



Interview von Aura Rosenberg mit
Sabine Breitwieser, Kuratorin der
Ausstellung

Aura Rosenberg (* 1949) lebt in New York und Berlin. Gegenwärtig werden drei Arbeiten von ihr in der Ausstellung „Up To And Including Limits: After Carolee Schneemann“ im Muzeum Susch (Unterengardin, Schweiz) gezeigt. Da die Ausstellung aufgrund der gegenwärtigen Viruspandemie geschlossen ist, haben wir Aura Rosenberg gebeten, in einem Text auf ihre dort gezeigten Arbeiten einzugehen. Darüberhinaus führt der Link zu einem Interview von Aura Rosenberg mit Sabine Breitwieser, der Kuratorin der Ausstellung.

Aura Rosenberg (* 1949) lives in New York and Berlin. Three of her works are currently shown in the exhibition „Up To And Including Limits: After Carolee Schneemann“ at Muzeum Susch (Unterengardin, Schweiz). Since the exhibition is closed due to the current viral pandemic, we have asked Aura Rosenberg to write a text about her works shown there. Furthermore, the link leads to an interview by Aura Rosenberg with Sabine Breitwieser, the curator of the exhibition.

Up To And Including Limits, the exhibition that Sabine Breitwieser curated at Muzeum Susch, takes the work of Carolee Schneeman as its starting point and surveys her legacy in the work of thirteen artists and art collectives. I'm showing three pieces in this exhibition.

The first is titled The Dialectical Porn Rock. It's part of a series of sculptures and photographs that started as a practical joke in the summer of 1988, when I was vacationing in the countryside with some artist friends. There, in the middle of the woods, I didn't want to continue making paintings as though I had never left my New York City studio. So, I was at loose ends. Mike Ballou, one of the other artists, was building sculptures that incorporated pictures from porn magazines. He also liked to fish in the stream in front of our house. So, I devised a joke for him by taking rocks from the stream and gluing porn pictures torn from his magazines on to them. I then covered the rocks with resin and put them back for him to chance upon while fishing. But, the incongruity of the altered rocks in this setting made me want to photograph them – although I had never used a camera before. This turned into a long--term photo project. At first, I thought of the rocks only as props for taking photos – as a way of making landscape photography. However, I gradually started to see the rocks as objects in themselves and installed them in different configurations, both in and out doors. Robert Smithson's essay about Central Park, Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape, suggested the title for the series.

For this installation, Muzeum Susch, shipped almost two hundred Porn Rocks from New York City, which we then combined with rocks collected onsite from the Flüela River. In this way, the installation recalls the surrounding landscape. But, it also reflects the Muzeum itself, as parts of the Muzeum were excavated by hollowing out nine thousand tons of rocks from the mountainside. One of the Muzeum entrances is a rock grotto, and fragments from the excavation process were processed and mixed with sand from the Flüela to form the terrazzo flooring of the galleries. Sabine Breitwieser installed my rocks next to Schneeman's 1964 film, Meat Joy, in which eight performers covered in paint crawl and writhe together playing with fish, meat and poultry. I've always felt that the Porn Rocks referred to flesh, that they re--corporealize the porn images. In fact, the first time I showed the rocks at White Columns in 1989, we sold them by the pound, like meat.

I haven't shown this work in Switzerland since 1993, when Josef Felix Mueller organized a

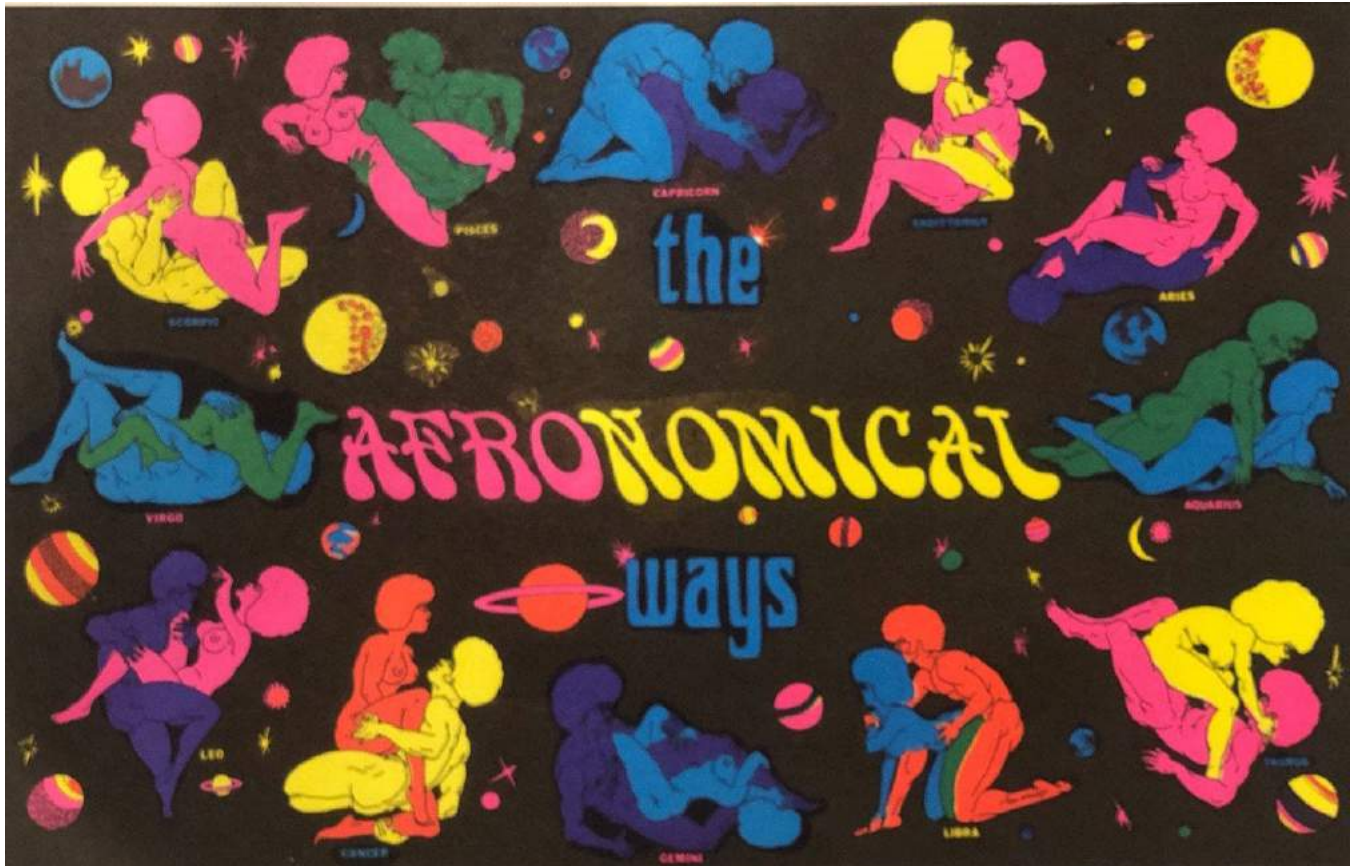
MARTOS GALLERY

survey of my work at Kunsthalle, St. Gallen. For that exhibition, we also combined Porn Rocks, with rocks from a nearby river. The exhibition included photographs from Dialectical Porn Rock, paintings from my series The Golden Age and a selection of photos from my portrait series Head Shots.

As I mentioned, in 1988, just before starting The Dialectical Porn Rock, I had been making paintings. I produced these paintings by covering my body with paint and imprinting it onto various fabrics, including vinyl and velvet. I referred to found images of figures in different postures to guide me in making the imprints, which were meant to connote a variety of activities and behavior. One of my references was a black light poster titled The Afronomical Ways that I had bought on 42nd Street when it was still the porn capital of New York. On a black velvet background, the poster depicts fluorescent silhouettes of ecstatic couples with Afros cavorting among the stars. Initially these paintings had more to do with formalism than content. I wanted to engage with the Modernist imperative to define painting according to its unique properties. I wanted to produce figurative paintings that were at the same time non-illusionistic. The imprints were indexical traces of my body, the result of a literal process. Coincidentally, I stopped making these paintings when I started making photographs, which, are also indexical images. In a way, the imprints were the last stop in painting before they turned into photographs. The mimetic nature of copying body postures inevitably led to other readings. With the figures in Afronomical Ways I became interested in the cross reading of two texts – astrological signs and instructional sex manuals. I stopped making these paintings in 1988 after The Dialectical Porn Rock took my work in new directions that involved primarily photography and sculpture. Even so, I still wanted to produce a painting for each of the zodiac signs. In 2013, my show at Martos Gallery offered me that opportunity. The back room of the gallery was usually reserved for special projects and I asked if we could use it for a series of twelve imprint paintings that I titled The Astrological Ways. This time, instead of making the imprints myself, I invited couples to make them. I selected couples according to their astrological signs and gave them an image from the poster corresponding to their sign. At the opening of the show we had eleven of the paintings hanging. One space was empty. I had hired a couple of dancers to enact the twelfth painting: Taurus. Halfway through the opening they started to undress and walked from the gallery into the backroom where we had laid out a piece of black velvet and a bucket of white paint for them. The next day, we stretched the painting and hung it with the rest of the group.



Photo © Werner Kaligofsky.



The figures in Afronomical Ways were also the starting point for a three--minute animated "flicker" video.

<https://vimeo.com/manage/33746225/general>

I made the video in Photoshop, altering each of the silhouetted couples in its own way – turning them into outlines, dissolving them into abstract patterns, or mirroring them. I then turned the altered image into a negative version of itself. Finally I made both positive and negative into a rapidly alternating sequence, producing a dizzying stroboscopic effect. The idea for the animation was inspired by Tony Conrad's flicker film of 1966. I was also thinking about "skin flicks", which is another term for porn movies. Preceded by the name of its astrological sign, each of the silhouettes pulsates in alternating black/white for fifteen seconds. The full video is three minutes long. The soundtrack is my band Dirty Mirrors, jamming. The video is projected above the entrance to the room of paintings and helps illuminate that with a pulsating light.