

## Intervention: “Rethinking the Collection”

### Chapter III

#### In the Course of Time

#### Filling in the Gaps. Pioneering Women Artists of Modernism

July 25, 2023 – June 16, 2024, K20

The Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen is embarking on a transformative journey to expand the presentation of its collection and redefine the museum’s role in a more global world. Introducing novel perspectives into the art historical narrative, a new space at K20 is specifically designed to engage with the collection, its evolution, and its scope. This latest installment signifies the third chapter in the ongoing series titled “Rethinking and Re-envisioning the Collection.” It showcases significant works by Marianne Werefkin, Sonia Delaunay, and Louise Bourgeois, casting a spotlight on the art of pioneering women artists of the modernist era, who have yet to be included in the collection. The preceding chapters delved into the museum’s history and the origins of its collection, followed by an exploration of the Kunstsammlung’s approach to colonial thought and traditions. The third chapter serves as a dedicated tribute to addressing the collection’s gaps and celebrating the groundbreaking and multifaceted contributions made by women artists to the ever-evolving realm of modern art.

Like many modern museums, the collection of the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen includes disproportionately more works by men than by women artists. During the period between 1962 and 1990, under the guidance of founding director Werner Schmalenbach, only three works by women artists entered the collection: two paintings by Maria Helena Vieira da Silva and, as a donation, a wall work by Lee Bontecou. Since 1997, in light of feminist, ecological, and social debates, the collection has witnessed the acquisition of several hundred works of art created by contemporary women artists. These encompass a wide range of media, including paintings, sculptures, and expansive installations by prominent figures such as Rosemarie Trockel, Maria Lassnig, and Katharina Fritsch, among others.

Over the past six years, the Kunstsammlung has been able to acquire its first pivotal works by modern women artists. These include paintings by Etel Adnan, Paula Modersohn-Becker, Gabriele Münter, Alice Neel, and Lygia Pape. Today, they are displayed in the galleries alongside works by Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, and Wassily Kandinsky. These new acquisitions mark the first steps in a long-term endeavor to transform the museum into a more polyphonic, plural, and inclusive institution.

Moving forward, the Kunstsammlung will continue to acquire works by women artists of the early twentieth century to rectify the current gaps within its collection. Reflecting on the

past, it engages with inquiries such as: Who were the pioneering women artists of the avant-garde? How did their contributions shape the evolution of abstraction and the very concept of modernism? What were the socio-cultural and artistic intersections between women artists and their male counterparts? Esteemed art historians like Linda Nochlin, Griselda Pollock, and Susanne von Falkenhausen have diligently addressed many of these disregarded narratives through their gender-focused research, yet certain stories continue to remain concealed within the annals of history.

“Rethinking and Re-envisioning the Collection” honors the artistic endeavors of women artists spanning three generations and highlights the museum’s aspirations for future acquisitions. Spotlighting artworks by Marianne von Werefkin, Sonia Delaunay-Terk, and Louise Bourgeois, this presentation underscores the transformative impact that women artists have had on the evolution of modern art. However, these accomplished women artists have remained absent from the museum holdings due to its history and its prior focus on establishing a canonical collection. Now, finally, the Kunstsammlung rectifies this oversight by providing them with the place and space they have long deserved.

**Marianne von Werefkin** (1860–1938) is a key figure in European Expressionism. Her works reveal the shift from academic realism to modern abstraction. She was a founding member of the Neue Künstlervereinigung München (New Artists’ Association Munich) in 1909, opened her apartment for salon discussions, and organized avant-garde exhibitions. She was both a painter and a dedicated supporter of other artists.

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Born in Tula, a large city in the then Russian Empire, she received her artistic education under the guidance of the painter Ilya Repin, a central figure in the realm of so-called Russian Realism. Subsequently, Werefkin veered away from the confines of academic painting. Teaming up with the younger artist Alexej von Jawlensky, she departed Russia and established herself in Munich. In 1907, she unveiled her inaugural Expressionist artworks. Together with Gabriele Münter, Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc, and Alexej von Jawlensky, she belonged to the avant-garde and was an important figure in artist’s groups such as Der Blaue Reiter and Der Sturm.

**Sonia Delaunay-Terk** (1885–1979) is an important representative of geometric abstraction. In her painting, she experimented with the power of form, color, and light. In 1912, the critic Guillaume Apollinaire coined the term *Orphism* to describe her abstractions. In addition to painting, Delaunay was active in fashion, furniture, and costume design. Her artistic innovations made her a central figure in the Parisian avant-garde.

Delaunay was born in what is now Hradysk, Ukraine, a city that was then part of the Russian Empire. With her husband, Robert Delaunay, she lived in Paris, Spain, Portugal, and the South of France. As a member of a Jewish family, she managed to survive the Shoah during the Second World War without leaving France. She passed away in Paris at the age of ninety-four. Today, her artistic work is honored in numerous international museum exhibitions.

**Louise Bourgeois** (1911–2010) is a pioneer of contemporary art. She revolutionized modern art with her installations, sculptures, and textile works. Her mostly autobiographical works touch on the unconscious and tell of pain, fear, and redemption. In 1982, her retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art in New York catapulted her to international fame. Today, she is considered one of the most important contemporary artists.

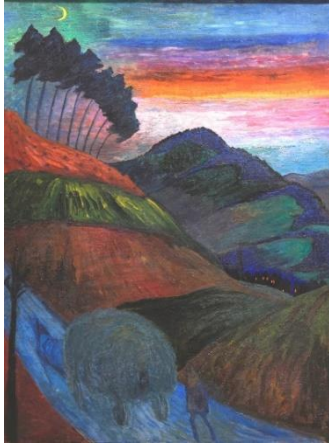
Born in Paris, Bourgeois studied mathematics, art history, and fine arts. Her family ran a textile and carpet restoration workshop. In 1938, she and her husband, Robert Goldwater, moved from Paris to New York. The couple had three sons. Upon arriving in New York, Bourgeois initially focused her artistic efforts on oil painting, printmaking, and drawing. It was during the late 1940s that she embarked on her journey into three-dimensional art. This marked Bourgeois' departure from the conventional confines of medium specificity, as she embraced the creation of monumental sculptures and expansive installations. Notably, in 1999, her exceptional contributions were acknowledged with the prestigious Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the 48th Venice Biennale. She passed away in New York at the age of ninety-eight.

*Curator: Vivien Trommer, Head of Collection*

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### Captions and short descriptions



Marianne von Werefkin  
*Notturmo con contadino che rincasa*, 1915  
Egg tempera on paper  
57 x 42.5 cm  
22.4 x 16.7 in  
Private Collection, Switzerland

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Marianne von Werefkin produced this painting in Saint-Prex on Lake Geneva in 1915, shortly after the outbreak of the First World War. She lived there in exile with the painter Alexej von Jawlensky, her maid Helene Nesnakomoff, and her son Alexander. The painting depicts a landscape in the Alps. The moon shines a warm light on one of the mountaintops. In the foreground, we see a carriage loaded with straw and the back of a figure. Depicted are the hard-working rural people. For Werefkin, art seemed to be the last refuge during the war. The emotional world of an uncertain time is reflected in the bright contrasting colors and rapid application of paint. The painting can be assigned to Werefkin's late work. She was trained as a private student of the painter Ilya Repin. He was the key representative of the so-called Russian Realism. Later Werefkin broke away from academic painting. Starting in 1907, she created her first Expressionist paintings in Munich. Together with Gabriele Münter, Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc, and Alexej von Jawlensky, she belonged to the artistic avant-garde and helped shape modern abstraction.



Sonia Delaunay-Terk  
*Marché au Minho*, ca. 1915–1916  
Oil and encaustic on canvas  
113 x 139.5 cm  
44 1/2 x 54 7/8 in.  
Private Collection, Switzerland

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Sonia Delaunay-Terk painted this picture in ca. 1915–1916, when she was living with her husband Robert and her son Charles in Vila do Conde, a coastal town in northern Portugal. The family learned of the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 during their summer vacation. Sonia Delaunay then returned briefly to her Paris apartment and reorganized the studio. The family lived in Portugal until 1918. The painting shows a market scene in Northern Portugal. A saleswoman sits amidst the lush array of fruits and vegetables. With her blue and red garments and yellow headscarf, she is depicted in the iconography of a saint. The image borrows from reality and is, at the same time, alienated through abstraction. It is an experiment with bright colors, abstract forms, and natural light. Recognizable are Delaunay's so-called "electric prisms," circles and stripes in simultaneous contrasts, which she had developed a few years earlier under the impression of the newly invented streetlamps in Paris. The painting belongs to a larger group of paintings and drawings devoted to the market of Minho. Comparable works are in prestigious collections, such as The Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and the Centro de Arte Moderna Gulbenkian in Lisbon. This work is in a private collection.



Louise Bourgeois

*Baroque*, 1970

Marble

96.6 x 64.1 x 65.7 cm

37 1/4 x 25 1/4 x 25 3/4 in.

Photo: Christopher Burke, New York

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Courtesy Galerie Karsten Greve Cologne, Paris, St. Moritz

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Beginning in 1967, Louise Bourgeois traveled regularly from New York to Pietrasanta in Italy. White Carrara marble is quarried near the town, the marble that had made the Baroque sculptor Gian Lorenzo Bernini famous. During her stays, Bourgeois visited the bronze foundries and marble quarries and worked in the local workshops and therefore began to focus on marble, a natural and very hard material. Previously, she had worked primarily with wood, plaster, latex, and bronze. *Baroque* pays homage to seventeenth-century Baroque sculpture. Soft organic forms intertwine, forming a unit of complex curves and spirals. The sculpture has great symbolic expressiveness and refers to recurring motifs in Bourgeois' work, such as family, motherhood, love, and hate. The surface of the marble block is roughly hewn. A pattern of thousands of chisel marks runs across the sculpture. In 1982, the work was part of the major Bourgeois retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art in New York that subsequently traveled to Houston, Chicago, and Akron. It was later exhibited in international traveling exhibitions in Frankfurt am Main, Munich, Lyon, Seville, and Mexico City.