**MERANO ARTE**

**presents, from June 27 to September 20, 2015,**

**two renowned representatives of contemporary art in a double exhibition:**

Francesca Woodman

& Birgit Jürgenssen

Works from the collection SAMMLUNG VERBUND, Vienna

Curated by Gabriele Schor

Director of SAMMLUNG VERBUND, Vienna

**Press conference:** Friday, June 26, 2015 at 11.00 a.m.

**Opening reception:** Friday, June 26, 2015 at 7.00 p.m.

For the first time, MERANO ARTE presents a double exhibition of works by the Italo-American artist Francesca Woodman (\*1958–†1981) and the Austrian artist Birgit Jürgenssen (\*1949–†2003). All of the 120 works on display are from the esteemed collection SAMMLUNG VERBUND, Vienna. This is the second cooperation project between MERANO ARTE and SAMMLUNG VERBUND, the first one having been the presentation of the early works of Cindy Sherman.

This double exhibition once again exemplifies the great commitment of MERANO ARTE as a platform for contemporary photography. Following solo exhibitions with internationally renowned artists, including Man Ray, Boris Michailov, Urs Lüthi, Eliott Erwitt, Ugo Mulas, and Cindy Sherman, MERANO ARTE now brings two artists together whose importance for the history of art has only been recognized over the past few years. From an aesthetic as well as a conceptual point of view, the works of Woodman and Jürgenssen belong to the "feminist avant-garde“ of the 1970s, a term coined by the director of SAMMLUNG VERBUND, Gabriele Schor.

Although the two artists did not know each other personally, there are many parallels in their works: the staging of the subject, the infirmity of human existence, and above all a critical view of the female body in art. Both artists

took their performative photographs themselves in their own studios, mostly using a self-timer. Surrealism as an emancipatory method is a main source of their artistic expression. Woodman and Jürgenssen are pioneers of the "poetic-performative feminism of the 19703. In their works, they consciously use the female body as a formal tool, thus creating a new image of womanhood. As both artists decided to use their naked bodies, they autonomously defined the female body neither as 'nature' nor as a 'sexual object', but as a 'work of art'.

Hitherto, the fleeting appearance of the female figure in the photographs of  **Francesca Woodman** was often interpreted as an aesthetic anticipation of her early suicide. SAMMLUNG VERBUND now advocates a new view of the artist's photographs, thus opening a new horizon which revolves around the *tableau vivant*, the requisites, and the body in space. The works of Francesca Woodman were made during a

nine-year creative phase, from 1973 to 1981, in the context of female subjectivity, conceptual photography, performance art, and the discovery of the body as a means of artistic expression. Most photographs are small, square format, black-and-white, and were taken with a large-format camera. The artist sets her body, often naked, in relation to her studio in a surprisingly unconventional manner and explores her curiosity for the female self. Her photographs pose questions, suggest answers, and reflect a specific ambivalence about the meaning of being a woman. The exhibition presents 75 photographs by Woodman, including 20 vintage photographs - unique exhibits that have never before been on display in Italy. Moreover, it includes some of her rare color slides as well as a video that deepens the poetry and metaphoric density that mark the unique artistic expression of the Italo-American artist.

The art of **Birgit** **Jürgenssen** is complex and stylistically diverse. The exhibition presents black-and-white as well as color photographs, Polaroids, Rayographs, cyanotypes, drawings, shoe objects, and fabric works, thus rendering an overview of the wide-ranging and innovative work of the Austrian artist. Jürgenssen's works revolve around the female body and its metamorphoses. In the 1970s, she intensively dealt with feminist and socio-critical topics and the demand "The private is political". A core topos in the work of the artist is language, which she

visualized ironically. Starting from the fact that she, being an artist, must subject and adapt herself to the symbolical language she was born into in order to work in the world of meanings, she gains her creative power. In her oeuvre, she stages the female body as a

masquerade, a fragmentation, a fetish, and a becoming animal. With surreal wit and irony, she reflects the sex and gender stereotypes, thus undermining the everyday prejudices and misunderstandings of our society.

**Biography Francesca Woodman** (\*1958–†1981) grew up bilingual in the USA and Italy. During her studies at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence (1975–1978), she took many photographs that she developed herself in a darkroom. She photographed in abandoned factories to which she set her body in an unusual relation. From 1977 to 1978, she spent one year in Rome and held her first European solo exhibition in the surrealistically oriented Libreria Maldoror. In 1979, Woodman moved to New York, and in January 1981, the artist committed suicide at the age of 22. Her works were last honored in 2011/2012 with a retrospective at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, as well as in 2014 with the first German monograph from SAMMLUNG VERBUND, Vienna.

**Biography Birgit Jürgenssen** (\*1949–†2003) is one of the most important representatives of the Feminist Avant-Garde. She discovered the French surrealism in Paris at the age of 17. Her works are also inspired by the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud, ethnological, and socio-critical discourses. She created her famous shoe work in the 1970s. In 1982, she introduced the subject of photography at the Akademie der bildenden Künste in Vienna, where she lectured until her death in the year 2003. Posthumously, her art has received great international attention for the first time through the publication of SAMMLUNG VERBUND. Ever since, her works have been included in major museum collections such as those of MoMA, New York; Tate Modern, London; Centre Pompidou, Paris, and Belvedere, Vienna.

**Publications**

SAMMLUNG VERBUND, Vienna, attaches great importance to research and has edited two comprehensive monographs about the presented artists:

2009 "Birgit Jürgenssen," edited by Gabriele Schor and Abigail Solomon-Godeau

2014 "Francesca Woodman," edited by Gabriele Schor and Elisabeth Bronfen

2015 current publication "Feministische Avantgarde. Werke der 1970er-Jahre aus der

SAMMLUNG VERBUND, Wien,", edited by Gabriele Schor

**SAMMLUNG VERBUND** was founded in 2004 in Vienna by VERBUND AG, Austria's leading electricity company and one of the largest hydropower producers in Europe. Over the past eleven years, Director Gabriele Schor has set the focus of the collection to the feminist avant-garde of the 1970s, with more than 500 works by 34 international artists, including works by Birgit Jürgenssen and Francesca Woodman.

**FRANCESCA WOODMAN & BIRGIT JÜRGENSSEN**

**Works from SAMMLUNG VERBUND**

**Press conference**: Friday, June 26, 2015 at 11.00 a.m.

**Opening reception:** Friday, June 26, 2015 at 7.00 p.m.

**Exhibition period:** June 27 – Sunday, September 20, 2015

**Catalog:** 2009 "Birgit Jürgenssen," edited by Gabriele Schor and Abigail Solomon-  
 Godeau

2014 "Francesca Woodman," edited by Gabriele Schor and Elisabeth   
 Bronfen

**Opening hours**: 10 a.m. – 6 p.m., closed on Mondays

**Admission fee:** EUR 6.00

Reduced fee for senior citizens aged 65 and above, and for persons with handicaps EUR 5.00

Students up to age 26 pay EUR 2.00

Free admission for children up to age 14, as well as for press   
and AMACI members

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