

Cora Pongracz
erweiterte portraits
January 13 – February 25, 2023

Message:
My soul-
My soul is in great disarray, my cameras too.
My closet is in great disarray.
The housewife can be understood by her closet.
Allegedly.
I want a self portrait, says Valie.
How do you imagine that?
My soul is a camera, a camera obscura, a box.
What is that supposed to mean?
"That is just what it is called" someone claims, as he always does?
The Origin of Photography:
A film is born in a black hole.
Conceived by light.
Cora Pongracz, 1974

Maxwell Graham is honored to present *erweiterte portraits*, the first ever exhibition outside of Austria to focus on the work of Viennese photographer Cora Pongracz (1943-2003). *erweiterte portraits* was Pongracz' original and intended title for a body of work and catalogue published in 1974. *erweiterte portraits* means *expanded portraits*.

Cora Pongracz was born in Argentina in 1943, to Jewish parents that fled Austria during World War II. After returning to Europe, Pongracz received a traditional training in photography in Frankfurt and Munich, and eventually resettled in Vienna. Pongracz was centrally involved with a group of philosophers and artists in the capital in the late 1960s and 1970s. The social and cultural organization of Austria in that era was overwhelmingly patriarchal. To earn both a living and some autonomy, Pongracz would produce scenic views for travel guides, as well as documentation of many of the Viennese Actionists' transgressive (abusive) performers. To this day, her honorific depictions of important men, Theodor Adorno, Hundertwasser, Arnulf Rainer, Dieter Roth, Franz West and Otto Muehl, are her best known photographs.

Cora Pongracz' real work as an artist was rather distinct in subject and structure. Pongracz reimagined what a portrait could be. In 1974, she conceived of a format of multiple-part portraits of eight women in her community. Each portrait consisted of seven photographs; two photographs beholding the woman and five photographs based on terms suggested by the woman to expand understanding of who they were. These suggested terms were not publicly disclosed. The expanded portrait of *Mira*, for instance, consists of two photographs of Mira, a photograph of a woman eating, an empty bird cage, a darkened stairway, the backside of Haus Wittgenstein, and of Pongracz herself; all of these diverse images remain portraits of Mira. *erweiterte portraits* is remarkable for its development in the concept of both authorship and identity. The work insisted that the women portrayed have some agency in the authorship of the work. The work insisted that the identity of the women portrayed go beyond visage to also include context and referent.

When the catalogue was released, the publisher rebranded and simplified the title, from *erweiterte portraits* to *FRAUEN IN WIEN (WOMEN IN VIENNA)* and included a dust jacket which included only images of the woman's faces.

Pongracz' first solo exhibition was in 1978 at the fabled Galerie nächst St. Stephan, which had just taken on the direction of Rosemarie Schwarzwälder. The exhibition and accompanying publication were titled »verwechslungen« (»mix ups«). Pongracz continued her decentralized approach challenging the capacity for a single photograph to contain the multitude of a person. Each portrait consisted of a group of photographs, sometimes as few as three sometimes as many as ten, directly on the wall, in different arrangements and configurations. This was a significantly prescient approach to photographic exhibition installation at the time. One portrait contained five photographs of a young girl on the street, sometimes posing, sometimes kicking a ball, sometimes turning away from the camera. One portrait consisted of six photographs of a woman contemplating at her desk. One portrait consisted of a mother sometimes in the distance, sometimes with her whole family, sometimes carrying a child.

In 1980 Pongracz began treatment in psychiatric centers. By 1991 she was permanently admitted into the Maimonides Center Sanatorium at the age of 49. Pongracz continued her work, occasionally making exhibitions and occasionally publishing, until the end of her life in 2003, even during periods when she no longer had access to a dark room, instead developing her film in retail

shops. Her camera turned toward her fellow patients, care providers and visitors, often just depicting their feet, or just a fragment of the face, never allowing the image to fully portray them.

Of particular formal significance in Pongracz' oeuvre, is that many of her images were printed off center on the page, leaving unusually large borders on just some sides, with the image bleeding over others. This unusual cropping decision, suggesting the image is only partially visible, coincides with Pongracz' overall vision, which repeatedly undermined photography's claim to capture someone completely.

Cora Pongracz was born in 1943 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and died in 2003 in Vienna, Austria. Pongracz has had solo exhibitions at Ost Licht, Vienna, AT; Gabriele Senn Galerie, Vienna, AT; Galerie am Taxispalais, Innsbruck, AT; the Maimonides Center, Vienna, AT; Galerie Steinek, Vienna, AT; FOTOHOF Galerie, Salzburg, AT; Galerie nächst St. Stephan, Vienna, AT; and Antiquariat Wögenstein, Vienna, AT. Pongracz's work has been included in group exhibitions at 21er Haus, Vienna, AT; Museum of Modern Art Salzburg Altstadt (Rupertinum), Salzburg, AT; Secession, Vienna, AT; mumok Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, AT and elsewhere.

The exhibition is presented in close cooperation and with immense gratitude toward, the OstLicht Collection, Vienna.

erweiterte portraits will be on view at 55 Hester Street in New York City from January 13 – February 25, 2023, Wednesday – Saturday 10AM-6PM. For additional information, please contact the gallery at 917-675-6681 or info@maxwellgraham.biz.