

## Forging Close Bonds

### **The Relationships between Erika Hoffmann and the Women Artists of the Sammlung Hoffmann**

Franziska Wilmsen

In an archive file at the Sammlung Hoffmann (Hoffmann Collection) I found a photograph of VALIE EXPORT's famous *Action Pants: Genital Panic* (VALIE EXPORT, 1969), in which the more recent photographer can be seen reflected in the original work's glazing.<sup>1</sup> With her silhouette, this photographer fits neatly within the contours of the body of the artist, whose image was taken after VALIE EXPORT's eponymous performance in a Munich art cinema. In her performance, she confronted viewers with her genitalia – visible because she had cut out the crotch of her pants – and thereby pointed out in an extreme way the clichés one finds in the representation of women in film. It would appear that the photographer captured herself “in” this iconic work of 1970s feminist art more accidentally than on purpose.<sup>1</sup> Erika Hoffmann-Koenige, who took the reference image of *Action Pants* for her collection's archive, only became aware of the artist's guerrilla-style performances and actions years later. Still, one immediately wonders what kind of relationship the collector has had with the work and its creator. What was the incentive to acquire this pertinent piece of feminist art? Is the collector a feminist herself?

While the last question would require an in-depth interview with Erika Hoffmann-Koenige, which would result in a portrait of the collector, the other two questions point in the direction this essay will take in the discussion. They are the starting point in the research I conducted to address the relationships between Erika Hoffmann-Koenige and the women artists of her collection. At the centre of this enquiry are the interactions between collector and artists, and the meaning of the works that were incorporated into the Sammlung Hoffmann. These topics are crucial to explore because they will provide a better understanding of networks

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<sup>1</sup> The black and white photograph of VALIE EXPORT was taken by Peter Hassmann in 1969. Afterwards, *Action Pants: Genital Panic* was circulated throughout public spaces and on streets in various cities in the form of screen-printed posters. See Elizabeth Manchester, “VALIE EXPORT. *Action Pants: Genital Panic*”, *Tate.org*, March 2017, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/export-action-pants-genital-panic-p79233> (Accessed 13 November 2022). The version held by the Sammlung Hoffmann is a single silkscreen on paper, from an edition of max. 250.

of women collectors and artists, thus helping to fill a lacuna within current scholarship and museum practices. Furthermore, by looking at the Sammlung Hoffmann from a perspective of museology, sociology and gender studies, this analysis shall, firstly, cast light upon how women collectors engage with artists and their works. Second, it will explore the networking and communication strategies employed by women in the art world from the 1980s until recent years, looking at pertinent cases. Finally, this enquiry will help illuminate the contributions of women in the global visual arts for a broader audience and will help enter pivotal but less-seen artworks into a collective (art) history.

Current scholarship on gender and equality as well as society's heightened awareness of these topics have intensified critical research on the representation of women artists and on the persons, who present them in exhibitions and collections. The underrepresentation of women artists in art institutions has been emphatically pointed out, having come to light through quantitative and descriptive analyses of their representation within academies, art prizes (e.g., Turner Prize), the art market (fairs such as Art Basel), and public collections. While these approaches are very relevant, it is also clear that less has been published on women artists who are represented in private collections owned by women, such as that of Erika Hoffmann.<sup>2</sup>

Though one cannot assume that private art collections owned by women are generally more balanced in their representation of women and men artists, recent gender debates stress the relevance of pursuing such questions. While the media give detailed reports about male collectors championing male artists as virtuosos first and foremost (François Pinault and Damien Hirst; Giuseppe Morra and Hermann Nitsch), little is known about female collector-artist-relationships

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<sup>2</sup> There are, of course, quite a few surveys concerned with women collectors, such as Peggy Guggenheim, Helene Kröller-Müller or the contemporary Patrizia Sandretto Re Rebaudengo. However, biographies and interviews on those women tend to stress their "exceptionality" within the line-up of private collectors, rather than looking at their representation of women artists. See Mary V. Dearborn, *Mistress of Modernism: The Life of Guggenheim*, New York City (NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004); Dorothee Wimmer, Christina Feilchenfeldt and Stephanie Tasch (eds.), *Kunstsammlerinnen. Peggy Guggenheim bis Ingvild Goetz*, (Berlin: Reimer, 2009); see Patrizia Sandretto Re Rebaudengo interviewed by Sabine B. Vogel, "Ich möchte involviert sein [I like to be involved]", *KUNST-FORUM International*, no. 244:150–52.

due to a lack of public communication.<sup>3</sup> In which ways do women collectors engage with women artists? What is the quality of these networks? And what art histories are in turn forged within these private collections? In the case of the Sammlung Hoffmann, from which around 1,200 works have been donated, and are still going to be integrated to the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, we also need to ask how these relationships might influence the museum's exhibition practices.

By examining these facets of private collecting and its social construction, the question of its relevance comes to the fore. Pivotal for a nuanced understanding of the bonds between Erika Hoffmann and the women artists in her collection are art- sociological discussions. Pierre Bourdieu's study of the power relations between actors of the art world remains an important approach to the social production of art.<sup>4</sup> This theory and other sociological writing, such as the more recent network theory advanced by Bruno Latour, proffer valid accounts that can prompt analyses into the networked bonds of the Sammlung Hoffmann.<sup>5</sup> Erika Hoffmann legitimises such avenues of discussion as she has emphasised in interviews that her collection rests upon a verbal and intellectual exchange of artistic ideas between collector and artist as equal partners.<sup>6</sup> This self-image which Erika Hoffmann has expressed is distinct from the concept of acquired art as a financial asset, characteristic of a certain kind of stereotypical (male) collectors and their social circles.<sup>7</sup> From out of a friendly relationship between the collector and artists, works have also been included in the holdings in other ways, for example as gifts.

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<sup>3</sup> See Carol Vogel, "Damien Hirst Is Back With an Underwater Fantasy. Will Collectors Care?", *The New York Times*, 6 April 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/06/arts/design/damien-hirst-francois-pinault-palazzograssi.html> (Accessed 13 November 2022). Further see "Hermann Nitsch bekommt Museum in Neapel [Hermann Nitsch gets a museum in Naples], *Tagesspiegel*, 20 August 2008, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/hermann-nitsch-bekommt-museum-in-neapel-1685824.html> (Accessed 13 November 2022).

<sup>4</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 1984; id., *The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. by Susan Emanuel (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> See "Quellen zeitgenössischen Kunstsammelns. Interview mit Erika Hoffmann", in *COLLECTING NOW. 2010*, 1 February 2010, [http://www.collectingnow.de/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/COLLECTING-NOW\\_Interview-Erika-Hoffmann\\_100201.pdf](http://www.collectingnow.de/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/COLLECTING-NOW_Interview-Erika-Hoffmann_100201.pdf) (Accessed 14 November).

<sup>7</sup> For further reading on the financial power of wealthy, private art collectors see Kathryn Brown, "Private Influence, Public Goods and the Future of Art History", in *Journal for Art Market Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2019), pp. 1–17.

Moreover, Erika Hoffmann's perception of her encounters with artists, which has added levels of meaning for artworks and deepened personal experience, underscores the necessity of looking into these artistic circles from a sociological perspective.<sup>8</sup>

However, it must also be said that focusing on only one of the two collectors of the Sammlung Hoffmann – developed as it was for over twenty years by the couple Rolf and Erika Hoffmann – remains a complex venture. The scope of this essay 'excludes', to put it bluntly, the Hoffmanns' joint endeavour of collecting, and primarily zeroes in on the relationships between Erika Hoffmann and certain women artists with whom she became friends. This can be legitimised by the finding that in most work files I reviewed, it was Erika Hoffmann alone who maintained (written and telephone) contact with these women artists. Thus, she emerged somewhat as a 'keeper' of their relational nexus. In the following, the reader will notice that references will change back and forth between the Hoffmann couple and the individual Erika Hoffmann. In this way, this article intends to uphold Rolf Hoffmann's merits and his crucial role in building this collection while also daring to emphasise Erika Hoffmann's engagement with particular artists.

#### Exploring the archive: From *Werkmappen* to *Passagenbücher*

The primary source for exploring such an artistic-institutional network has been, next to an interview with Erika Hoffmann, her comprehensive yet unpublished collection archive. This archive comprises so-called *Werkmappen* [German for 'work files'], which are portfolios allocated for each artwork in the collection. These files contain documents on the artwork's provenance, certificates, manuals, or images of similar works by the artist. However, the *Werkmappen* are not to be mistaken with a registry of objects or a catalogue as one would find with a museum. Instead, this form of archival material offers a more intimate understanding of the relationship between the collector(s), the works, and rather implies the character of a diary. The archive grew out of Erika and Rolf Hoffmann's first attempts to document their earliest acquisitions as a personal collection of ideas, images and technical details connected to the artworks. Though the couple started acquiring

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<sup>8</sup> See Erika Hoffmann in Gerda Ridler, *Privat gesammelt – öffentlich präsentiert. Über den Erfolg eines neuen musealen Trends bei Kunstsammlungen*, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2012, p. 259.

art in the late sixties, it was only in 1985, when Rolf Hoffmann's family company Van Laack was sold, that Erika Hoffmann (who worked as a designer of the firm's ladies' wear) was able to develop their collection's archive further.<sup>9</sup> Next to her personal notes on artworks – her intermittent jotting down of her interpretations or thoughts about them – the files further contain correspondence between her, Rolf and the artists (mainly hand-written letters and faxes). These textual components have been complemented with images of the works or with postcards showing works by other artists from various periods in art history that share a similar visual motif or concept with the item in the file. Consequently, the *Werkmappen* are to be understood less as a loose amassing of material and more as Erika Hoffmann's personal "almanacs".

In addition to the correspondence and the collector's written statements on artworks and their ideas, other sources are useful for grasping the social framework of the collection, for example, monographs on the artists and the so-called *Passagenbücher*.<sup>10</sup> The latter is an unpublished, ongoing series of "books" edited by Erika Hoffmann and her staff, consisting, for example of the collection's director and the "docents", who are the collection's guides.<sup>11</sup> Since the opening of the Hoffmann Collection in 1997 at Sophie-Gips-Höfe in Berlin Mitte, the *Passagenbücher* have been used to compile quotations, notes by the collectors, or artist's statements – all of which accompany and comment on each year's changing installation in the private showrooms. Compared to the *Werkmappen*, the *Passagenbücher* give a focused presentation of the exhibition of the collection and its works, while the *Werkmappen* content provides a rather 'unfiltered' view into the collection and offers missing context from the exchange between Erika Hoffmann and the artists that had not yet been specified in the literature.

Though such archival resources helped extend the empirical scope of this research, the meaning of the material sometimes lacked the necessary contextualisation. These gaps were filled through an interview with Erika Hoffmann that

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<sup>9</sup> See Sabrina van der Ley, "Kunst und Alltag als Symbiose. Die Sammlerin Erika Hoffmann", in *Kunstsammlerinnen*, edited by Dorothee Wimmer et. al., 2009, pp. 205–14, here p. 208.

<sup>10</sup> I would argue the term has a distinctly Walter Benjamin ring to it; see Walter Benjamin, "Das Passagen-Werk," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, vol. V (Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp-Verlag, 1982).

<sup>11</sup> Until his death, Rolf Hoffmann has also been an editor of the *Passagenbücher*.

helped to illuminate the collection's connection to certain women artists, the history of certain relationships as well as her own history as a person engaging with contemporary artists.<sup>12</sup> This interview also provided information about how artworks by women entered the collection and it shed light on the collector's decision-making process in her acquisitions.<sup>13</sup> Though the rich material would allow this study to be taken in various directions, the following analysis will be narrowed down to a few relationships and facets of collecting pertaining to the Sammlung Hoffmann. To start with, an up-to-date overview of the women artists represented in the holdings may be given:

Marina Abramović	Rineke Dijkstra
Carla Accardi	A.K. (Anne Katrine) Dolven
Rosa Barba	Catharina van Eetvelde & Abigail Lang
Yael Bartana	Tracey Emin
Hilla Becher*	Barbara Ess
Vanessa Beecroft	VALIE EXPORT
Ella Bergmann-Michel	Gretchen Faust
Vanessa Bell	Lili Fischer
Hella Berent	Gunda Förster
Madeleine Berkheimer	Ellen Gallagher
Monica Bonvicini	Isa Genzken
Elina Brotherus	Nan Goldin
Lonnie v. Brummelen*	Ulrike Grossarth
Miriam Cahn	Katharina Grosse
Sophie Calle	Carla Guagliardi
Patty Chang	Hannah Hallermann
Olga Chernysheva	Susan Hiller

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<sup>12</sup> This semi-structured interview took place in Berlin, Sophie-Gips-Höfe, on 20 June 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Further in-depth empirical study was limited due to the missing list of acquisition dates that would have been helpful in determining possible trends or patterns.

Jenny Holzer	Angelika Platen
Rebecca Horn	Anne Poirier*
Zuzanna Janin	Ljubov Popova
Leiko Ikemura	Charlotte Posenske
Jia	Joanna Rojkowska
Sejla Kamezić	Rivka Rinn
Kan Xuan	Pipilotti Rist
Kimsooja	Monica Droste*
Astrid Klein	Olga Rozanova
Iwajla Klinke	Nancy Rubins
Katarzyna Kobro	Duba Sambolec
Nina Kogan	Jenny Saville
Silvia Kolbowski	Carolee Schneemann
Katarzyna Kozyra	Gundula Schulze-Eldow
Barbara Kruger	Marike Schuurman
Elke Krystufek	Bonnie Seeman
Yayoi Kusama	Ene-Liis Semper
Eve André Laramée	Chiaru Shiota
Julie Mehretu	Katharina Sieverding
Ana Mendieta	Nancy Spero
Charlotte Moorman	Varvara Stepanova
Sarah Morris	Mathilde Ter Heijne
Teresa Murak	Rosemarie Trockel
Natalia LL (Natalia Lach-Lachowicz)	Joëlle Tuerlinckx
Helga Natz	Susan Turcot
Silke Otto-Knapp	Adriana Varejão
Therese Oulton	Jorinde Voigt
Elizabeth Peyton	Marijke von Warmerdam
Chloe Piene	Dorothee von Windheim
Suzan Pitt	Francesca Woodman

Andrea Zittel

\*= is part of an artists' duo incl. a man.

The international nature of the collection is discernible in the list of women artists, who come from North America, Eastern and Western Europe, and Asian Countries. Immediately, important protagonists of avant-garde and feminist generations stand out, such as Tracey Emin, Barbara Kruger, Natalia LL, Ana Mendieta, Pipilotti Rist, Nancy Spero or VALIE EXPORT, but so too do contemporary, "post-feminist" positions such as those of Patty Chang, Monica Bonvicini and Katarzyna Kozyra.<sup>14</sup> Also striking is the relatively strong presence of artists working in performance (collected in the form of video), photography and video. Turning to this in particular, the following paragraphs will explore the positioning of video art in the Sammlung Hoffmann and will look at the ways these works or artists were included by the collector.

#### Connecting with (Women) artists – Erika Hoffmann's commitment

Mapping out a relational field such as we find with the Sammlung Hoffmann requires attention to the environments in which Erika Hoffmann has met artists such as VALIE EXPORT and/or encountered their work (in person or through an intermediary, for example the gallerist or even a place such as an exhibition). Art sociology, and most prominently Bourdieu, have conceived artworks as situated at these 'meeting points' or 'junctions', in the social conditions of their production, distribution and consumption.<sup>15</sup> This depiction of the art field means that artworks are neither automatically included in canons nor expressive of artistic merit in their own right. Instead, in these relational contexts, such as in a private collection, value is given to the work and its producer by the collector's decision-making process (his or her selection of artists) based on the 'supply range' he or she is offered.

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<sup>14</sup> I have borrowed the term "post-feminist" from Roberta Smith's review of Patty Chang's performances in the late 1990s at Jack Tilton Gallery in New York City. However, this term is not used in an official way in feminist or gender scholarship as far as I am aware. See Roberta Smith, "ART IN REVIEW; Patty Chang", in: *The New York Times*, 16 April 1999, p. 35.

<sup>15</sup> See Bourdieu 1984.



'Supply range' here means the range of artworks and artists collectors encounter in a particular cultural environment. As Erika Hoffmann recollects, she mainly discovered artists and their works through galleries.<sup>16</sup> This serves to underscore the idea in sociological scholarship that art dealers remain critical mediators for collectors, providing access to artistic work.<sup>17</sup>

This circumscribed frame of accessing the art market as well as Erika and Rolf Hoffmann's involvement within the Rhineland art scene beginning in the 1970s affected the range of artists represented in their collection. Here, a picture emerges that is similar to the one we find when looking at the proportion of men and women artists exhibited or collected in public museums or on the art market.<sup>18</sup> The Sammlung Hoffmann counts works by about 330 artists, of whom 96 are female. This yields a proportion of 30 %. Though this is a proportion similar to what one finds nowadays on the art market or in public museums, the Sammlung Hoffmann is by no means a perfect reflection of galleries' cadres of artists as is the case with other private collectors. Although the collector couple was presented with mostly male artists through galleries<sup>19</sup> and was in contact with artists such as Joseph Beuys and Marcel Broodthaers at the museum's society in Mönchengladbach, the collection today offers quite vigorous feminist positions (including VALIE EXPORT, Natalia LL and Nancy Spero). Furthermore, in the West, lesser-known women artists such as Teresa Murak entered the collection in the 1980s. Such an aspect is interesting to consider more closely given that scholars such as Marsha Meskimmon have reminded us of "female forgetting", reinforced

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<sup>16</sup> See interview with Erika Hoffmann, 20 June 2022.

<sup>17</sup> See Fabio Rojas and Peter Lista, "A Sociological Theory of Contemporary Art Collectors", in: *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, 2022, 52:2, pp. 88–100, DOI: 10.1080/10632921.2021.2014010.

<sup>18</sup> For example, Tate Modern has exhibited from 2000 to 2021 a total of 179 national and international artists (in solo or duo exhibitions and shows by collectives). Of this number, 69% were male (124 artists), 30 % were women (54 artists) and 1 % non-binary (1 artist). I collected these data in 2020, while I was co-authoring in a study of the ISRF-funded research group from Loughborough University and Université Paris 8. See further Kate McMillan, *Representation of Female Artists in Britain During 2019*, London: Freeland Foundation, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> In North-Rhine Westphalia for instance Galerie m in Bochum, from whose owner Alexander von Berswordt-Wallrabe they bought their first work of Frank Stella in the early 1970s.

as it is by both art history and the art market in the course of the art world's globalisation.<sup>20</sup> For this reason, a reflection on the Hoffmann's collecting criteria is even more called for, as well as their openness towards feminist and women's art practices.

As Erika Hoffmann emphasises, the couple did not establish a collecting concept until the mid-1980s:

We even went so far as to put our criteria into words; that was in 1983 or 1984, around the time the company [Van Laack] was sold. After that, [...] as we became increasingly serious, we felt it was important to work out our own criteria. For example: "An artwork should be independent, in other words, new, be it in terms of form and content at the time of its inception; contemporary and seminal at the same time, reflecting current issues in a changing society and challenging us both intellectually and emotionally; [it should] incorporate idea and form as one unit, in other words, be unimaginable any other way; retain something a bit inexplicable, a lasting hint of incongruity; and finally, possess power and urgency, [...] the ability to inspire."<sup>21</sup>

This written statement bespeaks the couple's need to find intellectual stimulation in contrast to their highly engaging business activities, the management of a clothing company.<sup>22</sup> Though the Sammlung Hoffmann was never intended as a corporate collection, one can find a similarity between their approach and the value companies see in contemporary art and its producers as they acquire art. Hanno Rauterberg points out that companies hope for art's "intense transfer of power", meaning that they believe that the artist's exceptional abilities such as ingenuity, freethinking, and a risk appetite will transfer to their employees.<sup>23</sup> This idea of a transfer of energies certainly resonates in the Hoffmanns' collecting statement, though only with respect to a private agenda. What we find missing in the above statement, however, is the essential aspect of the Hoffmanns' style of

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<sup>20</sup> See Marsha Meskimmon, "Knowing, Imaging, and Inhabiting – Earthwide and Otherwise," in: *Empowerment. Art and Feminisms*, edited by Andreas Beutin et. al., ex.cat. Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg (Wolfsburg: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 2022), p. 32.

<sup>21</sup> See E. Hoffmann, in an interview with Pamela Kort, "A Life with Art", in: *Collection Hoffmann. With the Bicycle to the Milky Way*, edited by Martin Roth, ex. cat. Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2009), p. 85.

<sup>22</sup> See P. Kort 2009; further interview of the author with E. Hoffmann, 2022.

<sup>23</sup> See Hanno Rauterberg, *Die Kunst und das gute Leben. Über die Ethik der Ästhetik* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2015), p. 75.

collecting, which appears to be a rare feat, presumably only achieved by avid collectors: the (verbal and written) intellectual exchange with artists. This self-image, which finds expression in Erika Hoffmann's statements in interviews, stands at a remove from the concept of acquired art as a financial asset or cultural capital, a concept typically espoused by collectors of a particular class moving in particular social circles.<sup>24</sup>

Together with the Hoffmanns' collecting concept, such a practice of exchange requires personal, dedicated involvement with artists, often spanning years and taking place on a regular basis, as Gerda Ridler states.<sup>25</sup> Such a practice stands apart from approaches to collecting that are governed by trends on the art market or by museum canons in which only white male artists 'reign'. With her art history background and her designer's career at Van Laack, Erika Hoffmann seems to have been well equipped with the intellectual and creative abilities and the knowledge to discover artistic positions and arrive at her own judgements.<sup>26</sup> Thus, it was no surprise that she became enthusiastic about Constructivist women artists such as Olga Rozanova and Varvara Stepanova when she first learned about them in the exhibition *Tendenzen der Zwanziger Jahre 1977* in Berlin.<sup>27</sup> As Erika Hoffmann says in the interview, she was not aware of these women although they stand at the core of the Russian avant-garde.<sup>28</sup>

After these discoveries, the Hoffmann couple paid a visit to the gallery Gmurzynska in Cologne, which specialised in masters of the Russian avant-garde. The Hoffmanns acquired work by Olga Rozanova, Nina Kogan and Katarzyna Kobro, and Erika Hoffmann even participated in the gallery's first show focusing only on Constructivist women artists.<sup>29</sup> In 1979, Erika Hoffmann not only acquired art-

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<sup>24</sup> Such as in *COLLECTING NOW*, 2010; further see E. Hoffmann cited in Ridler 2012, p. 256.

<sup>25</sup> See Ridler 2012, p. 260.

<sup>26</sup> For a short biography, see the interview with P. Kort.

<sup>27</sup> See author, interview with E. Hoffmann, 2022.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> The show "Women Artists of the Russian Avant-Garde" was curated by the gallerist Krystyna Gmurzynska.

works by the artists Ljubov Popova and Varvara Stepanova, but also produced fifteen garments based on their designs.<sup>30</sup> Author Sonja Eismann describes the distinguishing features of Stepanova's practical unisex designs: "[she] distanced herself from the imitation of nature [...] she favored more abstract, geometric patterns and bold colors for textiles. [...] This meant: comfortable, practical, working away from the body—both female and male—rather than exhibiting it in its many shapes".<sup>31</sup> Eismann writes that such deflection from the specific physical characteristics of women, from femininity or women's external appearance, can be seen as an early "emancipation effort" that is expressed artistically.<sup>32</sup> Thus it can be said that as soon as the Hoffmanns started collecting seriously around this time, Erika Hoffmann encountered radical designs and ideas that were linked to feminist endeavours. In fact, she was so inspired by the designs of the Constructivist artists that she decided to execute them.

However, Erika Hoffmann did not limit herself to grasping these artistic concepts purely intellectually and creatively, but instead wanted to expand her engagement with artists on a more direct and personal level. She got in touch with Szymon Bojko, a Polish art historian (and later a lecturer at the Rhode Island School of Design), whom she met in 1980 when she lent her Russian avant-garde dresses to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art for an exhibition.<sup>33</sup> With her eagerness to learn about new art from the Soviet Union, especially as the Iron Curtain was about to fall, she was keen to learn his opinion. Having asked Bojko in 1984 to name some artists with whom she might be able to work on an exhibition, she became aware of Polish artist Teresa Murak and her work.<sup>34</sup> Though Teresa Murak sent her a photograph for the show to be exhibited, it was only in 1986 that she and Murak were finally able to meet in person because of the political situation. Erika Hoffmann describes the relationship she had developed with Teresa

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<sup>30</sup> See interview with P. Kort, p. 80 f.

<sup>31</sup> See Sonja Eismann, "Reform Dresses, Revolutionary Suits and Blue Bras. On the Relationship between Art, Fashion and Feminism", in: *Empowerment*, edited by Beitin et. al., 2022, 171.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>33</sup> The exhibition was titled "The Avant-Garde in Russia 1910-1930: New Perspectives", and curated by Stephanie Barron.

<sup>34</sup> See image film of the Dresden State Art Collection's series "Works from Donation Collection Hoffmann (1): Teresa Murak, no title (gloves)", *YouTube*, 2 December 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQHWM9pQCoU&t=15s> (Accessed: 21 November 2022).

Murak as a “felt connection” in the midst of language barriers, necessitating communication through gestures and signs.<sup>35</sup> Apparently, these constraints did not impede their dialogue (written and personal) but instead encouraged the collector to continue looking for artists who “have the courage not to follow social norms”.<sup>36</sup>

Other artists Erika Hoffmann established contact with in the early 1990s were Barbara Kruger, Gretchen Faust, and Nancy Spero. When she was invited by Sabine Fehleemann, director of Von-der-Heydt-Museum Wuppertal, to curate the exhibition *Buchstäblich. Bild und Wort in der Kunst heute* [Verbatim. Image and Word in Today’s Art] in 1991, the artists were supposed to come from North America. Because of her familiarity with the New York art scene at that time and her role as an associated curator, Erika Hoffmann could readily access galleries whose artists would best suit the theme. Through this exhibition, the collector became very intrigued by the idea of working with artists on site-specific commissions<sup>37</sup> – a form of collaboration we shall turn to later in the text. Erika Hoffmann’s first-hand experiences with the artists in the show, for example her experience of Barbara Kruger’s professionalism and Nancy Spero’s solidarity with other women artists, seem to have determined the collector’s demeanour towards the artists she henceforth acquired.

This goes to show how the act of featuring other artists, as Nancy Spero did with Ana Mendieta by ‘commemorating’ her 1982 performance *Body Tracks* in the new Wuppertal work *Ballade von der Judenhure Marie Sanders (1934-36)*, also became for the collector a specific means of art mediation.<sup>38</sup> As in the music industry, the phenomenon of featuring involves “one artist integrating another artist’s contribution [...] into their work.”<sup>39</sup> In a figurative sense, Erika Hoffmann’s conduct towards artists appears similarly supportive. For example, she regularly discusses their works with them in front of an audience and shows their works in her annually rotating exhibitions in the private rooms of her home at Sophie-Gips-

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<sup>35</sup> See interview with E. Hoffmann, 2022.

<sup>36</sup> See German quote, E. Hoffmann cited in G. Ridler 2012, p. 260.

<sup>37</sup> See interview with E. Hoffmann, 2022.

<sup>38</sup> See work file Nancy Spero, *Ballade von der Judenhure Marie Sanders (1934-36)*, unpublished, Sammlung Hoffmann archive. The original work *Body Tracks* by Mendieta was performed by herself at the Franklin Furnace Archive in New York City.

<sup>39</sup> See Andrea Ordanini et. al., “The featuring phenomenon in music: how combining artists of different genres increases a song’s popularity”, in: *Marketing Letters*, 29, 485–499 (2018), here 485.

Höfe. Not only this, but the letters archived in the *Werkmappen* indicate how the collector's support even goes beyond such traditional forms of mediation. In her correspondence with artists, Erika Hoffmann comments on new artworks about which the artists have asked her opinion or she even helps with the production of works (such as with Gretchen Faust's *The St. John Series/The Matthew Series*).<sup>40</sup> Here it is clear that such commitment is present throughout most of the reviewed *Werkmappen*, underscoring the statement made in Gerda Ridler's interview that, for Erika Hoffmann, personal relationship building with artists can even lead to deeper insights.<sup>41</sup>

### Video art as 'Mirror Image'

When browsing through the correspondence with particular artists or considering written statements Erika Hoffmann has made, one gains the impression that she is interested in something that comes in addition to having deeper insight into the artwork, however. Indeed, the archival material yields a picture of a collector who recognises herself in her collected works – who finds her reflection in them – and who, engaging with their producers, solidifies her connection with them. The mirror image metaphor does not in fact come out of nowhere: In the 1970s, feminists used it to express solidarity and 'sisterhood'.<sup>42</sup> The mirror image not only acts as a rhetorical figure in poems or manifestos but has a very literal analogy in video art shown on the television set as a mirror surface. In the following, I will bring these observations together and further illuminate Erika Hoffmann's predilection for performance and video art by women.

As stated and shown in the artist list, women pioneers in performance and video art are included in the Sammlung Hoffmann. In fact, 24 of the 96 women artists who document their performances on film or work with the medium have video works in the collection. This makes for a modest but noticeable anomaly, as the most significant portion of the collection consists of the classical mediums of

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<sup>40</sup> See work file Gretchen Faust, *The St. John Series*, unpublished, Sammlung Hoffmann archive.

<sup>41</sup> See Ridler 2012, p. 260, 272. For this fellowship, I have reviewed in total the work files by 35 artists within four weeks of archival research.

<sup>42</sup> See Kirstin Mertlitsch, *Sisters, Cyborgs, Drags: Das Denken in Begriffspersonen der Gender Studies*, Bielefeld: Transcript 2016, p. 66.

painting, sculpture, graphic art and photography.<sup>43</sup> Erika Hoffmann stresses that she and her husband never went to the cinema or watched TV – presumably, they refused this ‘non-medium’ in an Enzensbergian way.<sup>44</sup> Instead, she first became aware of the medium of video art through the video sculptures of Nam June Paik.<sup>45</sup> What followed were exhibitions by Marcel Odenbach, which she saw when she and her husband were living in Cologne and building their collection.<sup>46</sup> Though video art from the early 1990s is interspersed throughout the Sammlung Hoffmann, it was only in Berlin in the mid-nineties that the collector found the ideal spatial conditions to present video art. She describes her understanding of this medium:

In the beginning, the video was bound to a monitor or even a television set. [Projecting videos] was only an undertaking we planned for Berlin. And in the meantime, there were many more videos. It was then that ‘the’ medium, through its duration, was describing certain situations differently. What [...] I do not appreciate are narrative videos; no storytelling, but I would like to see a situation, preferably – a still life, in videos. And the same applies to [my] selection mainly. There is, of course, some telling not as a story but rather as telling that defines a certain situation.<sup>47</sup>

Erika Hoffmann has explained that this aspect of duration, or the situatedness, points to the core of certain video positions from the 1990s, put forward by artists such as Pipilotti Rist and Monica Bonvicini, who are included in the collection. Scholars like Katharina Fink posit that the manipulation of linearity and time is idiosyncratic to video and performance art:

To think of time in any other way and nonlinearly is to oppose these [linear, Western] patterns with something fundamentally *different*. [...] To stretch, accelerate, overlap, fold, and unfold time is to oppose its power. [...]

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<sup>43</sup> Prominent positions that work(ed) in these media and which are represented within the Sammlung Hoffmann are: Marcel Broodthaers, François Morellet, Richard Serra, Frank Stella, Arnulf Rainer, Günther Uecker and more.

<sup>44</sup> Hans-Magnus Enzensberger once had defined television as “Nullmedium” [German for ‘zero-medium’]. See “Die vollkommene Leere. Das Nullmedium oder warum alle Klagen über das Fernsehen gegenstandslos sind”, in: *DER SPIEGEL*, no. 20, 1988, pp. 234-44.

<sup>45</sup> He was a professor at the Dusseldorf Art Academy from 1979 to 1996 and had several exhibitions in the Rhineland beginning in the early 1970s. See interview the author with E. Hoffmann, 2022.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Translated from the German interview with E. Hoffmann, 2022.

Performance and video art are just two examples of dedication to this attack on temporality, which is both revolutionary and unpredictable.<sup>48</sup>

However, this bold statement does not consider the subjects pictured in the moving images of 1990s art. Looking at the case of Patty Chang's work, re-presented in the collection with three performances documented on video, the artist's/woman's body needs to be contextualised with respect to the dimension of time and situatedness, too. Especially in the piece *Melons (At a Loss)*, which she first performed in 1998 and videotaped in 1999, the non-linearity and minimal narrativity intensify how the artist deals with her body, or more precisely, with the Asian female body. The low-tech aesthetic of the video gives the work the appearance of a random scene. Using a kind of butcher's knife, Chang cuts and saws her voluminous bosom, consisting of melons. Scholars such as Lin Ming have seen this as the confrontation of the viewer with the stereotypes they have of the Asian female body (ethnicity, sex, the story of the inherited plate from her aunt, custom to Chinese people).<sup>49</sup> Chang tells the story about her dead aunt with a California twang, which further breaks with internalised stereotypes of Asian women.<sup>50</sup> Before the Hoffmanns' acquired this piece, they had seen Chang's likewise low-tech performance at Art Basel in Basel in 1998.<sup>51</sup> This presentation at the art fair must have stirred even more uneasiness with the (white, Western) spectators – triggering a negative reflection of inbuilt clichés.

In Katarzyna Kozyra's *The Rite of Spring* (1999-2002), Erika Hoffmann, who maintains a long-time friendship with the artist, finds a similar combination of themes and technical subtlety:

I found it fascinating how in the work, Katarzyna takes up not only the gender discussion from the original myth, *Le sacre du printemps*, but also the topic of age. In her reinterpretation of the ritual, it's not a beautiful young girl who is sacrificed, but ugly old people; [...]. Another aspect that interested me

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<sup>48</sup> See Katharina Fink, "Attack time: A Feminist Artistic Refusal", in: *Empowerment 2022*, p. 141.

<sup>49</sup> See Lin Ming, "Re-presenting the Asian Woman: Patty Chang's Performance Art of the Late 1990s", in: *pattychang.com*, [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57a3a21859cc68cdfbfc0c9d/t/58e79c4e37c5814cee38a369/1491573839528/2006\\_Representing+Asian+Women\\_ming+.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57a3a21859cc68cdfbfc0c9d/t/58e79c4e37c5814cee38a369/1491573839528/2006_Representing+Asian+Women_ming+.pdf) (Accessed 26 November 2022).

<sup>50</sup> Patty Chang was born in San Francisco, California to Chinese parents.

<sup>51</sup> Additionally, the Hoffmanns invited Patty Chang to re-perform *Melons (At a Loss)* at a private party in their Berlin space, where the video work *Fountain* was also shown in a loop.



was the production of stop-motion photographs as part of the six-channel video installation. [...] How daring it is to undertake this kind of animation – even if the result is only thirty-two seconds long – and what obsessiveness is required to see it through.<sup>52</sup>

This contrast underlines how, in the original 1913 ballet by impresario Sergei Diaghilev and composer Igor Stravinsky, Erika Hoffmann sees an opulence which Kozyra opposes in her video work through its “makeshift presentation”.<sup>53</sup> Such statements do more than reaffirm the collector’s interest in the aesthetics of a decade’s worth of video art, vitally influenced by women. They also disclose the collector’s tendency to engage with dissonance, breaks with societal norms, and outright confrontation with the viewer’s self.

Patty Chang’s *Fountain* from 1999 (fig. 2) explicitly deals with the concept of the ‘mirror image’. In this work from the collection, the trope of reflection turns into a literal motif as the artist is pictured slurping water from her mirror image. She filmed herself from a tight camera angle. The shot focuses on the artist’s face hanging over a mirror on the floor, wet with water. She is also carefully examining her face, like Narcissus from Greek mythology, as Erika Hoffmann has discerned: “What we see is a woman excessively drinking water, face to face with her own mirror image, a narcissus disposition that pretends to be self-satisfied but never gets enough of itself to be satisfied. This seems to me to reflect the present state of our society, our insatiable self-love, which has reached a crisis point.”<sup>54</sup> Instead of a male Narcissus, the woman in the video close-ups forces us, the viewers, to ‘take a look in the mirror’. While, in the 1970s, early feminist scholars such as Griselda Pollock discouraged the exposition of the (naked) female’s body in art because of the exploitative male gaze, art historians in the 1990s were more optimistic.<sup>55</sup> Amelia Jones, for instance, held that performance and video art with the

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<sup>52</sup> See statement by E. Hoffmann, “Erika Hoffmann-Koenige on Katarzyna Kozyra”, in: *So let the artists do it. Conversations with ten artists from the Collection Hoffmann*, edited by Isabel Parkes, Berlin: Distanz Verlag, 2021, p. 45 f.

<sup>53</sup> See author, interview with E. Hoffmann, 2022.

<sup>54</sup> See interview Kort, 2009, p. 88.

<sup>55</sup> See Griselda Pollock, “What’s Wrong with Images of Women?,” in: *Screen education* (24/1977), pp. 25-33.

female body as a subject can be eroticised, political and opposed to the patriarchal production of feminine images (i.d., the male gaze).<sup>56</sup>

Video art pioneers such as Ulrike Rosenbach aimed at an appropriation and deconstruction of the video image on the basis that video was an “unbiased medium” and therefore not dominated by men as with painting, nor was it historically loaded.<sup>57</sup> In video art of the 1990s, self-referentiality becomes characteristic, as in Chang’s work. Whereas Rosenbach’s statement also applies to myth-making in feminist art practice, the engagement of the artist’s body can be read as the narcissistic attempt at self-definition by “plunging into the electronical stream of images and churning up the water of a theory of narcissistic lads”, as Sigrid Adorf posits.<sup>58</sup> In an earlier account, Rosalind Krauss wondered when artists’ “self-regard is configured a narcissism so endemic to works of video” that she should “generalize it as *the* condition of the entire genre.”<sup>59</sup> The overarching argument of Krauss’s rather psychological account addresses the involvement of the artist’s body and/or spectators, who are surrounded or encapsulated by themselves. This idea has been interpreted by contemporary media scholars such as Alisa Kronberger as the self of the artist/spectator who transfers into its ‘double’ on a monitor and transforms the individual’s subjectivity “into another, mirror, object”.<sup>60</sup>

Though these studies, especially Krauss’s ideas, omit a clear definition of and separation from the psychological term “narcissism”, we nevertheless ought to utilise these concepts. Against this backdrop, the mirror image metaphor does more than describe an act of assertive self-reference on the part of artists such

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<sup>56</sup> See Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

<sup>57</sup> See Ulrike Rosenbach, “Video als Medium der Emanzipation,” in: *Digitales Erbe: Videokunst in Deutschland von 1963 bis heute*, edited by Rosanne Altstadt and Rudolf Frieling (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2006), pp. 99-102; here 101.

<sup>58</sup> See Sigrid Adorf, “Narzißtische Splitter. Video als feministische Botschaft in den 70er Jahren”, in: *Medien und Kunst: Geschlecht, Metapher, Code*, edited by Susanne von Falckenhausen et. al. (Marburg: Jonas-Verlag, 2004), p. 81 f. The German original: “[...]die in ihrem Eintauchen in den elektronischen Bilderstrom das Wasser einer Theorie selbstverliebter Knaben aufwühlen[...].”

<sup>59</sup> See Rosalind Krauss, “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism,” in: *October*, vol.1 (Spring, 1976), pp. 50-64; here 50.

<sup>60</sup> See Alisa Kronberger, *Diffraktionsereignisse der Gegenwart. Feministische Medienkunst trifft Neuen Materialismus*, (Bielefeld: transcript, 2022), p. 81. Kronberger cites Krauss in “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism,” *October* 1976, p. 55.

as Patty Chang and Katarzyna Kozyra. The self-reflection of the collector also comes to light in these videos as her statements convey not only information about the works but also the personal relationship she has established over the years by watching the videos. These works relay her sentiments, associations, and the knowledge she connects with them. Further evidence of this is shown by the material she has collected to accompany these works, which always adds insight and meaning. In an ontological sense, one can postulate that these video pieces and, in general, all the collection's works are expanded and enhanced by Erika Hoffmann's intellectual interaction and exchange with artists. To unpack this idea, I shall go back to how she engages (with) artists from an actor-network perspective.

### Collaborations: Actively Engaging (with) artists

A distinct modality connected to female networks in the contemporary art world can be seen in the manner in which women work together: as collectives, artist associations, or in the form of collaborations. These are terms frequently used to describe artist duos or groups of artists who support each other in solidarity and are process- or result-oriented.<sup>61</sup> As early as 2004, Grant Kester looked into the general phenomenon of artistic communities and collaborations.<sup>62</sup> He turned to countries such as Myanmar and Senegal, which were long overlooked by the Western art world. Just recently, these terms took on renewed significance by becoming linked to activist and/or feminist art practice.<sup>63</sup> Not only artists but also art institutions want a slice of this cake: With the help of artists working with communities, for example Tania Bruguera's relational art<sup>64</sup> for the Turbine Hall Commission at Tate Modern in 2018, museums have been aiming to promote themselves

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<sup>61</sup> Compare e.g. the newest anthology on feminism, the catalogue *Empowerment* by Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg. See here, especially, Katharina Koch, *In a Collective Way. Practices and Challenges of (Feminist) Collaborations in the Field of Art*, in the same, Beitin and Ruhkamp 2022, pp. 129-32. See also Maria Lind, "Complications. On Collaboration, Agency and Contemporary Art," in *New Communities*, edited by Nina Möntmann (Toronto: The Power Plant and Public Books, 2009), p. 54.

<sup>62</sup> See Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004); *The One and the Many. Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>63</sup> Most prominently, see ruangrupa's concept of the artists' collective and collaboration in 2022 at documenta fifteen. Also, in 2021, the Turner Prize has been awarded to an artists' collective for the first time, the Irish artists' group Array Collective.

<sup>64</sup> The artist has specified her practice as "arte útil", in English 'useful art'.

as community-minded and solidary. However, the commissioning of underrepresented artists (women, ethnic minorities) by public museums might risk becoming an act of tokenism rather than an effective means of diversifying the Western art history canon.<sup>65</sup>

One can say the opposite is true for private collectors. Except for some marketing-savvy collectors such as Charles Saatchi and François Pinault, private collectors like Erika Hoffmann seldom disclose details of their relationships with artists to advertise their collection. When it comes to the production of new artistic work, be it in the public or private sphere, the work in progress is concealed from the audience, and generally only presented in its final form. However, as Martha Buskirk points out, the ways in which museums and other institutions cooperate with artists – which she specifies as “negotiations” – “dramatically [shape] the public presentation of art.”<sup>66</sup> Since a significant portion of the Sammlung Hoffmann is donated to the Dresden State Art Collections, a large number of the works discussed here will be presented to the public. However, in what sense can the collector-artist cooperation influence an artwork? By looking into these ‘modalities’ based on a handful of cases, I will explore the nature of Erika Hoffmann’s collaborations with women artists as well as how this is manifested within the collection.

Central here is the notion that everyone and everything involved in the artistic relationships actually helps fashion the artwork. This brings us to the core of Bruno Latour’s actor-network-theory, which can serve as a simplified method in the social sciences, used to explore social entities without focusing on their opaque interdependencies (which reveals the flaw in Bourdieu’s theory). The pivotal feature is that according to Latour, both humans and things can form and determine a network. Thus, all entities perform as actors and have an influence on all others involved in their social group.<sup>67</sup> This means that in micro-milieus such as Erika Hoffmann’s network with artists, anything from the fax machines used for

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<sup>65</sup> I have discussed several cases of museum commissions which address this issue. See Franziska Wilmsen, *Commissioning the Contemporary: Museum Brands, Art Trends and Creative Networks* (Loughborough: Loughborough University Research Repository, 2020).

<sup>66</sup> See Martha Buskirk, “The Museum as Producer,” in *Now–Tomorrow–Flux. An Anthology on the Museum of Contemporary Art*, edited by Beatrice von Bismarck and Peter J. Schneemann (Zurich: Jrp Ringier, 2017), pp. 107-16, here 110.

<sup>67</sup> See Bruno Latour, “On actor-network theory. A few clarifications plus more than a few complications,” *Soziale Welt* 47, no.4 (1996), pp. 369-81.

communication to the studio workers responsible for production would be considered essential in the creation of an artwork. In a way that is characteristic of ANT, material structures facilitate human interaction, and thus, all of these objects have the same importance as humans in a specific network. In view of such comprehensiveness, I will focus solely on the correspondence or statements documenting the exchange between collector and artists to arrive at an understanding of influences.

The collector's collaborations can be divided into three categories: productions conceptualised or coordinated by artists, commissions, and gifts by artists. As mentioned above, Erika Hoffmann's first 'collaboration' took place when she realised clothing designs by Ljubov Popova and Varvara Stepanova at the Van Laack workshops. One imagines this was a rather tricky venture since both artists were deceased and could not be consulted about their original designs. Inevitably, executing these designs necessitated expertise in garment-making and an allegiance to the artistic legacy of both women. Teresa Murak's land art piece *Rasenskulptur* [Grass Sculpture] (1996; fig. 3) in one of the courtyards on the Sophie-Gips premises presents a similar case in terms of the collector's contribution. The work is made of a tilted lawn surface in which a ridge seemingly rises from the earth and the opposite side sinks into the soil. The structure is held by corten steel. Though *Rasenskulptur* looks as if it was custom-made for this space, the artist actually conceived it for a different setting, as Erika Hoffmann says.<sup>68</sup> In fact, it was the collector's initiative that facilitated the realisation of this work of land art.

As the Hoffmanns were still based in Mönchengladbach in the 1980s, Teresa Murak was able to visit the collectors there several times and stay in their guest house. During one of her visits, as Erika Hoffmann recounts, the artist outlined a sculpture for their private garden, destined to be embedded in the soil – a composition the collectors never intended for their garden.<sup>69</sup> During their home conversion in Berlin, Erika Hoffmann asked several landscape architects to develop the courtyard garden. However, as she was not satisfied with their ideas and designs, the collector devised the plans for the courtyard garden on her own, and

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<sup>68</sup> See author, interview with E. Hoffmann, 2022.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

asked Teresa Murak to adapt her piece to the new conditions in Berlin. Erika Hoffmann explains:

She was to design for us the sculpture she had intended for Mönchengladbach, which is what she did [for Berlin]. So she used a stellar constellation as a template and explained to me that it should look as if it had fallen from heaven. But she had no clue how to execute this idea [...] so we worked with a builder who did steelwork for us. She prescribed all the lines and slants. But [these earth masses] are stabilised through corten steel; this was our solution.<sup>70</sup>

This account of their collaboration shows, on the one hand, how the early concept for the artwork developed and transformed over the years as a result of the interpersonal rapport between collector and artist and the long-term consideration of her artistic concept. Erika Hoffmann thus seized the opportunity to work with Teresa Murak and execute *Rasenskulptur* in accordance with her plans, conserved as they were in the artist's drawings and memory. Further, these drawings constitute a kind of manual; they are even a complement to the actual artwork, and they embody a critical element of its production. At the same time, this case shows how collaboration does not equal imprudence on the part of the collector but is rather a well-considered venture – “in any case, it should last a long time”, as Erika Hoffmann emphasises.<sup>71</sup>

Other kinds of production can become somewhat unpredictable, for example when patrons take a risk by commissioning emerging artists who are not yet well-versed in contract work compared to experienced artists. However, the Hoffmanns hazarded such an experiment when they invited the German artist Gunda Förster, at the time still a student at Hochschule der Künste in Berlin, to develop works for the passages joining the courtyards between Sophienstraße and Gipsstraße. Before she was commissioned with *Lichträume* [Light Rooms] (1996), the artist showed her work in a temporary installation at the underground station Weinmeisterstraße, close to the Hoffmanns' new home. Erika Hoffmann explains that Gunda Förster was introduced to the collectors in 1994, and after they had seen her well-prepared plans, they agreed to finance the temporary light piece *Red*, consisting of fluorescent tubes.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

Because of her “incredibly precise and sound way of working”, the Hoffmanns decided to commission her to design light works for five passages on the premises. According to Erika Hoffmann’s note in the Gunda Förster *Werkmappe*, she developed a different geometric layout built with light tubes for every passage.<sup>73</sup> These arrangements were created specifically for these sites and then permanently installed. This commission ultimately became a fruitful collaboration between a young Berlin artist and a collector couple engaging in experimentation in Europe’s rising art capital. It can thus be said that during the production of the first temporary work (a trial-and-error attempt), the Hoffmanns gained the confidence to work with less experienced artists. In these collaborations, Erika Hoffmann could fall back on the know-how she had acquired with her work as curator for the *Buchstäblich* exhibition, and the collectors and the artist could share their skills and knowledge to realise the commission. In this way, both parties received something in the exchange.

While commissioning can be perceived as a tangible and intangible exchange for the collector and artists, gifting tends to be thought of as a one-way act connected with the reception of a ‘thing’. It could be argued that Teresa Murak’s *Rasenskulptur* could be considered a gift since no contract was initiated nor was the commission officially given by Erika Hoffmann. Such an interpretation is also supported when one considers other collection works by Murak, some of which the Hoffmanns purchased, and some of which they received as gifts from the artist during the time when the collectors were in Mönchengladbach and Cologne. An example here is *Leibmaske* (1992), inspired by the female body masks of the Makonde people from Tanzania, which Murak saw at the Hoffmanns’ Cologne house.<sup>74</sup> Though gifting can serve as an effective means by which artists position particular works they consider to be consonant with the collector’s other acquisitions, I believe in this case it expresses the personal and intellectual dialogue between the collector(s) and Teresa Murak. Because of their direct, intimate contact without having a gallerist as an intermediary, the artist found more than a patron in Erika Hoffmann. To conclude with a nod to Lewis Hyde and his book

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<sup>73</sup> See work file *Gunda Förster, Lichträume 1996*.

<sup>74</sup> See Dresden State Art Collection, “Works from Donation Collection Hoffmann (2): Teresa Murak, Leibmaske”, *YouTube*, 2 December 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFXMI2msffM> (Accessed: 21 November 2022).

*The Gift*, theirs became a spiritual friendship which can serve as a welcome counterweight to market-driven values in an age where purchases and sales are paramount.<sup>75</sup>

These friendships with artists, figuratively embodied in and emanating from the artworks, have also become a source of energy for Erika Hoffmann and have inspired her contemplation of art. As shown above, the close bonds she forged with women artists in particular created a supportive and sustainable network that enables an ongoing engagement with her collection and the artworks. In the future, this network model of the Sammlung Hoffmann could serve to inform the development of more sustainable networks between public museums and artists.

Translated from the German by Logan Kennedy and Leonhard Unglaub

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<sup>75</sup> See Lewis Hyde, *The Gift. How the Creative Spirit Transforms the World* (Edinburgh, New York and Melbourne: Canongate, 2007), p. xvi.



## List of Figures

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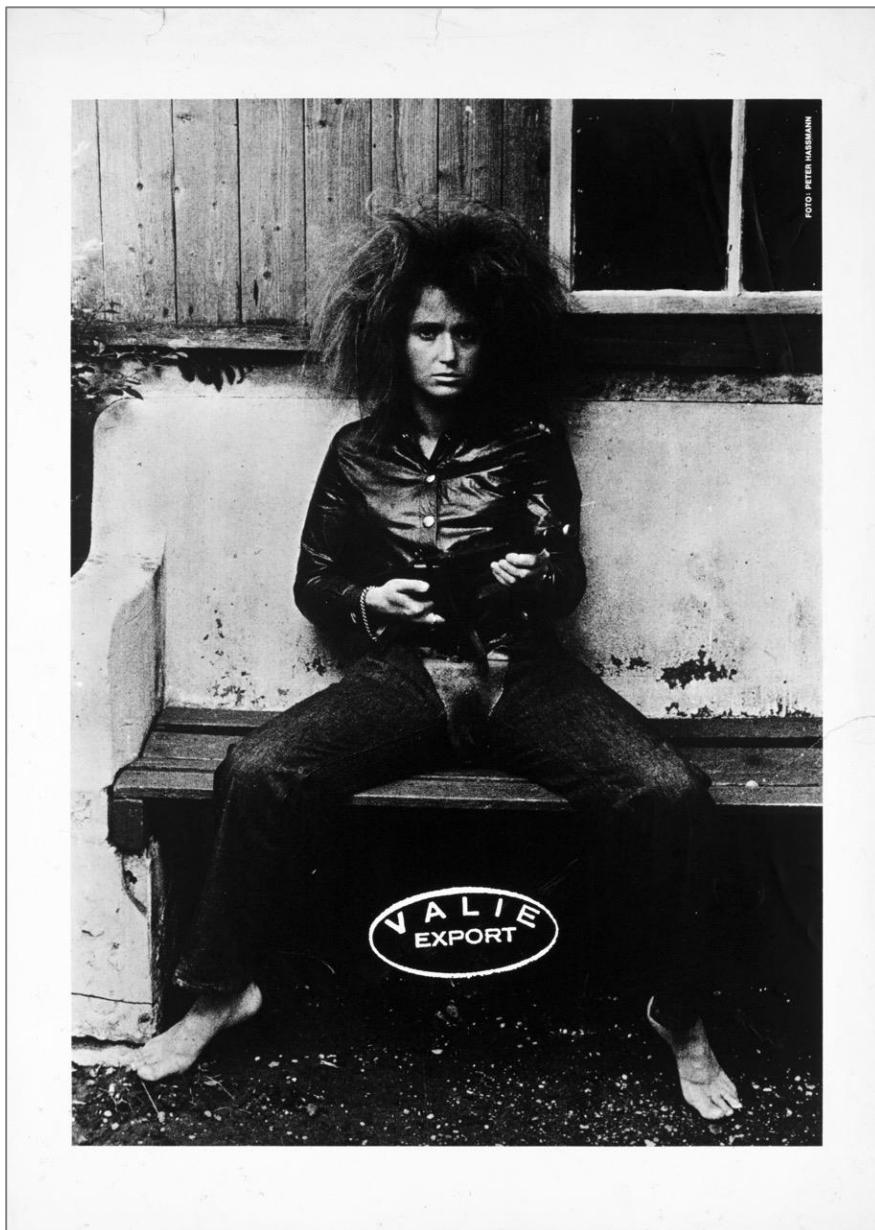


fig. 1: VALIE EXPORT, Action Pants: Genital Panic, 1969, self-staging, silkscreen on paper, photo: Peter Hassmann. © VALIE EXPORT und VG Bild Kunst, 2022, courtesy VALIE EXPORT.



fig. 2: Patty Chang, Fountain, 1999, SD Video, 5:30 minutes. presentation 2019/20, courtesy of the artist and the Sammlung Hoffmann, Berlin.

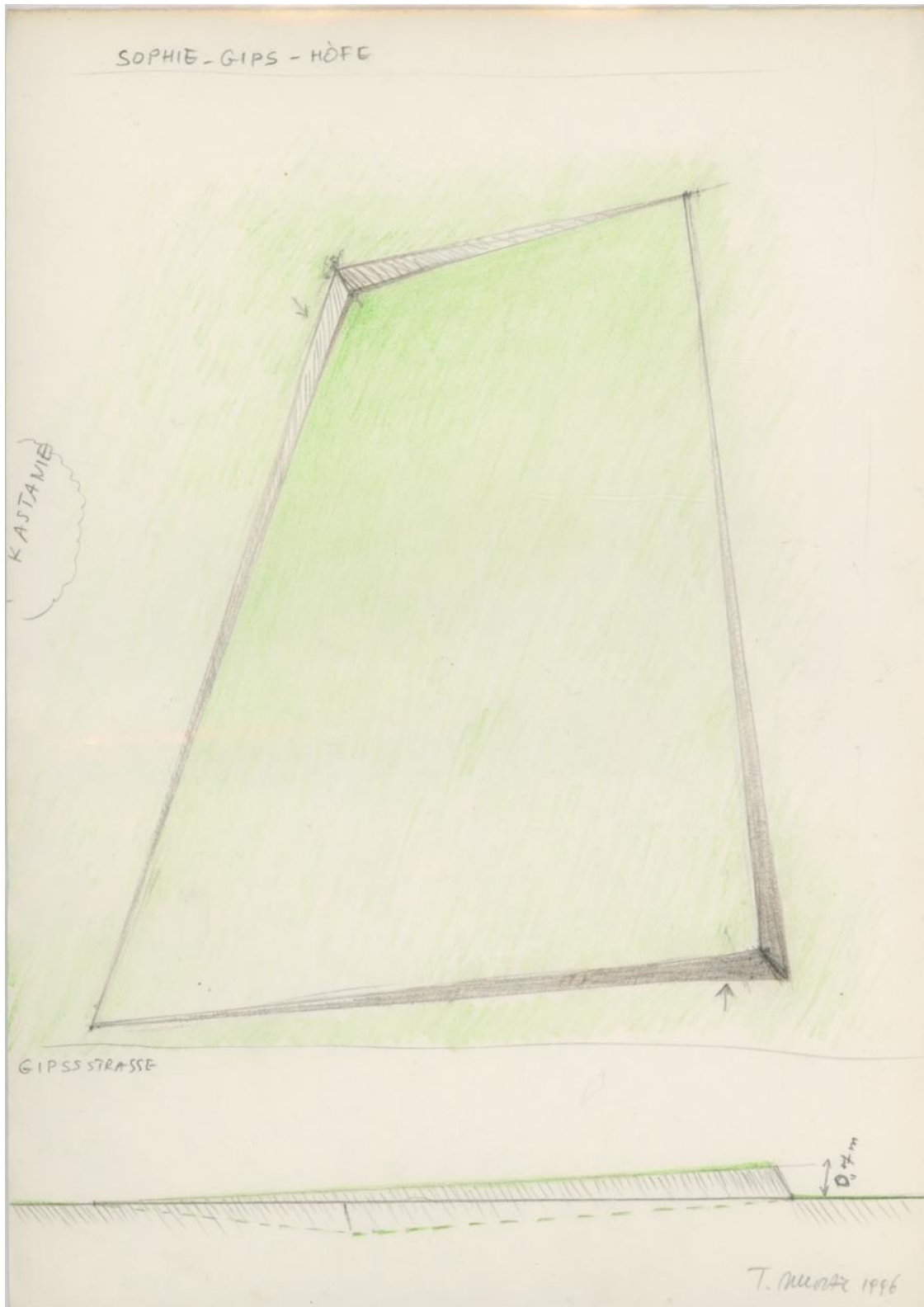


fig. 3: Teresa Murak, drawing of Rasenskulptur, 1996, permanent installation, courtyard garden, courtesy of the Sammlung Hoffmann, Berlin.

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## **Endnote**

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<sup>i</sup> Studio VALIE EXPORT asked me to use the artist's official image material instead of showing the photograph I describe in my introduction. Thus, I hope that readers can visualise the image of Erika Hoffmann's reflection, as is shown in this photograph.