

« An Enormously Tiny Bit of a Lot » Meret Oppenheim – a Retrospective June 2 – Octobre 8, 2006

The Exhibition

Meret Oppenheim (1913 – 1985) was one of the most outstanding figures of twentieth century Swiss art. She was far ahead of her time. Moving from Basel to Paris in the early 1930s in search of a more fertile climate for her creativity, she found the freedom she needed. It was in Paris, where she was famously photographed by Man Ray, that the foundations were laid for the aura of myth that was to grow around her. But the role of muse did not suit her well, and she was neither willing nor able to accept it.

From 1936 onwards, Meret Oppenheim concentrated primarily on creating objects, among them the work that made her famous: a cup and saucer, completed with spoon, covered with the pelt of a gazelle. André Breton enthusiastically gave it the title *Déjeuner en fourrure*. It is this one surrealist work, commonly referred to as the “fur cup”, for which she is perhaps best known to the broader public. Indeed, until now, it has tended to overshadow the rest of her oeuvre as an artist. One of the aims of this exhibition is to provide a richer view of her output.

Time and again, Meret Oppenheim created dadaistic works of incisive wit and innovation, forming a body of work that is often rooted in her subconscious. Her visions led her to create drawings, oil paintings, mixed media paintings, collages and assemblages, as well as plaster models for sculptures. Though her polymorphous oeuvre defies formal classification, it is nevertheless possible to discern certain predominant themes – the boundaries and overlaps between nature and culture, man and woman, day and night, dream and reality. There is a distinctly literary spirit running throughout Meret Oppenheim’s oeuvre. Indeed, for decades she drew upon the same primordial sources: dreams, associations, thoughts and play. She also repeatedly addressed the issue of her own gender, often in coded form.

Bern was Meret Oppenheim’s chosen home for more than thirty years. Thanks to her 1985 bequest, the Kunstmuseum Bern now houses the world’s most important collection of this artist’s works. Further acquisitions in recent years, and the fact that the museum is now the keeper of the archive, places the Kunstmuseum Bern in a uniquely privileged position for putting up this retrospective exhibition

Kunstmuseum Bern

It shows works from every period of her career. Alongside famous pieces from New York, Paris and Stockholm, the exhibition includes hitherto little-known works from private collections and her estate as well as some that have never before been publicly presented.

This exhibition marks the first comprehensive survey of this early multi-media artist's oeuvre in many years. That in itself is reason enough to take a fresh look at it and to consider its philosophical and literary links. By presenting her painting, sculptures, drawings, objects and designs, the exhibition offers an unparalleled opportunity of rediscovering the life and work of Meret Oppenheim.

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