

PRESSEINFORMATION

Strangers to ourselves
Portraits from Paula Modersohn-Becker to Zanele Muholi

21 August 2022 - 29 January 2023

The exhibition "We Are Strangers to Ourselves" explores questions of (self-) depiction and representation in the visual arts since the end of the 19th century. Major works from Von der Heydt Museum's collections show the ways in which roles defined by societal preconceptions are inscribed in images of human beings, and the effect this has on how they are perceived. The exhibition covers a broad range of works, from classical modern paintings by Paula Modersohn-Becker, Emmy Klinker, Henry de Toulouse-Lautrec, Christian Schad and Felix Vallotton, to works by WOLS, Francis Bacon and Miriam Cahn, and up to the present day, represented by Tobias Zielony and Zanele Muholi, among others.

The title of the exhibition is taken from Julia Kristeva's 1990 book of the same name. According to her central thesis, we are strangers to each other and resent each other to the same extent that we are strangers to ourselves – and so it shall remain. This is precisely the point the philosopher recognises as key in dealing with the concept of otherness.

The works in the exhibition reveal how a person's perception is guided or influenced by the staging of an image. In Paula Modersohn-Becker's figure portraits, for example, the individual is abstracted in order to achieve generalisation and a new, willful form. In his paintings, Francis Bacon depicts human extremes and man's vulnerability in the world. Zanele Muholi's impactful self-portraits play subtly with gender-specific conventions and, in the sense of a visual activism, aim to dissolve repressive narratives.

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