

# FRANZ GERTSCH: *POLYFOCAL ALLOVER*

Sep 19 - Dec 02 2018



*Polyfocal Allover* is the first institutional painting survey of Swiss artist Franz Gertsch (b. 1930, Mörigen) in the United States. The exhibition explores Gertsch's decades-long commitment to capturing life in portraiture, primarily through photo-realist paintings and woodcut prints.

For the first time in decades, several major works from the artist's monumental series of 'situation portraits' from the 1970s will be reunited, including *At Luciano's House* (1973), *Luciano I* (1976), *Luciano II* (1976), and *Portrait of Urs Luthi* (1970). Based on photographs Gertsch took of a group of young friends who had begun living in a commune in Lucerne after 1968, including celebrated artists Luciano Castelli and Urs Luthi, the paintings capture the subjects' lively presence as social beings in formation, surrounded by a clutter of clothes, makeup and unwashed dinner plates. The extraordinarily rendered details illuminated by the stark light of a camera flash capture an interest in American counterculture, as well as a playfulness with codes of sexuality and gender.

The exhibition will also feature a suite of Gertsch's large woodcut prints, a medium which the artist devoted himself to exclusively between 1986 and 1995. Several prints from the series *Natascha IV* (1988) are based on the same image of a young woman, with a glacial, yet luminous expression. These are accompanied by *Schwarzwasser* (1991), a study of subtle movement on the surface of a body

of water. For the first time, the limewood printing blocks used to print *Natascha /V* will also be exhibited, revealing the tiny raster-like gouges that Gertsch makes to register points of light.

Gertsch's longstanding artistic interest in the mirror as a surface on which a myriad of such identities might be perceived is captured in a small collection of early works. In a number of early paintings, drawings and woodcut prints, including *Spiegel* (1961), and *Mädchen vor dem Spiegel* (1960), individuals are seen reflected in looking glasses and contemplating their reflections, pointing to a lifelong interest in capturing the nuances of the self.

### **About Franz Gertsch**

Franz Gertsch was born in 1930 in Mörigen, Bern, and lives and works in Rüscheegg-Heubach, Switzerland. Gertsch has participated in several important international exhibitions over his career, perhaps most significantly in *Documenta 5* (1972) in a section organized by Harald Szeemann, Jean-Christophe Ammann and others, that looked to artists they saw to be 'interrogating reality'. Other group exhibitions include the Venice Biennale in 1978 and 1999. Solo exhibitions include: Kunsthalle Basel (1975); Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Germany (1975); Sprengel-museum Hannover, Germany (1980); Kunsthaus Zürich, Switzerland (1980); Museum of Modern Art, New York (1990); Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington (1991); Kunstmuseum Bern, Switzerland (1994); Albertina Museum, Vienna (2006); Mumok, Vienna (2006); Saarlandmuseum, Saarbrücken, Germany; and Musée Jenisch, Vevey, Switzerland (2017). Gertsch has been the recipient of multiple grants and prizes, including the DAAD Grant, Berlin (1974-75) and the Prize of the Bürgi-Willert-Stiftung. There is a museum devoted to the work of Gertsch, Museum Franz Gertsch, in Burgdorf, Switzerland.

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Image: Franz Gertsch, *At Luciano's House*, 1973. 243 x 355 cm. Acrylic on cotton. Courtesy The Sander Collection.