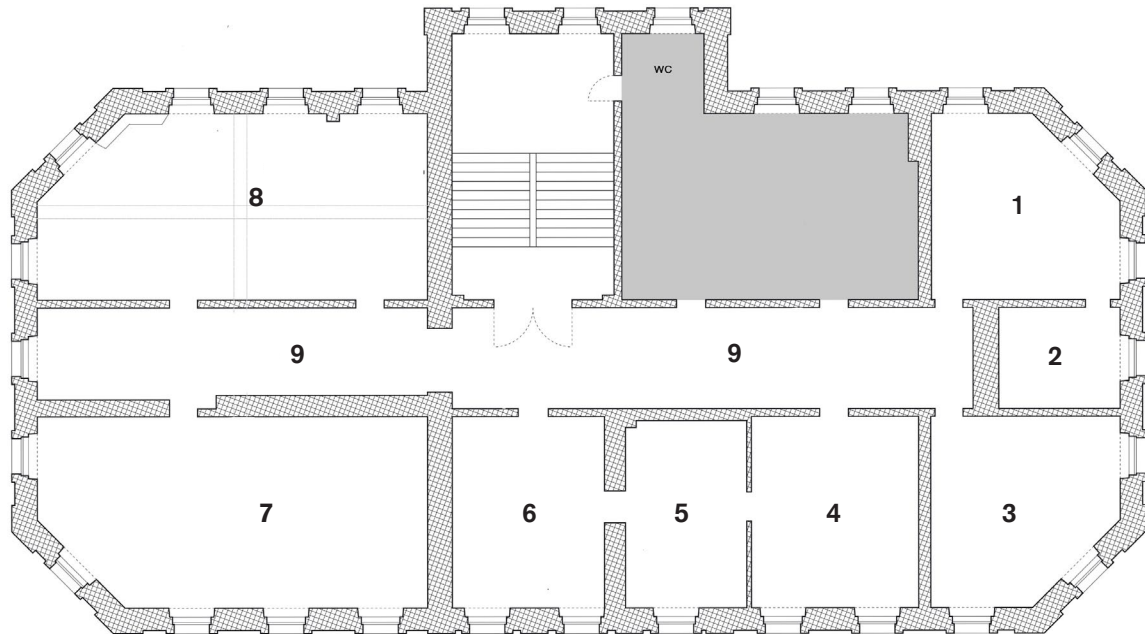


Kunsthaus Langenthal

English Version

Cathy Josefowitz. The Thinking Body

1st Floor



The Thinking Body, so far the largest exhibition of the work of Cathy Josefowitz (1956–2014), showcases the entire range of her artistic output, in which paintings and drawings enter into a dialogue with choreography. Her whole life long, she never ceased to deconstruct the hierarchy between the dramatic and the visual arts and, thanks to works whose dimensions and expression reflect the range and the impact of her own body, her œuvre personifies a reconciliation of two media often treated as disparate in art history. The body – in motion and in relation to other bodies – constitutes the core of her work.

Having departed this life, in Geneva in 2014, Cathy Josefowitz leaves a legacy comprising more than 3'000 works of art from a period of over forty years. While Josefowitz's extensive oeuvre was rarely exhibited during her lifetime, the cosmopolitan Swiss artist's oeuvre now can be re-thought in the context of current discourses: It resonates strangely in light of the present resurgence in Europe and the rest of the western world of questions of identity pertaining to the body, its self-expression, and its representation by others, as well as to the rise of a new syntax of feminist militancy.

Initiated by the Kunsthaus Langenthal and curator Elise Lammer, the exhibition was developed as a joint project in collaboration with the Centre culturel suisse in Paris and the MACRO Roma and will be on show in each of these institutions successively between August 2021 and spring 2022. The exhibition is supported by the society Les Amis de Cathy Josefowitz, Geneva; Arsenic, Centre d'art scénique contemporain, Lausanne and La Becque | Résidence d'artistes, La Tour-de-Peilz.

Room 6

Ciels (2000s)

This series of sky paintings exists along a continuum that translates the artist's attempt to depict the three-dimensionality of movement on canvas or paper. Towards the end of her life, Cathy Josefowitz used the medium of painting as means to transcend the materiality of her body while also expressing aspects of her existential introspection. In fact, for Josefowitz, each sky painting gives form to a different emotion while representing a specific set of atmospheric conditions. The paintings were made

in her Geneva studio, which included a large window offering an unobstructed view of the sky that allowed her to indulge in hours of observation. This series, produced toward the end of her life when she was ill, also marks the artist's closest commitment to full abstraction; however, anthropomorphic figures are evoked with the shape of a shadow or a cloud, and the human body is further suggested when considering the dimension of the canvases, which corresponds to the span of the artist's arms, translating, quite literally, her bodily capacity at the time.

Left Hallway (Room 9)

34 Pastels from Notebooks (ca. 1980)

Since the 1960s, Josefowitz kept notebooks colorfully illustrated with artworks, sketches, poems and texts describing important emotional aspects in her life. Love, friendship, but also the often conflicted relationship with her own body were central to her diaristic practice. From the late 1970s onwards, the notebooks notably contained a series of portraits and self-portraits in pastel. Mirroring the paradoxical relationship Josefowitz entertained with her body, and particularly with mainstream beauty canons, such works arguably express a body freed from physical and moral constraints, but also a body that is shaped by the artist's emotional turmoil. Deeply symbolic, the series on display shows human bodies whose disconnected and entangled limbs would physically render them dysfunctional, yet whose superhuman flexibility also translates the potential of absolute freedom. From 1979 to 1983, Josefowitz studied at Dartington College of Arts in the UK, an art school and dance research center with a radical approach to dance and pedagogy. Notably, Josefowitz studied under the supervision of Steve Paxton—co-founder of the Judson Dance Theater in New York with Trisha Brown in the 1960s and the inventor of the Contact Improvisation dance technique—and Mary Fulkerson, one of the founders of the Anatomical Release Technique.

Room 5

Scenography *La Tempête* (1974); Surrealist Indian Ink Drawings (1974)

In 1972, Josefowitz started to study scenography at the Strasbourg National Theater. She went on to produce numerous works informed by the artist's interest in the world of theater and spectacle. Her wide-ranging set of references included Brechtian theater, La Commedia dell'arte and famous circus clowns: they all shared an anti-bourgeois position while carrying the promise of social and political change. Josefowitz's particular interest for masked characters may find its explanation in the Brechtian concept of *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect), which emphasizes the artificiality of theater while helping the viewer to take full consciousness of their role as spectator. It becomes easy to see how Arlecchino from La Commedia or the famous Swiss clown Dimitri—two recurring figures in Josefowitz's work—align with the concept of alienation at a time when the artist, only aged 16, was coming to terms with her own position as a social and political being. *La Tempête* (1974) is a series of scenographic sketches made with gouache on paper for the eponymous play by William Shakespeare written in 1610–1611. This series was produced when Josefowitz was applying to Les Beaux-Arts de Paris shortly after dropping from her studies at the Strasbourg National Theater. The same year, working with Indian ink on paper, she created surrealist black and white drawings that were strongly influenced by avantgardists including Marc Chagall and Luis Buñuel, whose oneiric approach to reality both in painting and cinema provided great inspiration to Josefowitz. Born to a mother who was a painter and a father who was a conductor, Josefowitz had an artistic upbringing from a very early age. Her parents were important collectors of modern art, and they owned an exceptional collection of great masters, including works by Vlaminck, Derain, Degas, Dufy, Vuillard, Kandinsky, Kokoschka, Picasso, Maillol, and Delaunay, among others, who had a great influence on Josefowitz's own practice of painting.

Room 4 and hallway (Room 9)

Italy (1992–1993)

In the late 1980s, Josefowitz moved to the coastal town of Pietrasanta in Italy where she started a series of mid-size paintings. There, she produced a series of drawings and paintings that stand out

for their colorful palette and the lightness of their subjects. People dancing and playing, flowers and portrait of friends (*Luigi Ghirri in a blue armchair* (ca. 1992)) constitute the visual vocabulary of a brief period of light-heartedness in the artist's life. Josefowitz was in love, had just given birth to her only son, Pierre, and was in awe of the surrounding Italian landscape and particularly the atmospheric light, whose intensity and complexity would provide inspiration for her entire painterly production to come.

Room 3

Collages (2002) / puppets (ca. 1976)

Throughout her life, Josefowitz dedicated herself to the exploration of the many possibilities of the body. Her own body, the bodies of her lovers, passers-by, friends and animals: they all fed into the artist's exploration of the body's physical, metaphysical and anatomical capacity. This almost obsessive quest can be partly explained with the frustration she experienced with the limitations of her own body, and it is inversely expressed in the freedom granted to the imaginary bodies she has created over the 40 years of her career. The series of 19 puppets provide evidence of her effort to free the body of any constraints. As such, the puppets, with their articulated limbs, enjoy the fullest autonomy and defy the laws of anatomy. We recognize a pregnant woman in the cohort, Marcel Marceau, a chimera with a crocodile head and other recurring protagonists of the artist's fictional vocabulary. More than two decades later, Josefowitz produced a series of collages at her studio in Paris that further explore the human figure. The large-scale works are made from bits of paper and fabric that she would tear and assemble directly on the canvas. Often establishing guidelines when producing work for this series, she would forbid herself to use scissor, and to rework or discard any piece once torn. Here again, limitation provided greater creative freedom: randomness and accident are catalysts for unexpected forms while expressing the artist's most unrestricted instinct.

Room 1

Chair-Series (1994–95); *The Thinking Body*; Video: *Forever Young* (1990)

At a time in her career mostly dedicated to choreographic research and particularly the exploration of the principles of gravity, Josefowitz created *Forever Young* (1990), a piece for two performers with a chair serving as the only scenographic device. This work was created shortly after the abrupt death of her friend and colleague Moniek van der Laak, and it uses dance and movement not only as means for research but also her mourning and healing process.

As often in Josefowitz's work, specific areas of research become recurring motives spanning both media and decades. Interested in studying certain gestures she had created previously, Josefowitz realized a series of paintings based on *Forever Young* between 1994–95. Almost with the precision of a movement notation, the method she developed offered a way to register movement in space and to translate it into two-dimensional figures on canvas. In decomposing and deconstructing objects and bodies in motion, she captured and reproduced them all in one single image by means of duplication and accumulation. Set against a crimson, almost monochromatic background, the ghostlike and abstracted feature of the bodies on display of this series of works also mark the beginning of the artist's shift toward abstraction.

Room 2

Kama Sutra (2009); Miniature Kama Sutra Notebooks in Vitrines

Josefowitz's relationship to spirituality is important to take into account when approaching her work. Though her interest in mystical practices wasn't always visible in her work, she was an avid reader of Vedic philosophy and was practicing yoga and meditation on a regular basis. Throughout her life, though mostly intuitively, Josefowitz was interested in the notion of balance through the unity of body and spirit. Sexuality, alongside dance, was another important area of her artistic investigations and possibly represented a tool for manifesting a deeper sense of freedom. In 2009, she discovered the thinking of Osho, the founder and leader of the Indian Rajneesh mystic movement and community. Osho's teachings included experimental therapy sessions that explored physical freedom and sexual

power as tools for reaching super-consciousness. The Kamasutra series consists of large-scale paintings in which couples are having sex in different positions. What is striking is the immenseness of the space compared to the size of the figures. This contrast, it seems, was meant as a way to express the spiritual power of erotic pleasure.

Room 7 and Right Hallway (Room 9)

Figurative Paintings: Portraits, Lovers, Animals (1970s); Overalls (ca. 1977); Drawings (ca. 1976)

This area of the exhibition is dedicated to the early figurative painting of Josefowitz. The couples embracing, including *Sans titre* (1974), *Sans titre* (1976) and *Portrait de Romain* (1977), depict the artist together with lovers and friends. The disposable overalls (*Sans titre* (ca. 1977)) is a rare example of a collaborative work; it was produced in collaboration with Romain Denis while the couple was working on the scenography of Ariane Mnouchkine's Molière for la Cartoucherie de Vincennes. The selection on display also translates how Josefowitz's used painting to pay homage to marginalized bodies; those she felt lacked positive representation. The portrait of female and black bodies foreshadows a recurring concern that provides a thematic thread running through Josefowitz's entire oeuvre. According to relatives and friends Josefowitz responded strongly to all types of discrimination, particularly sexism and racism. Her political sentiment remained private, however, and was only expressed metaphorically in her artistic work and occasionally in her notebooks. Relatives of Josefowitz have on several occasions attested to the deep empathy and admiration she felt for animals; how she was fascinated by human-animal relationships and how this involved a unique ability to read nonverbal cues and translate them onto the canvas.

Room 8

Prières (late 1990s); Felt-Pen Drawings (1988–1989); Vitrines: Notebooks, Photos of Performances, Dissertation (1980s), Video: *Woodstock* (1988)

The late 1980s marked the emergence of a more gestural and intuitive style. Drawn with felt pen on paper, *Walking* (1989) and *Jambes vertes* (1989) are part of a series of sketch-like drawings that seem to have been produced while Josefowitz was travelling. Set on a bare background, the disarticulated limbs are anonymous, reduced to a pair of legs in motion, as if the artist was trying to capture the most ephemeral and essential aspect of movement.

From 1999, Josefowitz started a new series of paintings that mark a continuation of her work on abstraction, starting with the chair paintings in the in the early 1990s. Entitled *Prières*, ("prayers" in English), this new series counts among the largest works ever produced by the artist in her Paris studio. They were conceived with the help of a prayer shawl, which would first hover above the canvas before being placed on the surface for their final positioning. The shawl would then be outlined with tape, providing the central motif of the painting. The prayers were conceived either as portrait or landscapes, and they were often titled after a member of the artist's family or a place the artist had visited, thus offering another type of autobiographic markers.

Woodstock (1988) is the first choreography Josefowitz wrote while studying at Dartington College of Arts. Presented for the first time in Vienna in 1988, its title is an homage to the artist's American grandmother, Hilda Kagan, who lived a bohemian life in Woodstock, where Josefowitz would spend blissful summers until she was a teenager. The play is a solo performed by the artist herself with a minimal scenography. The play alternates between Josefowitz dressed in black performing long, contemplative movements on the floor or calmly eating at a table, with shorter sequences of the artists performing hectic, clownesque dance moves dressed in simple white underwear. *Woodstock* translates what can be understood a Josefowitz lifelong feeling of alterity and insecurity in a world that she often seemed at odds with, and in which she felt she had to perform in order to belong.

Also on display in the room, the video *EXIT* (1986) documents a play written by 'Research and Navigation,' the dance and theater company Josefowitz created with Mara de Wit while they studied at the Dartington College of Arts. With direct references to the Marx Brothers, the choreography confirms Josefowitz's life-long interest in the world of cinema, particularly in the figure of the trickster, whose ambiguous moral position offered an interesting conceptual tool to explore notions of gender and identity.

Publications

On the occasion of Cathy Josefowitz's exhibition, a vinyl reissue of the cassette of her queer-feminist music/performance group „Lining Time“ will be released in October.

A richly illustrated volume with texts by Ludovic Delalande, Rebecca Lamarche-Vadel, Elise Lammer was published in 2019 by Mousse Publishing.

Performance by Garrett Nelson

Saturday, 11 September 2021, 5 pm

Sunday, 12 September 2021, 2 pm

The exhibition also occasions a new performative work by the Swiss-American artist Garrett Nelson (*1982). In his research into Josefowitz's work as a dancer and painter, Nelson explores the experimental dance context as well as a form of painting that «is embodied.»