

MIRIAM CAHN. „Athens“ Room

In 2017 Swiss artist Miriam Cahn (b. 1949) was invited to *documenta 14* – held for the first time in parallel at two venues. In Kassel, she occupied a room of the *documenta* hall with colorful paintings; in Athens, the artist presented a room featuring early drawings from 1980 to 1992, accompanied by more recent texts. The installation, entitled the “Athens” Room, is being shown here for the first time in Germany. It is modeled in scale on the original situation at the Benaki Museum, where the confined space and dark drawings were intended to have a physical impact on viewers.

The density of the black chalk pigment and the powerful strokes suggest the energetic moment that underlies the creation of the drawings. In a performative act, as it were, the artist moved her entire body on the paper spread out on the floor, so that traces of fingers and feet testify to her identity. “I draw lying down, crawling, crouching, with black chalk, dancing on white paper and then washing the dust off my body,” stated Cahn describing her working method, which is close to body art.¹

In terms of content, the room reflects Miriam Cahn’s fundamental approach of using her art to take a clear stance on social issues and to articulate her female existence in a world determined by economics, capitalism and the political quest for power. From the early 1980s on, for this she used an open system of motifs, which she presented in changing combinations. The drawings, some of which are larger than life, show objects that the artist assigned to male and female categories. Technical devices, with their cross-shaped antennae or phallic forms, exemplify the male world, while things that belong to the domestic world represent the female cosmos. Like extended extremities, these objects stand as symbols of the relationship between the sexes.

The fact that the artist drew on early works in 2017 has something to do with her own biography: Already in 1982, Cahn realized one of her in total three rooms entitled *WACHRAUM* for *documenta 7*, but withdrew her participation after she was asked to take down some of her works to make room for another artist.

The “Athens” Room is based on the idea of her *WACHRÄUME*, which the artist conceived as *flowing spaces*. Cahn explains her concept stating that the presentations should “simply be imagined as words” that are “assembled into a contemporary sound poem.”² In a similar way, she explores themes such as war, fleeing and sexuality in the texts displayed on the floor. In this way, against the backdrop of Greece’s tough political climate in 2017 marked by a refugee and financial crisis, she developed a complex cosmos of content that runs seamlessly through current debates.

Susann Scholl

1 *Das wilde lieben*, 1983, quoted from Miriam Cahn, *Das zornige Schreiben*, Berlin 2019, p. 30.

2 Quoted from Miriam Cahn, *Das zornige Schreiben*, Berlin 2019, pp. 293/294.

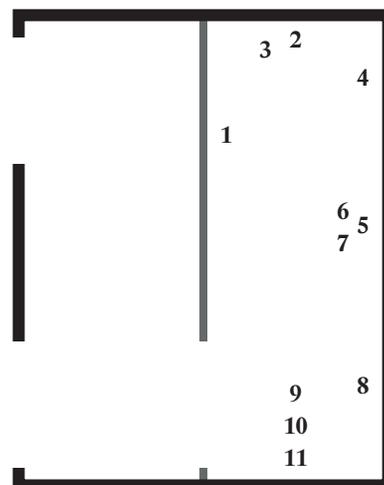
“Athens” Room, 2017

Drawings 1980–1992

- 1 *schwesterschiff*, 1982, chalk on parchment paper
- 2 *bett (alt)*, 1982, chalk on parchment paper
- 3 *computer (W+H), (Nov. 82)*, 1982, chalk on parchment paper
- 4 *raketenabschussrampe*, 1981, chalk on parchment paper
- 5 *(das klassische lieben), kleines weibliches durcheinander (11/17/82)*, series of 6 drawings, 1982, chalk on parchment paper
- 6 *2 binden*, 1981, charcoal on parchment paper
- 7 *fernseher*, 1981, charcoal on parchment paper
- 8 *luft unter den füssen (4/8/92)*, series of 3 drawings, 1992, chalk on paper
- 9 *o.T.*, series of 18 drawings, 1980, pencil on paper
- 10 *IM DUNKELN (7/14–12/9/1991)*, series of 8 drawings, 1991, pencil on paper
- 11 *folterbilder im mai 2004*, 2004 (Germ/Eng)

Texts 1994–2015

- PICASSO*, 1984 (Germ/Eng)
1991, 1994 (Germ/Eng)
re-considered escape ways, 2005 (Germ/Eng)
NOVEL SCULPTURE (having to eat), 2007 (Germ/Eng)
WE WERE OLD, 2009 (Germ/Eng /Greek)
myjews, 2011 (Germ/Eng /Greek)
COINCIDENCES, 2015 (Germ/Eng /Greek)
5 x schön, ohne Datum (dt)



The documenta room was made possible by permanent loans from the Kerstin Hiller and Helmut Schmelzer Collection. The museum regularly presents artists' rooms from the Nuremberg collector couple's collection. We would like to express our gratitude for the close cooperation existing since the museum's inception.