

ELVIRA BACH

The Other Eve. 1979 to the Present

22 June – 14 August, 2021

Opening on Thursday, 24 June, 2021

Opening remarks around 8 pm: **Michael Müller**, Governing Mayor of Berlin

On June 22nd Elvira Bach celebrates her seventieth birthday: time for a look back at over forty prolific years of work as a painter! The exhibition "The Other Eve" has brought together many paintings created since 1979 that are of particular importance to the artist, paintings she always held on to and never wanted to sell. In the 1970s, Elvira Bach had studied painting at the Berlin Art Academy, at the same time as Rainer Fetting and Salomé (unlike them, however, not with Karl Horst Hödicke, but with Hann Trier). Like them, she took her inspiration from German expressionism, devoting herself to large-format figurative painting characterized by strong colors and gestures. Her international breakthrough came at *documenta 7* in Kassel in 1982. But although she was in some ways affiliated with the "Moritzboys," she quickly set out on her unmistakably own path, with an intuitive, emotional approach to painting, clearly outlined forms, strong color surfaces and a choice of subject matter shaped by her own experience as a woman. It is a path to which she has remained faithful ever since.

The title of the exhibition, "The Other Eve," taken from one of her paintings, programmatically expresses an essential aspect of her entire oeuvre: this is not the biblical Eve, formed from a rib of Adam, subservient to man and led to the Fall from paradise by the serpent. Rather, the female figure appearing in almost all of the paintings embodies a new vision of womanhood, one which unconditionally celebrates female self-determination, strength and erotic charisma in all the different roles that she takes on. The autobiographical reference of these figures is obvious: they change in synchronicity to the different stages of her life—young female artist in the hedonistic Berlin of the 1970s and 80s, recipient of a scholarship in the Dominican Republic (1982), various sojourns in Africa (1986-92), marriage to her Senegalese husband, birth of her two sons (1984 and 1992). What they all share is the search for freedom in juggling the various tasks, roles and desires of a woman as an artist and a mother in society. There is no real dividing line between Elvira Bach's life and art: perhaps you have to see her studio or, even better, her apartment to understand that life and art merge seamlessly here, that the paintings are really just part of a larger project called Elvira Bach. Whether these female figures, with their abstract faces, broad shoulders and big, strong hands that can grasp, shape and create with skilled craftsmanship, are naked or in colored robes, with or without jewelry and make-up, always with their feet in the form of high-heeled women's shoes, are standing alone at the bar with a wine glass and a cigarette, are handling pots and knives as kitchen divas, are carrying children in their arms, on their backs or on their heads, or are dancing in exotic surroundings—they all are authentic facets of the artist's life, transferred to the canvas in vivid colors and distinctive shapes, with layered symbolism and clear composition. Conversely, the artist, herself a conspicuous figure in her

dotted or patterned robes and towering turbans, the inevitable cigarette in her hand, appears as if she had stepped out of these images.

Bach's paintings are populated by recurring elements and symbols that adorn and surround the central female figure: snakes, cats, hearts, anchors, crosses, large, fleshy flowers, strawberries, paintbrushes, playing cards, stacked pots and pans, and strong colors, above all the color red. The figure itself is marked with a variety of feminine signals—earrings, lipstick, fashion, the high-heeled shoe-feet, but above all the unusual headgear in which all of the above symbols appear at some point, including lush flower arrangements and sprouting trees, women's shoes and wine glasses, snakes and toddlers, as if she were—in an African manner—wearing all of these on her head, or as if all of this had sprung from her head, ready-made. The sensually erotic connotation of some of these symbols is obvious, yet they remain ambiguous and not quite determined: the coiling snake can stand for Eros and life force, but also for healing, seduction and, above all, transformation. In spite of all the continuity in Bach's paintings, it is the element of change—the constant restructuring of given elements, the ceaseless redefinition of her multiple roles—and her irrepressible vitality and creativity that define her oeuvre: Elvira Bach is all of these roles, colors and facets, her larger-than-life personality holds everything together, all her contradictions and conflicts, without having to resolve these creative dichotomies. We wish Elvira many more productive and fulfilling years!