

**Cordula Ditz**

***They Speak to Us in Dreams***

**26.10.–14.11.2024**

In her works, Cordula Ditz examines how our conceptions of gender roles and identity are shaped, reproduced and reinforced, by the media in particular. She uses found material from the Internet or from books, magazines and films, which she integrates into her paintings and videos in the form of collages and montages. She creates visual worlds that expose their own constructed nature with the aim of reflecting the generation and media representations of norms.

In recent years, the artist has been conducting research into a long-neglected topic: women who pursued artistic careers in the past centuries but have received little attention in art history to this day. As early as 1550, the Florentine art historian Giorgio Vasari published *The Lives of the Artists* – the first publication to document artists' biographies. Alongside hundreds of male artists, he only mentioned four female artists. Four hundred years later, E. H. Gombrich's standard work *The Story of Art* failed to provide a single reference to a woman. Even in the 16th edition from 1995, only one female artist is mentioned. In actual fact, women only occupy a marginal space in recorded history. Their contributions have in part been systematically suppressed in historical records around the world. The vast majority of surviving sources was written by men about men, and this phenomenon subsists in the digital age. For example, in 2023, still only eighteen percent of English-language articles on Wikipedia covered biographies of women, and only around twenty percent of all articles were written by female authors.

Based on her research and scientific findings from the field of memory studies, Cordula Ditz produced the 45-minute video and sound installation *They Speak to Us in Dreams*, being presented for the first time at Kunsthaus Hamburg. Using various AI image generators, she has conceived a fabulous, surrealistic animation about the invisibility of women in art history. In this work, she employs the flawed nature of AI as a form of representation for lost memories which, as a result of the power imbalance between the sexes, have led to the erasure of female artists from our collective memory. *They Speak to Us in Dreams* tells an art-historical heroines' story: at the beginning of the film, female painters from different eras pursue their vocation. Yet the historiography produced by their male colleagues leads to them gradually disappearing into the mire of oblivion. It is only through the dedicated reformulation of history by young female art historians that, ultimately, a portal is opened through which the women artists are freed, to enter the collective memory for good.

Cordula Ditz draws on numerous historical role models for her animated protagonists, such as Georgiana Houghton (1814–1884), Hilma af Klint (1862–1944) and Rachel Ruysch (1664–1750): Houghton had developed her own abstract imagery around 1865 – more than 40 years before Kandinsky became famous as the inventor of abstraction. Hilma af Klint had likewise adopted her own abstract position years before Kandinsky. However, both found little recognition during their lifetimes. Rachel Ruysch, in contrast, was internationally successful during her time. Her paintings fetched almost twice the price of Rembrandt's, and her works have remained in the collections of major museums to this day. Yet in most art-history books she is not even mentioned. The expansive installation at Kunsthaus Hamburg brings their forgotten biographies back to life. A haunting atmosphere is created in the exhibition hall: a large-format video projection, flickering light hanging from the ceiling, soft whispers emanating from the corners, women's voices whispering the names of forgotten artists from different centuries.

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