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Lotte Laserstein, *Girl Lying on Blue*, Detail, 1931, Private collection, Berlin, courtesy of Das Verborgene Museum, Berlin, Photo: Das Verborgene Museum, Berlin, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019



Lotte Laserstein

Face to Face

5.4. – 12.8.19

Press conference
Wed. 3.4.19 11:30 am

Opening
Thu. 4.4.19 7 pm

BERLINISCHE
GALERIE
MUSEUM OF
MODERN ART

Berlin's Lotte Laserstein (1898–1993) was one of the most sensitive portrait painters of the early Modernist period when tradition vied with innovation. Already at the age of 30 years she was a well-known and successful artist.

The Return of Modern Realism

We live in a period marked by rediscoveries of artists whose careers were cut short, often brutally, by the turmoil of the 20th century, the age of extremes. And realism is on the way back. For several decades it was quite rightly a valid response to reject grandiose feudal self-projections, old chestnuts about the meaning of beauty and realism in the classical vein. The art of a new society order called for experiments and exploring of new perspectives. Now the art world is finding that contrasts between form and formlessness, between the figurative and conceptual symbolism, can once again broaden and enrich perception.

Images of People, Intimacy, Sensuality

Lotte Laserstein had a talent for combining two universes. She played with quotes from art history but also with hallmarks of Post-Impressionism – its flat forms and its brushwork. Her oeuvre is dominated by images of people, by intimacy, warmth and sensuality. She never idealised her models, but lent them dignity and a powerful presence, whether they were clothed or naked. Laserstein was a gentle, empathetic chronicler of the 1920s and 1930s: she painted women and men of the new era and of every class as naturally as she found them. She used pictorial means to defy contemporary social norms about gender roles.

Berlin's public museum of modern art, photography and architecture will present 58 works – 48 paintings and 9 drawings among them – by Laserstein along with documents reflecting her professional heyday in Berlin and her exile in Sweden. The Berlinische Galerie will take over the exhibition named "Face to Face" – organised by the Städel Museum in Frankfurt, running there until 17th of March. In Berlin, these works by Laserstein will be expanded by portraits, landscapes, late works and also by paintings from her artistic environment in the 1920/30s. Comparisons with Konrad Felixmüller, George Grosz, Max Liebermann, Christian Schad, for example, will demonstrate what makes Laserstein's realism so special and original.

Press release
Berlin, 14.3.19

Misery and splendour of a lifetime

Lotte Laserstein was born in 1898 in the town now known as Pasłęk, then in Eastern Prussia. Her father was a Protestant pharmacist with Jewish roots. He died when she was only three years old. Her mother then took her two daughters Lotte and Käte to live with her own mother, also widowed, in a upper middle-class household in Danzig (now Gdańsk). From 1908 Lotte was already being taught to paint by the artist Elsa Birnbaum, her mother's sister.

In 1912 the family moved to the capital Berlin. In 1921, after a full school education, Lotte began studying at Berlin's art academy, the Akademische Hochschule. In the new Weimar Republic, women were finally being admitted to public art schools. Her teacher there was Erich Wolfsfeld, and one of her idols was the Naturalist Wilhelm Leibl. She graduated from the master class in 1927 after winning several distinctions. Laserstein shot to success in the art world, participating in about 22 competitions and group exhibitions within a short space of time. The first acquisition of a Laserstein by the City of Berlin soon followed in 1928. While her art betrays elements of New Objectivity, which was very popular at the time, her style is neither objectifyingly cool nor heatedly socio-critical. In 1931 she had her first solo show at Fritz Gurlitt's gallery in Berlin.

With the seizure of power by the Nazis, 1933, she was banned from participating in public cultural life in Germany. For a few years she taught art at a private Jewish school. In 1937 she emigrated to Stockholm, where she was being honoured with an exhibition at the Galerie Moderne. From there she received news of her mother's internment and execution. At least her sister managed to survive by hiding underground in Berlin. In 1954, after turbulent years spent in isolation from the international art scene, Laserstein moved to Kalmar in southern Sweden, where commissioned portraits helped her to earn a livelihood. Her international rediscovery began during her lifetime with exhibitions in London in 1987 and 1990 at Thos. Agnew & Sons and The Belgrave Gallery. She died in Kalmar in 1993. Her art returned to Germany for the first time in 2003 with the exhibition "Lotte Laserstein: My Only Reality" at the Ephraim-Palais in Berlin, organised by Das Verborgene Museum and curated by Anna-Carola Krausse in partnership with the foundation Stadtmuseum Berlin.



Lotte Laserstein, *By the Motorbike*, 1929, Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, Inv.-Nr. 1990/2491, © Foto: Deutsches Historisches Museum/A. Psille, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2019

Exhibition concept by Annelie Lütgens, Head of Department Prints and Drawings

The Berlinische Galerie will not only show works from Lotte Laserstein's seminal period in Berlin but will also feature the second chapter in the painter's career – her exile. In 1983 she caught the attention of Peter Fors (*1957 in Kalmar) during a show held in Kalmar to mark her 85th birthday. The young art enthusiast met and supported Laserstein, becoming a close companion until her death. In 2009 he passed hundreds of papers from her documentary estate to the Artists' Archives at the Berlinische Galerie, some of which have been selected for the exhibition. These will be complemented by items belonging to Mr. Fors.

Lotte Laserstein found her place in the Berlinische Galerie already many years ago. In 2014 during the exhibition "Vienna Berlin. The Art of Two Cities" Laserstein's long-lost painting "In the Tavern" (1927) was shown again for the first time since 1928.

Wanda von Debschitz-Kunowski, Untitled (Lotte Laserstein in front of „Evening over Potsdam“), undated. Gift from Private collection, Repro: Anja Elisabeth Witte, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019



It had been purchased by the City of Berlin but removed during the Nazis' "Degenerate Art" campaign, and until 2013 it had been given up for lost. At the exhibition "Vienna Berlin", the Berlinische Galerie showed three loaned paintings by Laserstein, including her masterpiece "Evening over Potsdam" (1930), held since 2010 by the Nationalgalerie – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. The Berlinische Galerie has the good fortune to be displaying Laserstein's early "Self-Portrait in the Friedrichsruher Strasse Studio" in their permanent collection, where it has been on longterm loan from a private collection since 2016.

**Thomas Köhler,
Director of the Berlinische Galerie:**

"I am most grateful to my colleague Philipp Demandt for realising his museum's exhibition project jointly with the Berlinische Galerie. Our partnership with the Städel Museum took place in a spirit of great professionalism, harmony and collegiality. Alexander Eiling and Elena Schroll, as well as many other staff members in Frankfurt, played a decisive role in that. Likewise, we deeply appreciate the support from the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin and the fact that 'Evening over Potsdam' will return to our walls. I thank Anna-Carola Krausse, whose work was key to Lotte Laserstein's rediscovery, for her patience."

Press comments

Die Zeit: "Laserstein's pictures draw life from tranquillity. They need no world history, they have themselves. She ventures not into aesthetic insurrection. She ventures into proximity."

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung: "She does not so much paint the 'New Woman' that everyone in the Weimar Republic was on a quest to find with their 'new' mania, even if her sitters sport the bob and period costumes – she paints women as such."

Die Welt: "It is not such a bad thing that today we can stand and wonder at a Laserstein work unscathed by ninety years of obfuscated memory."

Süddeutsche Zeitung: "What absorbed her most was the magic of a female awareness of self, preserving a brief sigh of liberty between outbreaks of excessive male violence, where a woman could be herself unpressured."

Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung: "There is the technical finesse with which she drives the paints into and up against each other. Smudges contours with a finger and shoots particles at each other like iron filings, with fascinating blur effects."



Exhibition catalogue

Prestel Verlag
192 pages with 159 illustrations, German/English,
Museum edition 39.90 €
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Book trade edition 45.00 €
ISBN: 978-3-7913-5823-9

Accompanying events and outreach in English

Guided tours in English take place every Saturday
at 4:15 pm. No extra charge to ticket-holders.
No advance booking required.

Press images

[berlinischegalerie.de/en/press/press-information/
press-images-lotte-laserstein](http://berlinischegalerie.de/en/press/press-information/press-images-lotte-laserstein)

Online tickets

berlinischegalerie.de/en/service/online-tickets

Social Media

#LotteLasersteinBG
#berlinischegalerie

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