

Fragile Concepts, Social Horizons, Complex Calm

Jörg Johnen and Julian Heynen in Conversation

Julian Heynen Let's start in the present: what is your most recent addition to your collection?

Jörg Johnen A *Chaguar* (cactus fiber) picture by Olaf Holzapfel. I already have some works by him; he seems to open up new horizons with every new group of works. In the *Chaguar* pictures he combines abstract painting in the European manner with working practices from South America. So-called high art meets so-called arts and crafts and an ecological view of the world. In this case he has cooperated with indigenous women—weavers in northern Argentina—working with their own local materials, colors, and techniques.

Julian Heynen Your Holzapfel acquisition shows that, as collectors go, you're very much a "recidivist," that's to say, you follow the work of certain artists for years, steadily acquiring works by them. Is constancy important to you?

Jörg Johnen In most cases, yes. Artists develop as time passes. That's always fascinated me. Take Katharina Fritsch, for instance, making the move from small multiples to megasculptures like the *Rat King*. Or Thomas Ruff's many series, or Jeff Wall's abundant pictorial inventions and genres.

Julian Heynen Your interest in an artistic subject, the concept and its solution is closely connected with your aesthetic interests.

Jörg Johnen As a young man I already had the feeling I wanted to be "modern." Ulm, where I grew up, had had its famous Hochschule für Gestaltung. I learnt that avant-garde art and design had developed an entirely new aesthetic world there—lighter, brighter, minimalist, socially more liberated. In those days people took the social obligations of design very

seriously. And the first Beatles song I heard on my Braun transistor radio revealed a whole new world to me.

Julian Heynen As you gradually found your way to visual art after those youthful discoveries, you first had a brush with architecture but then embarked on a degree in art history. Were you really drawn to that by the history of art—by “old things”—or were you actually interested in contemporary art?

Jörg Johnen When I was studying architecture in Munich I met the gallerist Rüdiger Schöttle. My interest in Arnulf Rainer’s work led me to him. I found it excitingly provocative. I was intrigued by provocation in modern art. My mother, not without some reservations, helped me to buy a black overpainting by Rainer for 3,000 marks. That was in the early 1970s.

Julian Heynen The dissertation you wrote for your doctorate, complying with all the regulations, was deliberately succinct. It has a pleasing, unacademic title: *Poetische Punkte* [Poetic Dots]. The subtitle is more forthcoming: *Der Zufall als Erkenntnisprinzip im Werk von Richard Tuttle* [Chance as an Epistemological Principle in the Work of Richard Tuttle]. Why did you choose Tuttle’s work for your thesis?

Jörg Johnen In 1973 Tuttle showed a number of white paper octagons at Kunstraum München. He had stuck them straight onto the white walls of the gallery with the result that you could hardly see them. It was both very radical and very subtle. I had the good fortune that Gottfried Boehm, who shared my great admiration for Rainer Jochims, found Tuttle interesting enough to agree that I could write my thesis on his work. In it I made art-historical connections with Paul Klee and Hans Arp, with Proust and Bataille. And I didn’t hesitate to list Rosa von Praunheim in my bibliography.

Julian Heynen There’s something esoteric, in the wider sense, that shines through Tuttle’s statements, even if they are mostly general, or sometimes cryptic.

Jörg Johnen For Tuttle the direct experience of art was at the heart of everything he did. “Right in the Here and Now,” as people used to say. I assume it was the soft, feminine side of his art that spoke to me. As in Jochims’s case, too.

Julian Heynen Was the esoteric background important to you?

Jörg Johnen I never thought of joining an ashram. I put my parents through a lot, but that would surely have been too much. I contented myself with listening to Indian sitar music.

Julian Heynen You gave up a museum job in Cologne, in great frustration, within a very short space of time. It was too musty and dusty for you. Instead you spent some years as an art critic for newspapers and magazines. Until in the end you turned to gallery work, which was also connected with Rüdiger Schöttle.

Jörg Johnen Through my work as a critic and also through Rüdiger I came into contact with a lot of younger artists. I was living in Cologne and in those days the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf was a remarkable pool of creative talent. Thanks to the art market in Cologne, to Rudolf Zwirner and Michael Werner, Cologne was steadily turning into a center for contemporary art. With Munich increasingly taking a backseat, Rüdiger and I came up with the idea of opening a gallery together in Cologne: Johnen & Schöttle.

Julian Heynen At the outset you billed your gallery as a space for art and architecture. The inaugural show was a joint exhibition with works by Aldo Rossi and Thomas Schütte. And you have retained your interest in the potential interaction of art and architecture. In 2018 you published your book *Marmor für alle*, which is about selected examples of art in public spaces in Berlin. When you founded that gallery, was there a link between the ongoing debate about postmodern architecture and your choice of “art and architecture” as a remit?

Jörg Johnen Absolutely! At the time I felt that Aldo Rossi was extremely important, both as an architect and a theoretician. And there were various young artists who wanted to reintroduce art into public spaces—creating carefully considered connections with architecture.

Julian Heynen You spurred that debate on here in Germany as editor of two themed issues of *Kunstforum International*, namely *Goldener Oktober* in 1983 and *Res Publica* in 1985.

Jörg Johnen Certain Conceptual artists had already engaged with architecture and public spaces, notably Dan Graham and Gordon Matta-Clark. With the advent of New Painting, art started to be hung up above sofas again. It was easy to argue against that new “hunger for pictures.” I proposed a few more exhibitions in that vein, such as *Der versiegelte Brunnen* in Rotterdam. And we shouldn’t forget Rüdiger and his *Theatergarten Bestiarium*, which Chris Dercon promoted back then.

Julian Heynen You've been talking about the early days of your gallery solely with reference to artistic content and your own intellectual stance as a gallerist. Did you already know at that time what the business side of life as an art dealer involves?

Jörg Johnen Not really. Given that I didn't cultivate important contacts in New York, for a long time I was stuck at a German level as an art dealer. The artists and I were all just working away on a fairly modest scale. It was Katharina Fritsch who introduced American standards, following in the footsteps of Jeff Koons. I couldn't really keep up with that and we went our separate ways.

Julian Heynen Your initial path into art and your many years as a gallerist of course laid important foundations for your collecting. They still influence it today. But now let's get to the point! Can you remember your first acquisitions? How did they come about?

Jörg Johnen Collecting art was not initially that important to me. I saw it as part of a free, modern, provocative lifestyle. As I said, I'd bought a black overpainting by Arnulf Rainer from Rüdiger, because it seemed so radical. I bought a large photo-work from Günther Förg because he sorely needed the money and I liked his work anyway. For all her doubts, my mother gave me a small tin object by Tuttle when I was awarded my doctorate. That's how it started, and also how it continued for a long time. Next came works by Thomas Schütte, Jeff Wall, Thomas Ruff, and Katharina Fritsch. It was only much later that I wondered about possible connections. The program at our gallery, and at my own gallery in due course, became ever more diverse; architecture had become too narrow a topic for an art gallery. And now there were also more and more women artists—Elke Denda, Candida Höfer, Corinne Wasmuht, and Wiebke Siem, for instance, who were soon followed by Inez van Lamsweerde, Pia Stadtbäumer, and Maureen Gallace.

Julian Heynen Were there ever conflicts between Johnen the gallerist and Johnen the collector?

Jörg Johnen Those conflicts are actually one everlasting conflict that requires both compromise and extreme feats of diplomacy. I've often come to the conclusion that it's more important for a work of art to get out into the world rather than languishing in my art store.

Julian Heynen So, over the years, it's not just that your collection grew and grew, but also that the works formed something like an open web. Looking back at it now, how would you

describe the broad outlines of your collection, without having to make clear distinctions or pin things down to rigid concepts?

Jörg Johnen I'd say I've been able to accommodate contradictory positions. Sometimes I've even sought them out.

Julian Heynen Do any particularly stark contradictions spring to mind?

Jörg Johnen Maybe Dan Graham and Stephan Balkenhol.

Julian Heynen But despite the great diversity of the works, you would probably agree that, to this day, the successors to Conceptual Art form a distinct strand in your collection. Although of course the mediums and forms are very varied. And another very different strand, albeit not so numerous, could perhaps be located somewhere between monochromaticism and meditation.

Jörg Johnen Minimalism and esoterics have indeed often appeared together in my collection, for instance in Richard Tuttle's work, or in works by Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman and Rainer Jochims. The triumphal progress of Pop Art increasingly sidelined Jochims and other quieter positions. They were regarded as elitist—not in tune with the 1960s' sense of pastures new. That's why I added Jochims to my list in 2012, one of my more contrary moves as a gallerist. In my autobiography I go into some detail on Warhol and Jochims as opposite poles.

Julian Heynen Another current in your collection reflects your intense interest in aspects of the art from Central and Eastern Europe that appeared and evolved after 1989–90. You've been on research trips there, particularly in Poland and Romania. How did that come about?

Jörg Johnen It all goes back to my first encounter with colleagues from the Foksal Gallery Foundation in the year 2000; they had a stand at Art Cologne. All the works they had on display looked interesting to me, particularly the paintings by Wilhelm Sasnal. I was also impressed by the people running the gallery, such as Adam Szymczyk and Andrzej Przywara. You could tell straight away that their ambitions were about much more than just dealing in art. During the period of transformation that came after the upheavals in politics and society in Poland, Foksal Gallery had carved out a special status for itself, in both commercial and non-commercial terms. After that initial spark I then explored the broad spectrum of

contemporary art in Poland. There was a special kind of seriousness in that art scene, which attracted me.

Julian Heynen I felt the same thing in the 1990s. The Poles didn't shy away from tackling major issues in a serious, even existential manner. Given the usual Western attitudes to art from the late twentieth century, I was very struck by that and—despite a certain skepticism and surprise, for instance at the pathos I glimpsed here and there—I was drawn to their approach.

Jörg Johnen And yet the methods they used to deal with issues of that kind on an artistic level were in no sense conservative, illustrative, or simplistically narrative: they were cutting edge. Later on, in Romania, I met the writer and curator Erwin Kessler, who—very persuasively and with some raw emotion—promoted artists whose work communicated a special sense of urgency and somber meaning, especially in light of Ceausescu's dictatorship. Maybe Warhol would have gone down a similar route if his parents hadn't emigrated to the United States. Artists from the United States are very differently supported and absorbed into the art market, quite apart from the fact that they can also promote themselves, to great effect. By contrast, representing Romanian artists meant going back to basics.

Julian Heynen I see a certain affinity here with the young Italian artists that you already started to take an interest in when you were still in Cologne, artists such as Francesco Gennari, Gianni Caravaggio, and Pietro Roccasalva.

Jörg Johnen I was struck by the fact that they saw no need to speak English. A photograph by Gennari caught my attention at the Liste Art Fair Basel. It was of a snail on a small mound of whipped cream. It was very carefully composed and appeared very serious. I saw an affinity with Arte Povera. This was an artist who dared to strike a metaphysical note.

Julian Heynen I can't help but notice how often you've mentioned Jeff Wall in conversations we've had—of course without in any way diminishing the other artists in your collection. And you don't only mention his work. He seems to be an important conversation partner more generally for you.

Jörg Johnen That's right. You can tell that from the fact that I've actually given eight fat folders of correspondence between Jeff Wall and myself to ZADIK, the Central Archive for German and International Art Market Studies in Cologne. I've never had such an extensive,

intense exchange of letters and emails with any of the other artists represented in my collection. It's not only that I feel his work is so outstanding, it's also that he's a highly cultured artist and a brilliant speaker. In fact his rhetorical brilliance means one is always at risk of ending up in thrall to him.

Julian Heynen Maybe one could also consider your collection—different positions and their “spirit,” so to speak—from the point of view of the major social, political, and cultural issues of our time. Even if you didn't explicitly have that in mind, do you see any potential connections there?

Jörg Johnen Very specific references made by Tino Sehgal certainly come to mind. From the outset he engaged very intensely with economic and ecological issues and has, as far as possible, tried to lead a “net zero” life. He also attaches great importance to environmentally friendly production methods for his own works. One work of his, () *kWh*, explicitly addresses its own energy consumption. And then there are also my Romanian artists: Florin Mitroi and Stefan Bertalan. During Ceausescu's reign of terror, they both developed extremely serious psychological conditions, delusions, and severe depression. Every painting by Mitroi is an expression of hopelessness and resignation. *The Raised Hand* is the only one that has a hint of protest. Bertalan took refuge in a form of symbiosis with the botanical world. Anri Sala's film, *Intervista*, is a tremendous political statement about life under Enver Hoxha; most of his later films, both longer and shorter, also deal with political issues. And there's also Wilhelm Sasnal, whose compositions present a multifaceted account of life in Poland. Olaf Holzapfel also started to incorporate ecological ideas into his art practice early on.

Julian Heynen One might also view your collection in a very different light. I'm thinking of works that—rather than exploring and revolving around those grand ideas—allow open spaces, liberated zones, even utopias to loom into view. Rainer Jochims comes to mind, as does Prabhavathi Meppayil. Maybe there is also something similar—handled very differently—in Rodney Graham's fine-spun alternative “narratives.”

Jörg Johnen Meppayil's work could certainly serve as an example of that. Despite the difficulties she has had to face as a woman in India, she has managed to live a free and independent life and has created an impressive body of work. In her artistic production she in effect just sidelines any cultural ballast. Even though she creates works using her father's goldsmithing tools—thereby bringing a certain historical-cultural dimension into play—her

compositions still have plenty of scope for innovation. Her use of metal is very minimalist, reminiscent of Agnes Martin. And she took a hugely radical step when she decided to melt down her traditional wedding jewelry and completely recode it.

Julian Heynen Another special feature of your collection is the fact that quite a few of the sculptures are ceramics. You've been interested in ceramics—passionately, I'd say—for a long time now. Both in pots or vessels and in free forms. How did you first come into contact with this particular form of artistic expression? Was there an initial spark there, too?

Jörg Johnen As so often in life, it was fortuitous. I saw some very beautiful pots by Georges Jouve at Art Basel. He was a French star ceramicist in the 1950s and 60s. I thought his work was wonderful, but it was out of reach for me. So I did some research into what there might be in the way of comparable, mid-century ceramics in Germany. And that's how I came across Jan Bontjes van Beek. He worked from around 1930 to 1960. He made very beautiful pots, but that wasn't all, he also had an interesting history. His first wife, Olga, who was of Jewish descent, studied at the Bauhaus; one of his daughters, Cato Bontjes van Beek, was executed by the Nazis as a Resistance fighter and member of the Rote Kapelle. By contrast, Jan Bontjes van Beek's studio was placed under the protection of Joseph Goebbels, because he had already won so many prizes for his superb ceramics. Another of his daughters, Digne Meller Marcovicz, became a renowned photographer in West Germany. In the 1950s Jan Bontjes van Beek attempted to produce elegantly simple "everyman's" ceramics. However, that venture never really took off, like so many similar attempts to scale up the production of first-rate designs. While his work—always very rigorous—is certainly not as elegant as that of Georges Jouve, it is high-quality both in terms of its forms and its glazes. So the motivation behind my entry into ceramics was rooted in both aesthetics and history. With Bontjes van Beek as my point of departure, I delved ever deeper into German ceramic art, not least because it was much more affordable than American, French, and British ceramics. Those countries all have a very different tradition of ceramic art. Even quite small pieces—by Lucie Rie, for instance—can cost a good 100,000 Euros. She and Hans Coper, both of Jewish extraction, emigrated to England in the 1930s and became renowned ceramic artists in the 1960s. Once I had worked my way even further into ceramics, I came across Beate Kuhn. At that point her large pieces only cost around 3,000 Euros. Incredible, considering what a great artist she is! She cultivated her own liberated lifestyle, deliberately living on her own, fully concentrated on her work. And she became very successful. I discovered more and more good German ceramic artists who had no connection with the art world. As a collector, I saw bridging that divide as an excellent

opportunity. I also liked the fact that there was a certain modesty in the ceramics scene, whereas megalomania has long been the *modus vivendi* for many in the art world.

Julian Heynen Over the last few years certain art galleries and art museums have increasingly been including ceramics in what they do. Do you see that as a chance for ceramics to receive greater recognition and that maybe there might be some cross pollination?

Jörg Johnen I think it's more to do with the time we live in. As I see it, contemporary art is in a major crisis. And that seems to be a chance to experiment with what used to be called "arts and crafts." For years now Thomas Schütte, for one, and Rosemarie Trockel, for another, have worked successfully with ceramics and have made good use of its particular qualities: for instance, abandoning perfection and instead, adding an extra emotional charge by adopting a spontaneous, gestural approach. And the material itself, clay, is there for anyone to use. It's inexpensive and easy to work.

Julian Heynen Let's take a leap back into your own life, now. Around two years ago you published an autobiography called *Warhol und das schreckliche Kind* [Warhol and the Dreadful Child]. It's filled with stories, encounters, details, and opinions from both your private life and your professional experience. If one were to attempt to define the arc of your narrative, the underlying theme, one might describe it, without exaggeration, as "liberation through art" or "finding one's identity through art." And that brings me to a matter that barely ever arises in your collection but that's in full view in your book: the relationship between homosexuality or—let's open it up somewhat—queerness and art. In what way do they connect, as you see it?

Jörg Johnen Thank goodness we now have the much nicer word "queer." For whatever reason, I've hardly met any queer artists. My network was almost entirely straight. For a long time I didn't even know that Warhol was gay. My own queerness as a person and in the way I live was perhaps more evident in the fact that from the outset I collected a lot of work by women artists—at least twenty, if I remember rightly. Success came very quickly for Katharina Fritsch and Candida Höfer; it took a little longer for Karin Kneffel, Corinne Wasmuht, and Candice Breitz. Here in Germany I couldn't do much for my women artists based in the United States, such as Sue Williams, Karen Killimnik, and Maureen Gallace. In my collection I've created focal points around both Maria Bartusová and Beate Kuhn. Sadly I only have one work by Prabhavathi Meppayil: there was such demand from collectors that I had to sell almost everything I had of hers, to keep out of trouble. When collectors don't get what they want—

that's a whole chapter of its own.

Julian Heynen Would you say that, as a queer person, you have a slightly different sensibility (difficult to define) that means you react in a particular way to certain works of art?

Jörg Johnen This is a very murky area. I was never sporty and preferred reading books by women, such as Gisela Elsner and Gabriele Wohmann, maybe that was queer. And I was a loner. Looking back I could maybe say that I really had no interest in building up a power base. You can maybe see that in my collection. It's almost entirely bereft of big-budget potboilers. Simply filling space was anathema to me. My therapist once described me as a "fine weave." Which also explains my affinity with Richard Tuttle. Most of his works are small, fragile, and very feminine. Most of Maria Bartuszo's works are made from the thinnest possible plaster and as light as a feather. Maybe there is a certain fragility and delicacy in my collection. Jeff Wall's works are also very finely woven in terms of their composition, emotions, and subject matter—regardless of their physical size and weight.

Julian Heynen Would you say your collection is more an expression of your persona or an expression (of a certain aspect) of contemporary art, that's to say, the time we live in?

Jörg Johnen Both, actually.

Julian Heynen You have been intensely engaged with contemporary art and have helped to shape it over many years, a good four decades. Hence my question: has your relationship to it changed?

Jörg Johnen Art has naturally changed a great deal. Much of what I feel should have still been of significance for many years to come has been relegated to the bench and is waiting to rejoin the fray. But of course, it shouldn't be forgotten that Vermeer sank into oblivion for centuries. Clearly everything is becoming more widely available today. What was once high-end art is now being recycled and made universally accessible, enriched with topical subjects and considerably more diverse protagonists than in the past. I note with some satisfaction that in both the United States and Germany Beate Kuhn is increasingly gaining recognition as a ceramic artist. Unthinkable, not so long ago.

Julian Heynen In the forty years spanning the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries there have clearly been stark, radical changes in art—in terms of subject matter, economics, social issues. Obviously the focus is no longer on Western art but on art as a global phenomenon, and that is a huge challenge. In that sense the most recent documenta, for all its failings, was a good training camp. And the champions of “useful art” are demanding “art as activism and activism as art” (Tania Bruguera)—to mention just two aspects of those changes. Even if the “business-as-usual” of ingrained ideas and art practices still continues unabated alongside those new developments, are you unsettled by those changes? Or do you see favorable possibilities or at least an extremely interesting time for people who really care about art?

Jörg Johnen (*Pause*) I have to confess that I didn’t attend the most recent documenta. In general I go to see less than I used to. I view the current painting overkill with a generous dose of skepticism. Everywhere you turn there’s rampant sideshow Surrealism aiming at a quick impact and quick sales. That’s not my thing. Jeff Wall is still producing stunning pictures with meaningful content; Jochims is still hewing stone day after day and practicing humility, and the latter is also true of Prabhavathi—sinking copper wires into gesso and then polishing the surface with endless patience until the wires reappear. Wade Guyton has developed his own “painting without paint,” thereby opening up many new possibilities for painting. And just last year at the Venice Biennale, where Katharina Fritsch showed the green *Elephant* she made in 1987, she was awarded a Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement.

Julian Heynen So, despite all your skepticism, you’re not just dismissing today’s art or suggesting it has nothing to do with you any more. In your autobiography you also reflect on your decades in art in a critical, constructive way. So you chose the right path for you.

Jörg Johnen Absolutely! And I’ve been lucky enough to have lived through a unique, fortunate era. There were so unbelievably many great artists between the 1960s and the 2000s. There was Warhol’s singular contribution to diversity and emancipation for queer people; Joseph Beuys’s clear-out of postwar stuffiness; Eva Hesse’s magnificent feminine appropriation of Minimal Art; Louise Bourgeois and the discovery of female themes. I don’t see anything comparable today, if I’m honest. Although there are some important things, some appealing ones, small steps and developments.

Julian Heynen You've always engaged with art in a whole variety of ways: you've looked at it, you've constantly been in dialog with artists and others in this field, you've exhibited art, you've dealt in art, and you're still writing about art. So what is the extra component, the added value if you like, in also acquiring and owning art?

Jörg Johnen For as long as cave art has existed, people seem to have felt the need to surround themselves with art. It probably has something to do with assuring oneself—on a sensory level—of one's own culture, taking pleasure in it, and also presenting and representing oneself. That sense of self-assurance can be achieved through language, music, apparel, or visual art. Since the 1960s there have been attempts to use prints and multiples as a democratic solution to people's aspirations to collecting and ownership. A lot of things can come together in art: status, joy, decoration, self-expression, the desire for freedom, eroticism, political and social statements, religion and metaphysics, fury, and much more. If the world isn't the way someone wants it to be, art can sublimate it or can be used as propaganda. It was not for nothing that Tino Sehgal called one of his works *This is propaganda*.

Julian Heynen You're now gifting a considerable portion of your collection to the Lenbachhaus in Munich. At this particular juncture, would you say your collection is complete?

Jörg Johnen Basically, yes. Every so often I acquire something more by Beate Kuhn, because she has such a wealth of enticing ideas. It's the same with Johannes Nagel. And as to Mario Garcia Torres, I'm just fascinated by the variety of the stories, the techniques, and the social contexts of his works. And the results of his research tie in aesthetically with Conceptual Art.

Julian Heynen Giving works from your collection to a public collection, as you are—do you feel a sense of obligation, because art—by definition—should be experienced by as many people as possible? And/or are you hoping that these items will last well, that they will be as valuable to posterity as they are to you now?

Jörg Johnen It's important to me that these works of art are stored, looked after, and cared for by professionals, so that they can be brought out and shown again whenever the occasion arises. In that sense I feel both: an obligation to the works and the hope that they will continue to make an impact on viewers.

Julian Heynen How did you select works from your collection for the Lenbachhaus? Your gift comprises around fifty works by around twenty-five artists.

Jörg Johnen I approached the Lenbachhaus with some proposals, such as works by Rainer Jochims and Beate Kuhn, for instance, but we made the final selection together. Unlike many other art professionals, Matthias Mühling and Eva Huttenlauch had no hesitation at all when it came to these more out-of-the-ordinary artists. And I immediately felt their appreciation of their qualities was genuine. So there was no shady cherry-picking. That made up my mind to work with this particular art museum. And that became the basis for the wider selection process. We had two main aims: to address gaps in the Lenbachhaus collection and to identify which of my works would best enhance it. In some cases existing concepts could be rounded out; in others new perspectives could be opened up, for instance by painters from Poland and Romania or by Wiebke Siem or by a moving-image artist such as Anri Sala. It was perhaps also a help that I didn't turn up at the door with huge packing cases in tow.

Julian Heynen Your donation of works from your collection to the Lenbachhaus is being marked in an unusual way—which I feel is also typical for you. There's not a special exhibition devoted to these works nor has a "wing" been cleared to accommodate them. Instead they form the basis of a substantial new presentation of the Lenbachhaus collection that has been curated with your active participation. Were there any aspects of this presentation that were particularly important to you? Did you find that jointly curating the exhibition with the museum staff opened up new perspectives on "your" works?

Jörg Johnen This venture with the existing museum collection has created an opportunity for "my" works to be seen in completely new contexts: immensely delicate sculptures by Bartuszová in the company of works by Senga Nengudi, for instance, and semi-figurative, erotic objects by Nengudi interacting with objects by Wiebke Siem, or Peter Welz's semi-documentary, semi-formal portrait of AA Bronson rubbing shoulders with semi-formal, semi-political works by General Idea. No doubt many other interesting connections will emerge as people make their way through the exhibition. And maybe some visitors will find they already connect on a subconscious level with Katharina Fritsch's pitch black *Cat* or her bright yellow *Madonna*.

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Translated from the German by Fiona Elliott

Jörg Johnen is an art collector and former gallery owner. In 2023, he donated large parts of his collection to the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus and Kunstbau München.

Julian Heynen is a curator and author living in Berlin. He was exhibition director at Museum Haus Lange, Museum Haus Esters, Kaiser Wilhelm Museum Krefeld and from 2001 artistic director of the K21 Kunstsammlung Düsseldorf. From 2009 to 2016, he directed the Kunstsammlung NRW. In 2003 and 2005 Heynen was commissioner of the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

This conversation will be included in the publication that will be issued to accompany this exhibition; the provisional date of publication is late 2023 or early 2024.