

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Ilona Keserü

23 March–21 April 2018

Private view

Thursday 22 March, 6 - 8pm



Stephen Friedman Gallery is delighted to present Hungarian artist Ilona Keserü's first solo exhibition in London. Following her inclusion in our Frieze Masters presentation in October 2017, this exhibition includes paintings, objects and drawings from the 1960s to the early 1980s.

Keserü was born in 1933 in Pécs, Hungary and created a diverse body of work that has rarely been seen outside Eastern Europe. She is one of Hungary's leading post-war abstract artists. Her career spans over seventy years and her work expresses power and strength in the face of political and cultural adversity. Pioneering a visual language that explores material, colour and the body, Keserü's use of colour and recognisable soft forms draw comparison to Eva Hesse, Louise Bourgeois and Judy Chicago.

In 1962 Keserü lived in Italy. She learnt about new shades of paint and approaches to material and form. The trip altered her approach to painting forever – "as if all that had gone before had been cut off".

Over the last five decades Keserü made a body of abstract work driven by modern life. Two of the earliest and most personal works in the exhibition (both 1965) use lace gifted to her by her aunt. 'Television' is a playful mixed media collage

depicting a television screen. An undulating line suggests televisual static. In the painting 'In Memory of an Actress' a lace collar produces a bodily halo. The collar previously belonged to Hungarian actress Mari Jászai. This choice of unusual and evocative textiles demonstrated how her work from 1965 onwards adopted everyday materials and readymade shapes.

In 1967 Keserü discovered the heart shaped headstones of Balatonudvari cemetery, Hungary. Since then she reproduced this shape many times in drawings, paintings and objects. By inverting and overlaying the motif, Keserü transformed the tombstone into rolling field landscapes and sensuous figurative studies.

In a series of three-dimensional works from 1970 Keserü used string as a sculptural material. Encased in small glass bottles, volumes of string bring to mind the interior of a human body. Produced in the same year, 'Engaged Column' is a free-standing fibreboard column. Keserü applied paint, stitch work, canvas and a tangled line drawing of string to the column. The eddying circles of layered string create a sculptural surface of entwined forms and shapes.

One of the largest works in the exhibition is 'Pendant Object (Suspended)', 1981: an imposing three-metre-high hanging composition of organic forms stitched onto dyed linen. This work reflects Keserü's later manipulation of the tombstone shape into a variety of striking elongated and abstract colour symbols. In some cases, she cut out symbols of corresponding forms, producing both a hollow silhouette in the larger form and a new symbol. Keserü then adhered the elements to a vivid two-dimensional relief.

Keserü believed that by reducing the natural world into a series of signs and forms, one gains a greater understanding of life. Her unique artistic language and peerless ability to render colour and form confirms Keserü as a leading figure in the international history of abstraction.

Notable solo exhibitions include: 'Színe-Java – Válogatás Ilona Keserü Ilona életművéből, Zsolnay Negyed', Pécsi Galéria m21, Pécs, Hungary (2016); 'Kisterem', Budapest, Hungary (2014); 'Az idő színtere – Cangiante', Vaszary Galéria, Balatonfüred, Hungary (2014); 'Kisterem', Budapest, Hungary (2012); 'Cangiante-Színváltás', Kieselbach Galéria, Budapest, Hungary (2012); 'Danubiana Meulensteen Art Museum', Bratislava-Čunovo, Slovakia (2012); 'Magyar Intézet', Kulturinstitut der Republik Ungarn, Stuttgart, Germany (2002); 'Pitture scelte 1984-2001', Accademia d'Ungheria, Rome, Italy (2001); 'Color and Space', Delphine Gallery, Santa Barbara, CA, USA (1991).

Notable group exhibitions include: 'With the Eyes of Others: Hungarian Artists of the Sixties and Seventies, Elizabeth Dee, New York, USA (2017); 'Crossing Borders – The Grüner Collection', Danubiana Meulensteen Art Museum, Bratislava-Čunovo, Slovakia (2017); 'Ez bejött', Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, Budapest, Hungary (2016); 'Ludwig Goes Pop + The East Side Story', Ludwig Múzeum - Kortárs Művészeti Múzeum, Budapest, Hungary (2015); 'Tolerance in Art', Contemporary Hungarian and Slovak Art, Danubiana Meulensteen Art Museum, Bratislava-Čunovo, Slovakia (2009); 'Aktuelle Kunst aus Ungarn', Donaueschwäbisches Zentralmuseum, Ulm, Germany (2007); 'Hazai javak. Magyar nőművészek Budapesten és New Yorkban', A.I.R. Gallery, New York, USA (2006); 'Fiatal festők Keserü Ilona közelében Pécssett 1983-2003', Pécsi Galéria, Pécs, Hungary (2003); 'Aspekte / Positionen, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna, Austria (1999); 'Kunst Europa '91 Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst', Kunsthalle, Bremen, Germany (1991);

Gallery Hours

Tuesday to Friday, 10am–6pm
and Saturday, 11am–5pm

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'Contemporary Visual Art in Hungary. Eighteen artists from Hungary', Third Eye Centre, Glasgow, Scotland (1985); 'Ungersk Konst 1905-1980', Liljevachs Konsthall, Stockholm; Konstmuseum, Göteborg; Konsthall, Malmö, Sweden (1981); 'Exposicion de Pintura Hungara del siglo XX', Museo Carillo Gil, Mexico, Palacio de Cristal, Madrid, Spain (1979).

Keserü's work features in the permanent collections of numerous prominent institutions including Ludwig Museum, Aachen; Nationalgalerie, Berlin; Ludwig Museum - Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest, Hungary; Municipal Gallery - Kiscelli Museum, Budapest; Francia Intézet, Budapest; Kassák Museum, Budapest, Hungary; Városi Művészeti Múzeum, Győr, Hungary; Modern Magyar Képtár II., Janus Pannonius Múzeum, Pécs, Hungary; National Museum of Modern Art, Seoul, South Korea; Szent István Király Múzeum, Székesfehérvár, Hungary; Ferenczy Múzeum, Szentendre; Fondation Károlyi, Vence, France; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, USA; and Zentralsparkasse und Kommerzbank, Vienna, Austria.