

FONDATION BEYELER

E

CLOSE UP

CLOSE-UP

**Berthe Morisot, Mary Cassatt, Paula Modersohn-Becker,
Lotte Laserstein, Frida Kahlo, Alice Neel, Marlene Dumas,
Cindy Sherman, Elizabeth Peyton**

19 September 2021 – 2 January 2022

Cover:

Alice Neel

Richard at Age Five, 1945 (detail)

Oil on canvas, 66.2 x 35.9 cm

Courtesy The Estate of Alice Neel and David Zwirner

© The Estate of Alice Neel

INTRODUCTION

CLOSE-UP shines the light on nine women artists whose work shares a focus on portraits and self-portraits: Berthe Morisot (1841–1895), Mary Cassatt (1844–1926), Paula Modersohn-Becker (1876–1907), Lotte Laserstein (1898–1993), Frida Kahlo (1907–1954), Alice Neel (1900–1984), Marlene Dumas (*1953), Cindy Sherman (*1954) and Elizabeth Peyton (*1965).

These artists occupy prominent and exemplary positions within the history of art from 1870 to the present day. It was at the beginning of this period that – in a context of wider societal shifts in the status and condition of women – it first became possible for women artists in Europe and America to become professionally active on a broad basis.

The exhibition focuses on the artists' specific outlook and gaze on their respective surroundings as expressed in their portraiture work. This joint display makes it possible to experience how the artists' view of their subjects evolved between 1870 and the present day, what is reflected in their gaze and what makes it particular.

The exhibition was curated by Theodora Vischer,
Chief Curator at the Fondation Beyeler.

ROOM 1

Berthe Morisot

Berthe Morisot (1841–1895) grew up in Paris in affluent circumstances. She received private lessons in drawing and painting as part of her education and came into contact early on with artists such as Édouard Manet and Edgar Degas. Degas belonged to the circle of young painters who opposed the conservative artistic outlook of the Académie des Beaux-Arts and the Salon de Paris, and organised the Impressionist exhibitions. In 1874, Morisot took part in the first of these exhibitions as a co-founder. Most of the works shown here were created between 1869 and 1885, the period in which her Impressionist style reached its full development. The paintings display the artist's everyday environment, depicting modern urban life in the domestic sphere, i.e. in the spaces that were open to women of her social background. Her models are often family members, female servants and young women from her circle of acquaintances.

ROOM 1

1 Berthe Morisot, Girl on a Divan, c. 1885

Oil on canvas. Tate

Bequeathed by the Hon. Mrs A.E. Pleydell-Bouverie
through the Friends of the Tate Gallery 1968

The young woman gazes just past the viewer. Her posture appears both relaxed and – with its suggestions of gentle twisting and leaning – dynamic, as though the painter had captured a brief moment in the midst of a conversation. This impression is underscored by the bold brushstrokes and the vibrant colours, used not only for the sitter's elegant dress but applied to the full surface of the picture, thus uniting the figure and the surrounding space. Only fragments of this space are visible and its flatness gives full precedence to the sitter's presence. Berthe Morisot's painting is among the outstanding examples of the novel, impressionistic form of portraiture that showcased the modern, self-confident *Parisienne*.

ROOM 2

Mary Cassatt

American painter Mary Cassatt (1844–1926) was already a highly trained artist when she settled in Paris in 1874. She held a progressive view of women's social position not uncommon among prominent women of her generation in her native country. In Paris, Cassatt exhibited at the Salon, where Edgar Degas saw her works for the first time in 1874, henceforth holding her art in high esteem. She followed Degas's invitation to join the circle of the Impressionists, where she met her coeval Berthe Morisot. This new artistic environment gave her the freedom to combine the approaches developed by the Impressionists to capture modern urban life with her own perception, which was shaped by her Franco-American background and training.

ROOM 2

2 Mary Cassatt, *In the Loge*, 1878

Oil on canvas. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

The Hayden Collection – Charles Henry Hayden Fund

What exactly is the elegantly dressed young woman in the theatre box looking at so intently? The arm with which she holds up her opera glasses rests easily on the railing. In the background, only a sketchy view is provided of members of the audience in other boxes. One person is leaning forward and seems to be observing the young woman across the picture space. This second visual axis emphasises the theme of seeing and being seen.

Mary Cassatt's impressionistic style of painting makes visible the very essence of human sight: what matters in the moment is brought into sharp focus, while the eye only fleetingly skims and blurs what are considered secondary details. *In the Loge* is an exception among Cassatt's early portraits, in that it shows a woman in public space. Most of her other paintings display women of her personal circle in private and domestic settings, for example reading or drinking tea.

ROOM 3

Paula Modersohn-Becker

German painter Paula Modersohn-Becker (1876–1907) can be viewed as an early pioneer of modernism. The works in the exhibition date from the last ten years of her short life, which unfolded by turns in two highly disparate locations: on the one hand Worpswede in Northern Germany, a typical nineteenth-century artists' colony apart and independent from the academies and their traditional understanding of art, and on the other hand Paris, the metropolitan focal point of the international avant-gardes. While Modersohn-Becker also painted landscapes, still lifes and genre-like depictions of figures, portraiture clearly took centre stage in her work. Her self-portraits provide the fullest expression of the boldness of her art, in which realistic likeness and emotional expression are replaced by concentration on a few formal qualities that characterise a face or a figure.

ROOM 3

3 Paula Modersohn-Becker, Self-Portrait Facing Half-Right with Hand at Chin, summer 1906

Oil tempera on paper on cardboard

Paula-Modersohn-Becker-Stiftung, Bremen

On loan from a private collection

In this self-portrait, the head is turned to the right and fills the entire picture surface. The face, painted in bright colours, is set against an indeterminate dark background. This contrast is further underlined by the dark eyes, lips and hair as well as the distinctive necklace. Mask-like, the face is assembled from separate chromatic areas and features strong outlines. The probing gaze is directed outward from the picture and underscored by the enigmatic gesture of the hand placed against the chin. The painting belongs to a series of self-portraits that Paula Modersohn-Becker worked on during her stay in Paris in the summer of 1906, in which she explored the simplification and formalisation of her individual facial features. This intent is clearly apparent in this self-portrait.

ROOM 4

Lotte Laserstein

Berlin artist Lotte Laserstein (1898–1993) is considered one of the outstanding exponents of realism as it emerged in the 1920s alongside the art of the New Objectivity. The exhibition presents paintings from her early work, created between 1923 and 1933 before her forced emigration to Sweden. Laserstein's academic training is apparent in her meticulous painting technique. In her choice of subjects, however, she showed herself fully committed to the present and to her own surroundings. Her portraits and figures are set in the metropolis of Berlin during the years of the Weimar Republic. They feature types of everyday modern life, in particular the "New Woman" whose image was then propagated in photography, magazines and film. The specific tension found in Laserstein's works from this period arises from the combination of her resolutely modern outlook with her slightly melancholy traditional painting style in earthy tones.

ROOM 4

4 Lotte Laserstein, *In my Studio*, 1928

Oil on wood. Private collection

In my Studio shows the artist and her model. Lotte Laserstein has given this classic motif a highly contemporary note. In the foreground, the body of the reclining nude model extends the full width of the picture. At the back, the artist sits at her easel in front of a large picture window, through which the city and thus the present are brought into the painting. The size of her palette is in line with the wide range of tones used by Laserstein within a very narrow choice of colours. At the picture's edges, the model's hand and especially the painter's head appear truncated, reminiscent of the cropping techniques used in photography. The model seems to be asleep, the painter absorbed in her work, and yet a silent connection is established across the pictorial space between the two faces turned toward one another.

ROOM 5

Frida Kahlo

Frida Kahlo (1907–1954) lived and worked in post-revolutionary Mexico. The development of her wholly distinctive visual language was driven by various circumstances: her origin as the daughter of a German father and a Mexican mother, her active political engagement alongside her husband, painter Diego Rivera, her strong interest in both European art history and pre-Columbian culture and folk art. Self-portraits are at the heart of her work, her approach differing strongly from conventional notions of portraiture. For a long time, these self-portraits were interpreted solely against the background of Kahlo's personal life. In fact, however, they do not attempt to capture the biographical self, but rather they are highly constructed representations in the sense of a masquerade. The consistently beautiful and serious face is defined by accessories and props that evolved over time.

ROOM 5

5 Frida Kahlo, Self-Portrait with Bonito, 1941

Oil on masonite. Private collection

Courtesy of Thomas Ammann Fine Art AG, Zurich

This self-portrait captivates the viewer with its striking composition and conjunction of strong contrasts. It is reminiscent of a Renaissance bust portrait, in which the sitter is shown in close-up with various attributes. The warm skin tones contrast harshly with the black of the dress and the hair as well as the precise drawing of the facial features. The background displays a rich and subtle range of greens. The lush foliage harbours insects at various stages of life. On Frida Kahlo's shoulder, the plumage of Bonito the pet parrot takes up the colours of both the leafy backdrop and the sitter's skin tones, thus operating as a link between central motif and background, between humankind and nature. Kahlo's work features many animals she kept as household pets. Their significance varies between deep symbolism and the expression of wholly personal appreciation.

ROOM 6

Alice Neel

A classical portrait painter active during both the pre-war and post-war periods, American artist Alice Neel (1900–1984) stands out as an exception in twentieth-century art. During her studies at the Philadelphia School of Design for Women, she was strongly influenced by the tradition of American Realism. She painted portraits from live models or from memory while others turned to abstraction. Her portraits feature individuals from different social classes and backgrounds, chosen from her neighbourhood or from among her acquaintances, friends and family. On the one hand, they reflect Neel's precarious circumstances as a woman and single mother in New York City, where she had settled in 1932. On the other hand, considered as a whole they provide a view of American society in the 1930s to 1960s from the perspective of a politically engaged artist.

ROOM 6

6 Alice Neel, Harold Cruse, c. 1950

Oil on canvas. Antonia Axelsson Johnson Family Collection

The sitter is shown in a seated position. The composition is almost symmetrical, as simple as it is effective: the colour of the suit is repeated in the grey of the background's right half, while the warm brown of the left half reflects the subtly nuanced skin tones. A blue scarf provides a lone gleam in the centre of the painting and directs the focus toward the sitter's face and his pensive far-off gaze. Harold Cruse (1916–2005) was an intellectual, a social critic, a college professor and a central figure of the Civil Rights Movement and of Black Nationalism. The issues he addressed decisively shaped Alice Neel's everyday life in the ethnically and culturally diverse New York neighbourhood of Spanish Harlem.

ROOM 7

Marlene Dumas

Born in South Africa, Marlene Dumas (*1953) moved to Amsterdam in 1976 after completing her art studies in Cape Town. For the first time, she was able to look at the originals of old and new European and American artworks, which she had until then only seen in reproduction. This experience was key for Dumas's exploration of the perception of images and their painterly representation. The human figure and the portrait are at the centre of her work. As a starting point for her paintings, drawings and watercolours, she uses photographs drawn from various sources, such as newspapers and magazines or film stills, gathered over the years. With her painterly gesture, she transforms the original image into a fascinating, at times disturbing, and deeply moving painting. Her individual and group portraits deal with topics both current and timeless such as love, sexuality, death, identity and mourning.

ROOM 7

7 Marlene Dumas, *Teeth*, 2018

Oil on canvas. Private collection, Madrid

Teeth shows a detail of a face in extreme close-up, prominently displaying the wide open mouth and bared teeth. The lipstick's bright red has stained the teeth. The area featuring the closed eyes is shaded in dark blue hues that extend to the cheek like smudged makeup. The expression is not easy to read. Does the image portray grief, pain, anger, or maybe extreme joy? Like many of Marlene Dumas's works, this painting is based on a photograph, namely a black and white portrait of celebrated opera singer Maria Callas. Dumas did not choose a glamorous pose, in which the viewer would readily recognise the famed star. Her painterly gesture allows us to take part in a highly ambivalent and profoundly human emotional situation.

ROOM 8

Cindy Sherman

American artist Cindy Sherman (*1954) belongs to the first generation to have grown up with television. Her work is shaped by our mediated view of the world and the power of media imagery. She draws inspiration from cinema and television, fashion photography, advertising, and the inexhaustible flood of images found on the Internet.

Since the late 1970s, Sherman has been focussing on photographic portraits, acting both behind and in front of the camera as photographer, director and model. In her New York studio, she transforms herself into fictional characters, staging herself as a Hollywood actress, a model, a housewife, a vamp or a clown. Her figures are placed in precisely designed settings, more recently also created with the help of digital imaging technologies. She explores themes such as beauty, age and gender, questioning and parodying the constructions of female identity, social roles and stereotypes. For more than 40 years, her portrait series have provided an unusual and unsparing view of society.

ROOM 8

8 Cindy Sherman, Untitled, 1989

Chromogenic colour print. Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth, Zurich

Everything in this picture is reminiscent of a historical painting: the opulent, exquisitely detailed clothing, the pearl jewellery, the draped shawl and the boudoir atmosphere with mirror and cherubs. The position of the sitter's hand quotes Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's portrait of Madame Moitessier, painted in 1856. A closer look exposes the fabricated and deceptive nature of the image, in which everything is costume, scenery and thickly applied makeup.

Over the years, Cindy Sherman has created highly varied groups of works. This photograph is one of a series of 35 *History Portraits* from the late 1980s, which reference various art historical periods and at times specific paintings by old masters such as Holbein, Rubens, Raphael and Caravaggio. The title of the series echoes the term "history painting" – the artist is narrating a history of the conventions of representation in the genre of portraiture.

ROOM 9

Elizabeth Peyton

American artist Elizabeth Peyton (*1965) studied at the School of Visual Arts in New York. While her work also comprises still lifes and landscapes, it centres on the portrait. Since the 1990s, she has been giving renewed relevance to the genre with her oil paintings, watercolours, drawings and prints. Peyton paints acquaintances and people close to her as well as celebrities from different times and contexts whose life and creativity inspire her. Her paintings take as their starting points photographs, literary and musical inspirations, her own memories and, for some time now, working from live models. She does not aim for strict likeness. Her subjective, empathetic gaze conveys deep familiarity and intimacy with her subjects. They appear youthful, often lost in thought, full of promise and potential at the beginning of their life's journey. Beauty, love and individuality are the key themes of Peyton's work.

ROOM 9

9 Elizabeth Peyton, Camille Claudel Sculpting, 2010

Oil on wood. The Newhouse Collection

The painting shows sculptress Camille Claudel (1864–1943) deeply immersed in modelling a large figure. With its small format and restricted colour palette, it references an 1887 photograph that shows Claudel and fellow artist Jessie Lipscomb in their shared Paris studio. Claudel was a student of sculptor Auguste Rodin and was well known for her skilled handling of a wide array of techniques and materials, from plaster to marble and bronze. In this painting, we see her working on the female figure of her sculpture *Sakuntala*, which met with great acclaim at the Salon des Artistes Français in 1888. The joint display of *Camille Claudel Sculpting* and the portrait of contemporary sculptress Isa Genzken, also painted in 2010, shows how Elizabeth Peyton's painting succeeds in connecting people from wholly different eras.

ROOM 10

The artists

The vast last room allows us to meet the nine artists in words and in images by means of short films created specially for the exhibition with the cooperation of nine distinguished actors. The room further dedicates space to artist Marie Bashkirtseff, whose diaries published in 1887 turned her into a role model for many female artists and writers and young women.

ROOM 10

One film project, nine actors

Through their performances, actors also create portraits, bringing to life on film characters initially described using merely words.

This is particularly true of the nine actors' cinematic evocation of the artists in the exhibition:

Irène Jacob on Berthe Morisot

Martina Gedeck on Mary Cassatt

Luna Wedler on Paula Modersohn-Becker

Meret Becker on Lotte Laserstein

Ángela Molina on Frida Kahlo

Bettina Stucky on Alice Neel

Romana Vrede on Marlene Dumas

Maria Furtwängler on Cindy Sherman

Valerie Pachner on Elizabeth Peyton

Duration: around 4'30'' each

Idea: Theodora Vischer; Concept: Fondation Beyeler
in collaboration with Zeitsprung Pictures;

Production: Michael Souvignier (Zeitsprung Pictures);

Direction: Jochem Wahl; 2021

The film project was made possible by the support of
the BNP Paribas Swiss Foundation.

ROOM 10

Marie Bashkirtseff (1858–1884)

The exhibition comes full circle with Marie Bashkirtseff's *Self-Portrait with Palette* (c. 1883) and her painting *In the Studio (Académie Julian)* (1881), in which she portrayed the circumstances under which young women artists were training in Paris at the time.

Bashkirtseff was born in Havrontsi in present-day Ukraine into a family of minor Russian nobles. Aged twelve, she moved with her mother to Vienna. They then travelled to several European cities before finally settling in Nice in 1873. From 1877 to 1884, Bashkirtseff studied at the Académie Julian, the most prestigious private art school in Paris. Yet her name is rarely linked to her comparably limited artistic output, for it is with her diaries that she became famous. They were published only three years after her early death from tuberculosis in an abridged and censored version. Her *Journal* immediately found an eager, young and largely female readership, and was soon translated into several languages. The diaries thus became a point of reference for countless readers in Bashkirtseff's own and later generations, among them last but not least Berthe Morisot and Paula Modersohn-Becker.

INFORMATION

The exhibition is generously supported by:

Beyeler-Stiftung

Hansjörg Wyss, Wyss Foundation

Simone and Peter Forcart-Staehelin

L. + Th. La Roche Stiftung

FX and Natasha de Mallmann

Napinvest AG

Patronesses of the Fondation Beyeler

Victor Pinchuk

The room guides have been produced with
the valued support of



Room texts: Theodora Vischer, Marlene Bürgi
and Stefanie Bringezu

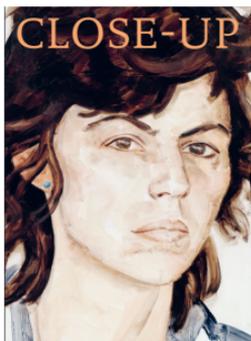
Editing: Marlene Bürgi and Stefanie Bringezu

Copy editing: Holger Steinemann

Graphic design: Heinz Hiltbrunner

Translation: Maud Capelle

CATALOGUE



CLOSE-UP

Edited by Theodora Vischer

for the Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel, Switzerland
Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2021, 344 pages, 215 illustrations
CHF 58.–

Further publications on the artists featured in the
exhibition are available from the museum's Art Shop:
shop.fondationbeyeler.ch

Upcoming exhibition:

GOYA

10 October 2021 – 23 January 2022

FONDATION **BEYELER**

Baselstrasse 101, CH-4125 Riehen/Basel
fondationbeyeler.ch

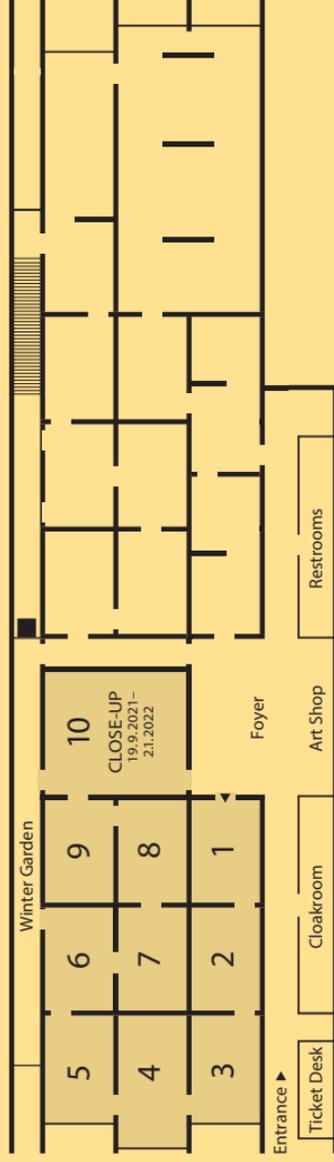
#BeyelerCloseUp



CLOSE-UP

Berthe Morisot, Mary Cassatt, Paula Modersohn-Becker, Lotte Laserstein,
Frida Kahlo, Alice Neel, Marlene Dumas, Cindy Sherman, Elizabeth Peyton

19 September 2021 – 2 January 2022



Caution: please do not touch the artworks!