

Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger's first solo exhibition at a German museum

Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger

K21 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen

February 22 – August 31, 2025

Press preview and press conference: Thursday, February 20, 2025, 10 am at K21
The artist will be present.

Opening: February 21, 2025, from 7 pm at K21

The Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen will present the first German museum survey of the groundbreaking painter, psychoanalyst, philosopher, and peace activist Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger (BRACHA). Born in Tel Aviv in 1948, BRACHA is known for her small-format oil paintings that are driven by unconscious processes and created over the course of up to eight years. BRACHA transforms photographic material, including evidence of violence against women and children during the Shoah, into painterly images of inner states that visibly change over decades. At the heart of the exhibition are twelve recent paintings, some of which are shown outside the artist's studio for the first time. With more than 80 works, including a selection of early work from the 1980s, the Bel Etage of K21 presents a singular concept of art. It combines psychoanalysis and painting, a feminist rethinking of identity and gender relations, radical vulnerability, and the hope for a peaceful way of dealing with conflicts and inherited traumas.

K21

About Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger

Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger is a self-taught artist. She studied clinical psychology at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and moved to London in 1975, where she studied at the London Centre for Psychotherapy, taught and worked with Ronald D. Laing, pioneer of the antipsychiatry movement and the Tavistock Clinic. After moving to Paris, she showed her artistic works there for the first time in 1982. These were soon collected and exhibited by major museums, including the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. BRACHA also participated in actions and exhibitions in Germany at the Berlin Philharmonic in 1983, in Düsseldorf in 1984, and in Cologne in 1987. She has shown in influential group exhibitions worldwide. Numerous renowned theorists have each dedicated several essays to her work, including Griselda Pollock, Jean-François Lyotard, Christine Buci-Glucksmann, and Nicolas Bourriaud. The accompanying exhibition catalog makes excerpts of these exemplary essays available in German for the first time.

Throughout her career, Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger continued working as a psychoanalyst. Her book *The Matrixial Gaze* was published in 1995 and develops a synthesis of aesthetics and ethics that has been taken up in a variety of disciplines, including psychology, philosophy, ecology, education, art, film and gender studies. Ettinger has taught at numerous universities and art academies. She is a professor at the European Graduate School in Saas-Fee, Switzerland and the Global Center for Advanced Studies in Dublin, Ireland. She has been involved in human rights organizations such as Physicians for Human Rights, Women Wage Peace, and the Palestinian-Israeli Forum of Bereft Families, where she works for equal rights for Israelis and Palestinians.

Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger's art

As an artist, Ettinger goes by the name BRACHA. Her practice has developed a unique set of techniques from 1981 onwards: she places materials such as book pages and historical photographs on a photocopier, opens it during the exposure process, and overpaints the unfixed toner pigment of the incomplete copies with ink, oil, and ash. In 1992, she started painting in oil on canvas. To this day, she continues adding ash to her oil paintings, which resemble weavings. This is the result of her working with tiny lines in countless layers. Over many years, she covers the canvas with dots until unforeseeable patterns emerge. A multitude of figures and faces can be recognized in each painting. The exhibition shows how these figures have become increasingly mobile and colorful over the decades. In the most recent paintings of the *Angel of Carriance* series, this development culminates in a tension between turmoil and confidence. BRACHA's works and the titles she gives them (such as "Eurydice," "Medusa," "Pieta" or "Rachel") are shaped by her preoccupation with spiritual traditions from Judaism, Christianity, and Buddhism, as well as Italian classical painting.

The exhibition juxtaposes BRACHA's paintings and drawings with her notebooks, which are independent artworks in their own right and have been the subject of many museum exhibitions. In them, she records feelings, thoughts, and dreams in notes, drawings, ink paintings, and watercolors. Here you can witness the artist as she reflects—also on the terrible events during the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 and the war that followed. "[M]y heart cries for each dead on all sides," she wrote in her letter of resignation from the selection committee for the artistic direction of *documenta* in November 2023. "Every life is precious."

Relationship with Germany

The exhibition at K21 offers the sensation of a late discovery. The fact that BRACHA is only now becoming well-known in Germany is due to her deliberate decision not to exhibit in the country for nearly 40 years. The reason for this was precisely her intensive engagement with the country of her ancestors. Her family's German roots go back to the 15th century. The historical images on which BRACHA's works are based almost all engage German history: they include family photographs of her parents walking in the Jewish ghetto of Łódź; media images of the 1936 Olympics in Nuremberg; a photograph of a mass shooting of women and children in Ukraine in 1942; as well as early German aerial photographs of Palestine taken in 1917 during World War I. While unresolved historical tensions between Israel, Palestine, and Germany reverberate through Ettinger's entire practice, her art and

writing foster an understanding of vulnerability and “self-fragilization”, interdependence and “co-emergence” and the necessity to recognize, “to carry” and care for the other in all their differences.

Art as witness

Most of BRACHA’s relatives were murdered during the Shoah. Her parents managed to flee to the British Mandate of Palestine, where Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger was born in Tel Aviv a few weeks before the state of Israel was founded in 1948. As the daughter of Holocaust survivors who were unable to find a language for their traumatic memories, much of BRACHA’s art and thought revolves around the possibility of being a witness to witnesses—a role that she also ascribes to art. Art enables what BRACHA calls wit(h)nessing: the experience of the presence of another life, mediated by the artist and the painting itself. This co-emergence, which always remains incomplete and singular, can contribute to the understanding of shared injuries, the transmission of their traces and their healing.

Her many years of dealing with personal and historical traumas in both her theory and her painting have recently led BRACHA to the conviction that her work is now ready to have an impact in Germany. “I did not want to come with morals and complaints about the past”, she says. “I wanted to make sure that I have a gift to make”.

Art as healing

Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger’s work occupies a key position in the study of art, psychoanalysis, and women’s knowledge. Through art, practice and theory, Ettinger searches for ways to overcome violence and polarization in order to reclaim spaces for “humanization”, compassion, and openness towards a shared future. Her reflections on the spiritual in art offer many connections with works in the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, such as those by Wassily Kandinsky, Agnes Martin, and Paul Klee, about whom she has also written theoretically. In 2016, she gave a lecture at K20 on the art of Agnes Martin, and in 2024 on that of Hilma af Klint. In her essay “Angel of Carriance,” which is published in German for the first time in the accompanying exhibition catalog, Ettinger warns against the instrumentalization of art for political agendas, fuelled by the dynamics of social media. Only when art asserts its distinct independence and slowness can it have a healing effect and support the human ability to appreciate differences and approach one another in a caring and supportive way, and even influence, over time, the social field. Therein lies its political power. BRACHA’s unique combination of painting, psychoanalysis, and ethics allows us to see collective wounds and traumas and their healing as both a radically personal and radically communal task.

The first German-language publication on the work of Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger

The exhibition is accompanied by a 144-page catalog published by DISTANZ Verlag with numerous illustrations, new essays by Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger and Kolja Reichert as well as excerpts from canonical essays on BRACHA’s work by Nicolas Bourriaud, Christine Buci-Glucksmann, Rosi Huhn, Jean-François Lyotard, Brian Massumi, and Griselda Pollock.

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Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger: Angel of Carriance

Approx. 144 pages

Numerous illustrations

Format 16.5 x 23 cm

Distanz Verlag

Approx. 29 EUR in the exhibition, 36 EUR in bookshops

Talks with BRACHA

February 22, 12–6 pm, K21 Salon21

Free admission with exhibition ticket

With Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Nicolas Bourriaud, Rosi Huhn, Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, Kolja Reichert, and others.

Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger has not only influenced a younger generation of artists: Her theory of the matrixial space has also been widely received in psychoanalysis, the philosophy of art, film studies and other disciplines. On the day after the opening, several of her prominent companions will discuss the influence of BRACHA's art and theory. The focus will be on the role of art as a source of humanity, understanding, and a sense of the future.

On spelling the artist's name

Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger has often been abbreviated to Bracha L. Ettinger. The museum and the artist have decided to include her German surname "Lichtenberg." Thus, her name is always either written out completely as Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, or abbreviated to her artist name BRACHA (always in capital letters).

Curator: Kolja Reichert

The exhibition *Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger* at the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen is supported by Artis; Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York; and High Art, Paris.

Media partner for the exhibition:

Kunstforum International

Media partner of the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen:

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