

TESS JARAY

East of the West

Sept 12 – Oct 13, 2019

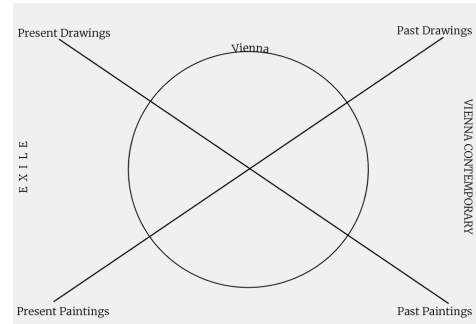
Karsten Schubert London and EXILE are pleased to present a two-part solo exhibition of Vienna-born, London-based artist Tess Jaray entitled *East of the West*. The first part of the exhibition, from Sept 12 to Oct 13 at EXILE, presents recent paintings (from 2017/8) together with a selection of early drawings (all 1964). The second part of the exhibition, held at VIENNA CONTEMPORARY from Sept 26 – 29, will focus on early paintings (from 1964/5) paired with a selection of contemporary works on paper (all 2010).

Und wäre es nicht denkbar, dass wir auch in der Vergangenheit, in dem, was schon gewesen und grösstenteils ausgelöscht ist, Verabredungen haben und dort Orte und Personen aufsuchen müssen, die, quasi jenseits der Zeit, in einem Zusammenhang mit uns stehen? (in W.G. Sebald: Austerlitz. Fischer Taschenbuch, 2003. P 367)

The Danube river's meandering path through the city's fabric has been modified for many past centuries until its current, further and further, outsourced riverbed. Less and less disruption and flooding have occurred since, with the river's newly man-made path streamlined and tamed not unlike some historical narratives. Today, the remains of one historical Danube riverbed are clad in brick walls allowing an even, controlled inner-city river flow from west towards east. Now called *Donaukanal*, it splits the inner city into two sections with the Donaukanal's shores mainly used as recreational space.

In one of those inner city districts, Tess Jaray was born in late 1937. Yet there are no actual recollections of the first eight months of her infant life before being forced to emigrate with her parents in 1938. Instead, Jaray grew up in the rural English countryside, with her parents and especially her mother Pauli sharing displaced memories while being surrounded by brought along artefacts that formed a precious link between past thriving city life and present rural beginnings. Among these, a blue cupboard, dated 1778 acquired by her parents in exchange for 100 light bulbs while on their honeymoon in Salzburg. It remains with Jaray until today and signifies importance through its physical presence alone in a life that was without many traceable and physical roots. (Tess Jaray: *The Blue Cupboard*, 2014. Royal Academy of Art Publications).

Prior to the Austrian *Anschluss* in 1938, members of Jaray's extended family played a prominent role in Vienna's cultural scene, among them were the actor Hans Jaray or the gallerist Lea Bondi-Jaray. Out of her immediate family only Tess Jaray together with her parents survived. Today, very few traces are left within the city. Just two artefacts of an otherwise eradicated history have found their way into the cultural archives of the city: the 1927 painting by Christian Schad of Tess Jaray's great aunt Lea Bondi Jaray, and the artist's painting *St Stephen's Green*, 1964. Both works were acquired in the 1960s by Werner Hofmann, the first director of the newly formed mumok.



East of the West. Exhibition map

Investigating architectural structures and ornamental patterns has been at the core of Jaray's practice since the 1950s. A building's particular structural rhythm remains a core inspiration and driving force for the artist's visual translation into painterly abstraction. Yet Jaray's perception of architecture frees its specific form from its contextual site and elevates it towards a universal moment of autonomous perception. With the exhibition *East of the West*, Jaray returns to her city of birth, presenting a selection of works from different periods of her oeuvre in two spatially separated locations. The exhibition's title refers to Jaray's specific biography as well as to Vienna's geopolitical location as a consequence of historical events.



Roof of Stephansdom. Photograph by Carlos Vergara

Similar to the Donaukanal dividing the inner city, *East of the West* is likewise split into two sections rupturing any attempted monocausal reception of the work. Only both parts of *East of the West*, when experienced in their fragmentation, can qualify to be a first introduction to the artist's extensive oeuvre. The exhibition's set-up creates an X-shape reflecting on the artist's displacement and absence from the texture of the city. The viewer is encouraged to become an activated traveler passing through Vienna's center between the two locations with the knowledge of the body, identity and oeuvre of the artist absent. Yet, all exhibited artworks remain signifiers of the artist's body and identity outside of Vienna's social and cultural narrative they are biographically and partially conceptually deeply rooted in.

EXILE

Elisabethstr 24

1010 Vienna

+43.681.814.62848

www.exilegallery.org

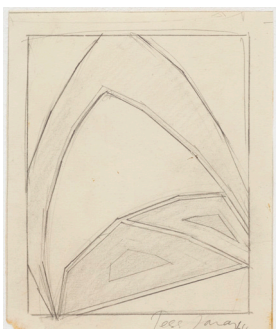
info@exilegallery.org

In the first part of *East of the West*, Jaray's paintings present themselves as vibrant abstractions of architectural patterns that through their singular plane, seemingly do not disclose their architectural reference within them. The painterly surface seems intangible, like a reflexive mirror in which the viewer becomes herself the reflection. Only one of the four exhibited paintings seems to break this surface flatness. In the painting *Glimpse* (2017) we are invited to look through the painting's interior frame to an architectural detail of a building that has been abstracted by the artist on previous occasion. Differently to the two other bold visualisations of the same architectural and deeply Viennese pattern, the zig-zag shape of the tiled roof pattern of Vienna's Stephansdom cathedral, *Glimpse* barely reveals its view onto an almost hidden detail within an otherwise bold graphic frame.



Glimpse, 2017. Acrylic on canvas, 178 x 142 cm

When bringing these works in context to the artist's specific biography it appears as if the artist is referencing personal biographical data by either hiding, revealing or confronting us with the consequences of historical facts. They are either bold and confrontational, or hidden and subtle representations of the inherent particular architectural reference, which becomes a signification for memorial loss in which the viewer is invited to question their own reflection, personal identity and socio-political position. Yet, this exhibition is not an exhibition about Vienna. It is in an exhibition about the artist and her oeuvre. *Fez Green* (2017) extends an otherwise too narrow focus into an architectural plural typical for the artist's practice. As an example, in her 2018 solo exhibition at EXILE, then in Berlin, Jaray presented a series of works that stands in relationship to a particular pattern remembered from visits two Aleppo.



Untitled [St Stephen's Way II], 1964. Graphite on paper, 14.5 x 12 cm

The works exhibited alongside the recent paintings allow a first peek into Jaray's earlier process. These drawings are sketches for paintings created in 1964, which partially can be seen in the later, second part of the exhibition at VIENNA CONTEMPORARY. In these early drawings and respective paintings, the surface lies within the works themselves. The perspective has not been fully flattened, instead these works contain a kind of internal horizon

upon which a mirroring or reflection appears. Depth of field is included within the works, making them architectural renderings themselves; when viewed in this light these 1964 works are less about radical surface and abstraction. On the contrary, they are rather painterly references to architectural perception focusing on reflections and internal mirroring as evidenced by the embedded pictorial plane in the form of a particular horizon line. Though most horizontal lines are uneven and distorted, seemingly making it difficult to maintain balance. Again, when viewed in context to Jaray's biography, the works can reveal an internal longing for grounding, being on one hand abstraction of architectural detail and on the other a metaphorical search for belonging.



St Stephen's Way II, 1965. Oil on canvas, 180 x 152 cm

One of the exhibited works, as drawing in one location and painting in the other, is entitled *St. Stephen's Way II*, 1964 which refers to a reflection the artist experienced then visiting the Stephansdom cathedral together with her parents in 1957: "*When I was 19, I went with my parents to visit Vienna, which is where I was born, they hadn't been back since then and of course I had never been, I was 8 months when I came to this country [Jaray's parents emigrated to the UK in 1938] and we went to St Stephens's church which is an amazing deeply gothic building; very, very resonant of darkness and fear [...]*" (Arts Council, 2017. https://youtu.be/_3GCrg1bGHY)

East of the West presents an overdue introduction to the complex oeuvre created by Jaray over the last 50 years. Yet her practice demands a much deeper investigation and extensive presentation. The works' relevance within contemporary art, its socio-political importance and Jaray's specific biographical relation to Vienna are evident and require action.

LIST OF WORKS (left to right)

Return, 2017. Acrylic on canvas, 178 x 142 cm
Glimpse, 2017. Acrylic on canvas, 178 x 142 cm
Revue, 2018. Acrylic on canvas, 178 x 142 cm
Fez Green, 2017. Acrylic on canvas, 178 x 142 cm

Untitled (b), [Study towards 'St Stephen's Way II'], 1964. Graphite on paper, 14.8 x 13.8 cm
Untitled, [Study towards 'Glimmer'], 1964. Graphite on paper, 15.3 x 13.2 cm
Untitled [Study Towards 'Green Sanctuary'], 1964. Graphite on paper, 14.5 x 12 cm