

SILVIA BÄCHLI | MARTHE WÉRY

February 7–April 4, 2020

In the exhibition *Silvia Bächli | Marthe Wéry* the works of two artists from different generations and artistic backgrounds enter into a dialogue. Recent drawings by Bächli are juxtaposed with the monochrome paintings of the late Belgian painter Wéry, who passed away in 2005. For all their disparity, the artists share a concentrated mode of expression, avoiding everything superfluous. Both of them think in installation terms, beyond the edge of the picture, and position their works in relationship to space. For each of them color likewise takes on particular significance.

Wéry and Bächli both initially became known for their “uncolored” works. In the 1970s Wéry gained recognition in the context of Minimalism and Fundamental Painting with her *Series Lignées* in various shades of gray. Bächli made a name for herself starting in the early 1980s with drawings in black oil pastel, India ink, and gouache, based on bodily perceptions and everyday observations. For both artists, the invitation to exhibit at the Venice Biennale coincided with an initial turn to color.

In 1982 Marthe Wéry exhibited at the Belgian Pavilion with an installation comprised of narrow, vertical-format canvases in various nuanced shades of red. Leaning against the walls of the pavilion and interacting with the light in the building, they created an intense experience of color and space. From then on, investigating the nature of color became the motor of her art. Her drive “to live color” led her to ever new, at times radical experiments in which she explored the interrelationship between color, material, space, and light. She painted thin, translucent layers of color one on top of the other, made the colored surfaces extend into the space by using thick wood panels as her picture carriers, or integrated chance while experimenting with different textures and pigments—the substance of color itself. She then once concluded: “Nothing in the world is more familiar to us than colors: they give it shape, depth and beauty.”

Silvia Bächli first integrated delicate color gouaches into her otherwise predominantly black-and-white installation in the Swiss Pavilion at the 2009 Venice Biennale. At the time she was inspired by her impressions from a sojourn to Iceland, its snowy landscape, and the colored details that stood out in contrast. A studio visit in London in 2018–19 led to a new intensive colorfulness. Short, horizontal brushstrokes in luminous shades condense into towers and abstract, painterly formations, adding a further nuance to the variety of the line in Bächli’s work. The artist herself described the shift this way: “Over many years I worked exclusively with diluted black paint. First since Iceland, since 2008, there are also sheets with color, shades of watery blue and turquoise, rust red, green. The works join the others much ado. Still, through their color they add a new, different tone, like a new instrument in an orchestra. Colors have different spaces; they have different depths and stretch out differently into space.”

Marthe Wéry, *1930 Etterbeek, †2005 Brussels. 1985 São Paulo Biennale; 1982 Venice Biennale; 1977 documenta VI
Selected exhibitions: BPS22-Musée d’Art de la Province de Hainaut, Charleroi, BE (2017); Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, NL (2017/2011); Musée des Beaux Arts de Rouen, FRAC Haute-Normandie, FR (2006); Musée des Beaux-Arts, Tournai, FR (2004); Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, BE (2001); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, NL (1975)

Silvia Bächli, *1956 Baden, CH, lives and works in Basel. 2009 Venice Biennale Swiss Pavillon
Selected exhibitions: Fondation Beyeler, Basel, CH (2019); Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, DE (2019); Kunstmuseum Basel, CH (2018); Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, PdM, Munich, DE (2014); Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, CH (2012); Cabinet des arts graphiques, Centre Pompidou, Paris, FR (2007)