

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Ilona Keserü

With a career spanning over seventy years, Keserü is one of Hungary's leading post-war abstract artists.

Ilona Keserü was born in 1933 in Pécs, Hungary and she lives and works in Budapest.

In the face of political and cultural adversity, Keserü's organic style of abstraction developed in defiance of Soviet rule following the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. The artist's distinctive approach combines modern abstraction with references to Hungarian folk culture and historic European imagery. Her use of colour, materials and soft forms draw comparison with artists such as Eva Hesse, Louise Bourgeois and Judy Chicago.

Anya Harrison, writer and curator, states: "For Keserü, the sensation of looking is always a haptic, bodily experience. Undulating lines – painted and appliquéd to surfaces or discernible in the shaped canvases themselves – are a reoccurring staple, redolent of the ebb and flow of waves or the wavelengths of light that determine and structure rules of perception. In fact, they're a readymade form, taken from the idiosyncratic heart-shaped tombstones found in the cemetery of the small village of Balatonudvari which Keserü encountered in 1967; they have taken root in her practice ever since." The erotic, corporeal associations connected with these forms are emphasised through her choice of colour, using fleshy pinks, lipstick reds and burnt oranges.

Keserü's strong engagement with colour remains at the core of her practice today, exploring the optical effects of combining specific pigments with one another. Her characteristic use of curved shapes is now accompanied by gestural, erratic brushstrokes and abstract swathes of paint. The third volume of her catalogue raisonné will be published in 2024, bringing together works made since 2001.

Her work is included in 'Beyond Form: Lines of Abstraction, 1950–1970' at Turner Contemporary, Margate this year. A solo exhibition of works on paper by Keserü opened at Museum of Fine Arts, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest in December 2023. A significant survey show of her work opened at Q Contemporary, Budapest, Hungary in March 2023. Stephen Friedman Gallery presented a solo booth by Keserü for Frieze Masters, London 2022, focussing on paintings and three-dimensional works made in the 1970s and early '80s. The gallery presented the artist's first solo exhibition in London in 2018.

Keserü was included in the first major presentation of Hungarian abstract art in Korea at Sungkok Art Museum, in autumn 2022. The artist's work was exhibited in the group show 'Women in Abstraction' at Centre Pompidou, Paris, France in May 2021 which travelled to Guggenheim Bilbao Museum, Bilbao, Spain in October 2021. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York included a monumental wall hanging by Keserü from their collection in the group show 'Epic Abstraction: Pollock to Herrera' in 2019.

Keserü's work features in the collections of numerous prominent institutions including Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA; Ludwig Museum, Aachen; Nationalgalerie, Berlin; Ludwig Museum - Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest, Hungary; Municipal Gallery - Kiscelli Museum, Budapest, Hungary; 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.