

Tanya Leighton

Press Release

Marianne Wex
'LET'S TAKE BACK OUR SPACE'

24 January – 9 March 2024

Preview: Saturday 20 January, 3pm–5pm
4654 W Washington Blvd, Los Angeles

Tanya Leighton, Los Angeles is pleased to announce 'Let's Take Back Our Space', an exhibition by the trailblazing feminist artist Marianne Wex, featuring the influential series 'Let's Take Back Our Space: 'Female' and 'Male' Body Language as a Result of Patriarchal Structures, 1977'.

Widely celebrated upon its debut almost 47 years ago, Wex's provocative photographs of everyday patriarchy approaches the topic across mediations of documentary, art history, and commercial advertising. The work renders visible the hidden effects of sexist ideology across time and space and thus aims to make patriarchy thinkable not only as a societal norm but also as an epistemic field that individuals inhabit.

What Wex provides the viewer is a taxonomy by which they might begin to see patterns of gendered embodiment, a focus that anticipates theorisation's of iterative performance among late-twentieth-century feminists. Far from essentialising her subjects, Wex's photographs offer nuanced readings of class and social hierarchies, drawing attention to the ways in which, in some cases, a person pushes back against social expectations by exercising atypical gendered body language.

Beginning her career as a painter inspired by Pop and the figurative work of Paula Modersohn-Becker, Wex's turn to photography in the mid-1970s grew out of her interest in body language. After several years of documenting people in Hamburg, Wex produced an archive of over 5,000 photographs that were supplemented by images from art history catalogues, photojournalism, commercial advertising, pornography, and mail order catalogue clippings. From this enormous image bank, Wex constructed 'Let's Take Back Our Space', a speculative and polemical history of body language and physiology from the 1970s to ancient Egypt. Wex's project is rigorously subdivided according to different postures and poses, revealing how gender stereotypes permeate our everyday gestures. Again and again, the series captures power differentials simply in the amount of space a subject feels entitled to occupy.

The resulting body of photographic collages are unique; they combine the history of documentary and the strict pictorial aesthetic of mid-century German conceptual photography, known for its focus on the possibilities of modular recombination. 'Let's Take Back Our Space' might be classified, non-exhaustively, as a feminist broadside, an encyclopaedia of gesture, an ethnographic portrait of Hamburg in the 1970s, a genealogical tract on art history, or a semi-autobiography in that it represents a deep dive into an idea.

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Marianne Wex was born in 1937 in Hamburg and passed away in 2020 in Höhr-Grenzhausen, Germany. She studied at the Academies of Art in Hamburg and Mexico City, and was a professor of the Academy of Art, Hamburg from 1963 to 1980.

'Let's Take Back Our Space' was first exhibited as part of 'Women Artists International 1877-1977' at nGbK, Berlin. Wex's work was shown for the first time in decades at Focal Point Gallery, Southend in 2009, then in a more comprehensive form at the Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe in 2012, and at Tanya Leighton, Berlin in 2018 in collaboration with Mike Sperlinger, Professor of Theory and Writing at the National Academy of the Arts, Oslo.

Other recent exhibitions include Centre Canadien d'Architecture, Montréal; Galeria Zachęta, National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, Poland; Adam Art Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand; Gasworks, London; LA Galerie, centre d'art contemporain, Noisy-le-Sec, Paris; and Yale Union, Portland. Her work is held in the permanent collection of MoMA, New York.

For more information, please contact info@tanyaleighton.com or telephone +49(0)30221607770.

The gallery is open Wednesday to Saturday, 11-5pm and by appointment.