen Rocca

July 3 – November 8, 2020

Grafisches Kabinett

Press conference: Wednesday, July 1, 2020, 11 a.m.

Opening: Thursday, July 2, 2020, 4-8 p.m.

With Suellen Rocca's installation in the Grafisches Kabinett, the Secession is pleased and grateful to present the last exhibition the artist conceived herself, which has been realized posthumously with great respect for her work. New paintings and drawings are presented together with paintings from recent years in a setting composed of a folding screen and a simple bed that cites Rocca's pictorial vocabulary. Presenting the actual objects next to their figurative representations blurs the lines between exhibition and pictorial space and supports the sensation of virtually being able to step into the pictures' landscapes.

Suellen Rocca enjoyed a long and distinguished artistic career, which began in the 1960s as a member of the Chicago-based group Hairy Who. Their six members were closely associated with the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and labeled as Chicago Imagists who, as opposed to prevailing trends on the East Coast, bucked both the austerity of Minimalism and Pop Art's cool detachment to develop a grotesque figurative aesthetic influenced by Art Brut and Surrealism. Rocca's oeuvre is characterized by a distinct personal iconography, which she continuously expanded in tune with and reflecting transitions in her private life. This pictorial grammar is apparent in her figurative drawings and paintings and draws on repetition, the use of a grid, text and icons. It is informed and inspired by a broad range of visual culture, from Egyptian hieroglyphs to Surrealism, indigenous art, pre-reader illustrations and illustrated catalogs as well as comics.

At the center of two expressive, dynamic paintings with vibrant, contrasting colors—*Departure* (2012) and *Sunset* (2013)—is a torso amid a watery realm inhabited by fish and serpents. Connected by flowing lines, the torso blends in with its respective surrounding. While the images appear pulsating, at the same time the symbolic language suggests things are in a state of flux, slipping away. The palette in the painting *Night* (2014), which can be regarded as a "hinge" work, has turned from vibrant to dark. Again, a torso fills the canvas; its shape, however, no longer indicates any connection to the exterior world but, as in Rocca's latest paintings too, instead describes a closed, self-contained form that serves as a reservoir for a sort of inner landscape. Here, the image may suggest a kind of arrival, with birds sitting in a tree that branches out like the circulatory system above an empty boat resting in the crook of the arm.

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Suellen Rocca's latest paintings (which, due to the artist's unexpected death, remained untitled) repeat the self-contained, closed form of the torso, the arms folded in front in a meditative pose. One picture seems to address unease and turbulence with icons of beds, chairs and other generic domestic furniture scattered wildly on a pale green torso set against a background of clouds with hands reaching out of them. In contrast, the pink torso in another picture offers a home for bodies and empty beds enclosed in womb-like bubbles that are placed out alternately and evenly within the body's bounds, forming a repetitive pattern. The painting radiates a sense of peace and tranquility, almost as if a circle were completed. Subdued colors enhance the quiescent tenor of these static images.

Reflecting different conditions and the transitions in her life—happiness as well as challenges and hardships she faced and embraced—Rocca's pictorial grammar made several transformations. Her colorful early work is populated with signature elements like palm trees, dancing couples, purses and jewelry and is an expression of a joyful and care-free period. While in the 1960s, the artist focused on romantic feelings, female sexuality, and domestic life, her view successively turned more and more inward. In the last decade, especially, a period of introspection, Suellen Rocca showed a great interest in the unconscious and included dream imagery in her work that symbolizes different states of being. Presenting her most recent paintings next to ones from the past decade, a significant change is noticeable in the pictures' grammar, mood, and palette once again.

Alongside of her show, Suellen Rocca also drafted a publication with additional drawings and sketches, published by Secession according to the artist's idea as a fan-folded book.

Suellen Rocca was born in Chicago in 1943 and died in March 2020. Besides her artistic practice, she was director of exhibitions and curator of the Elmhurst College Art Collection in Elmhurst, Illinois.

The exhibition program is conceived by the board of the Secession.

Curators: Jeanette Pacher

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Artist's book

Suellen Rocca

Format: 17 x 26 cm

Details: Hardcover with linen, leporello-book with facsimiles of nine drawings, manually inserted into the body of the book

Concept: Suellen Rocca

Secession 2020

Distribution: Revolver Publishing

EUR 33,-

Suellen Rocca's publication, a facsimile of her own design prototype, comprises nine drawings she selected from her sketchbook. Completed while she was preparing for her exhibition at the Secession, these drawings show her weaving together visual elements from different stages of her long career to create an entirely new group of works. Among Rocca's subjects are renderings of her recently rediscovered dollhouse furniture, recalling her childhood, an early and frequent source of inspiration; a handbag, a key element of the personal iconography she developed in the 1960s from advertising and other pop-culture sources, and a ubiquitous presence in her work from that time; and imagery that she described as "more internal" — depictions of anonymous torsos, plants, birds, and other creatures — that came to characterize her later paintings and drawings, beginning in the early 1980s. As Rocca made these drawings and conceived of her book's format, she was contemplating both the passing of time and time's cyclical aspect, the repetition of hours, days, and seasons that make up a life, prompting her decision to reproduce the drawings on both sides of a single continuous sheet of paper that can be arranged in a circle.

Press contact

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Press images

Installation views are available for download at www.secession.at/en/presstype/aktuell and <https://www.secession.at/en/presstype/preview/>

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Biografie / Biography Suellen Rocca

Suellen Rocca, geboren 1943 in Chicago, gestorben im März 2020. Neben ihrer künstlerischen Praxis war sie Director of Exhibitions und Kuratorin der Elmhurst College Art Collection in Elmhurst, Illinois. /

Suellen Rocca was born in Chicago in 1943 and died in March 2020. Besides her artistic practice, she was director of exhibitions and curator of the Elmhurst College Art Collection in Elmhurst, Illinois.

Einzelausstellungen (Auswahl) / Solo exhibitions (selection)

- 2018 *Drawings*, Matthew Marks Gallery, New York
- 2016 *Bare Shouldered Beauty, Works from 1965 to 1969*, Matthew Marks Gallery, New York
- 2013 *Focus 4: Four Solo Exhibitions*, Chicago Gallery, Illinois State Museum, Chicago
- 2007 *Suellen Rocca and Art Green: Imagists Classic Hits, Vol. 1*, Corbett vs. Dempsey Gallery, Chicago
- 1997 University Club of Chicago
- 1983 Phyllis Kind Gallery, Chicago

Gruppenausstellungen (Auswahl) / Group exhibitions (selection)

- 2019 *How Chicago! Imagists 1960s & 70s*, Goldsmiths Centre for Contemporary Art, London
With a Capital P: Selections by Six Painters, Elmhurst Art Museum, Elmhurst, USA
- 2018 *Painting: Now and Forever Part III*, Greene Naftali Gallery and Matthew Marks Gallery, New York
The Time Is Now! Art Worlds of Chicago's South Side, 1960–1980, Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago
Eye Deal: Abstract Bodies of the Chicago Imagists, Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Madison, USA
The Figure and the Chicago Imagists: Selections from the Elmhurst College Art Collection, Elmhurst Art Museum, Elmhurst, USA
Hairy Who? 1966 – 1969, The Art Institute of Chicago
- 2017 *Famous Artists from Chicago. 1965 – 1975*, Fondazione Prada, Mailand / Milan
- 2015 *Interfaces: Outsider Art and the Mainstream*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia
- 2014 *What Nerve! Alternative Figures in American Art 1960 to the Present*, Rhode Island School of Design Museum of Art, Providence, USA; Matthew Marks Gallery, New York
- 2011 *Re: Chicago*, DePaul Art Museum, Chicago
Chicago Imagists at the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Madison, USA
- 2010 *Touch and Go: Ray Yoshida and His Spheres of Influence*, Sullivan Galleries, School of the Art Institute of Chicago
- 2008 *Art and Politics in Chicago*, DePaul Art Museum, Chicago
- 2006 *Drawn Into the World*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
- 2005 *Art in Chicago: Resisting Regionalism, Transforming Modernism*, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia
- 2004 *That 70's Show*, The Center for Visual and Performing Art, Munster, USA
- 2000 *Chicago Loop: Imagist Art 1949–1979*, Whitney Museum of American Art – Fairfield County, Stamford, USA
- 1997 *Don Baum says, "Chicago Has Famous Artists"*, Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago
- 1996 *Art in Chicago: 1945–1995*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
Women and Chicago Imagism, Rockford Art Museum, Rockford, USA; Illinois Art Gallery, Chicago

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- 1994 *Chicago Imagism: A 25 Year Survey*, Davenport Museum of Art, Davenport, USA
- 1987 *Drawings of the Chicago Imagists*, Renaissance Society, University of Chicago
- 1980 *Who Chicago? An Exhibition of Contemporary Imagists*, Camden Arts Centre, London; Sunderland Art Centre, Sunderland, UK; Third Eye Centre, Glasgow; The National Museum of Modern Art, Edinburgh; Glynvivan Gallery, The Welsh Arts Council, Swansea, UK; Ulster Museum, Belfast; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; Contemporary Art Center, New Orleans
- 1972 *Chicago Imagist Art*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; New York Cultural Center, New York
- 1969 *Spirit of the Comics*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia
- 1968 *The Hairy Who*, San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco
- 1966/1967/1968 *The Hairy Who*, Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago

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Werkliste / List of works Suellen Rocca

Departure, 2012

Öl auf Leinwand / Oil on canvas
76 x 76 cm

Untitled, 2020

Graphit auf Papier / Graphite on paper
56 x 76 cm

Untitled, 2020

Öl auf Leinwand / Oil on canvas
91 x 91 cm

Untitled, 2020

Öl auf Leinwand / Oil on canvas
91 x 91 cm

Untitled, 2020

Graphit auf Papier / Graphite on paper
56 x 76 cm

Untitled, 2020

Graphit und Farbstift auf Papier / Graphite and colored pencil on paper
56 x 76 cm

Untitled, 2020

Graphit und Farbstift auf Papier / Graphite and colored pencil on paper
56 x 76 cm

Night, 2014

Öl auf Leinwand / Oil on canvas
76 x 76 cm

At Sunset, 2013

Öl auf Leinwand / Oil on canvas
76 x 76 cm

Untitled, 2020

Öl auf Leinwand, vier Tafeln / Oil on canvas, four panels
56 x 71 cm

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Exhibitions

Hauptraum

Verena Dengler. *Die Galeristin und der schöne Antikapitalist auf der Gothic G'stettn (Corona Srezessionssession Dengvid-20 ☺)*

July 3 – September 6, 2020

Galerie

Michael E. Smith

February 21 – September 6, 2020

Grafisches Kabinett

Suellen Rocca

July 3 – November 8, 2020

Artist's books

Verena Dengler. *Die Galeristin und der schöne Antikapitalist auf der Gothic G'stettn (Corona Srezessionssession Dengvid-20 ☺)*,

120 pages, app. 300 images, € 36,-

Suellen Rocca, leporello-book with nine drawings, € 33,-

Michael E. Smith, 2020, cat calender (edition of 692), € 18,-

Permanent Presentation

Gustav Klimt, *Beethoven Frieze*

Beethoven – Painting and Music in cooperation with Wiener Symphoniker

Opening hours

Tuesday – Sunday 2–6 p.m.

Exhibition talk

Sunday, July 5, 11 a.m., Verena Dengler and Kolja Reichert

Curator's tour

Saturday, September 5, 4:30 p.m., Bettina Spörr and Jeanette Pacher

Guided tours

Every Saturday at 2 p.m. in German, free of charge, without registration

Art Information

Every Saturday, 1 – 2 p.m., free of charge

Admission

Adults € 9,50 / Pupils, students and senior citizens € 6,-

Press images

download at <https://www.secession.at/en/presstype/aktuell> and
<https://www.secession.at/en/presstype/preview/>

Press contact

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Main Sponsor

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