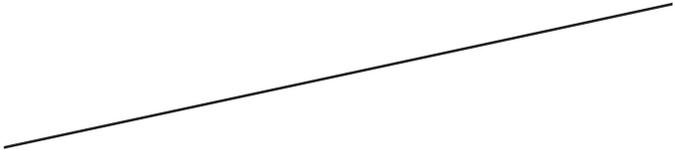


**KUNSTMUSEUM
THUN**



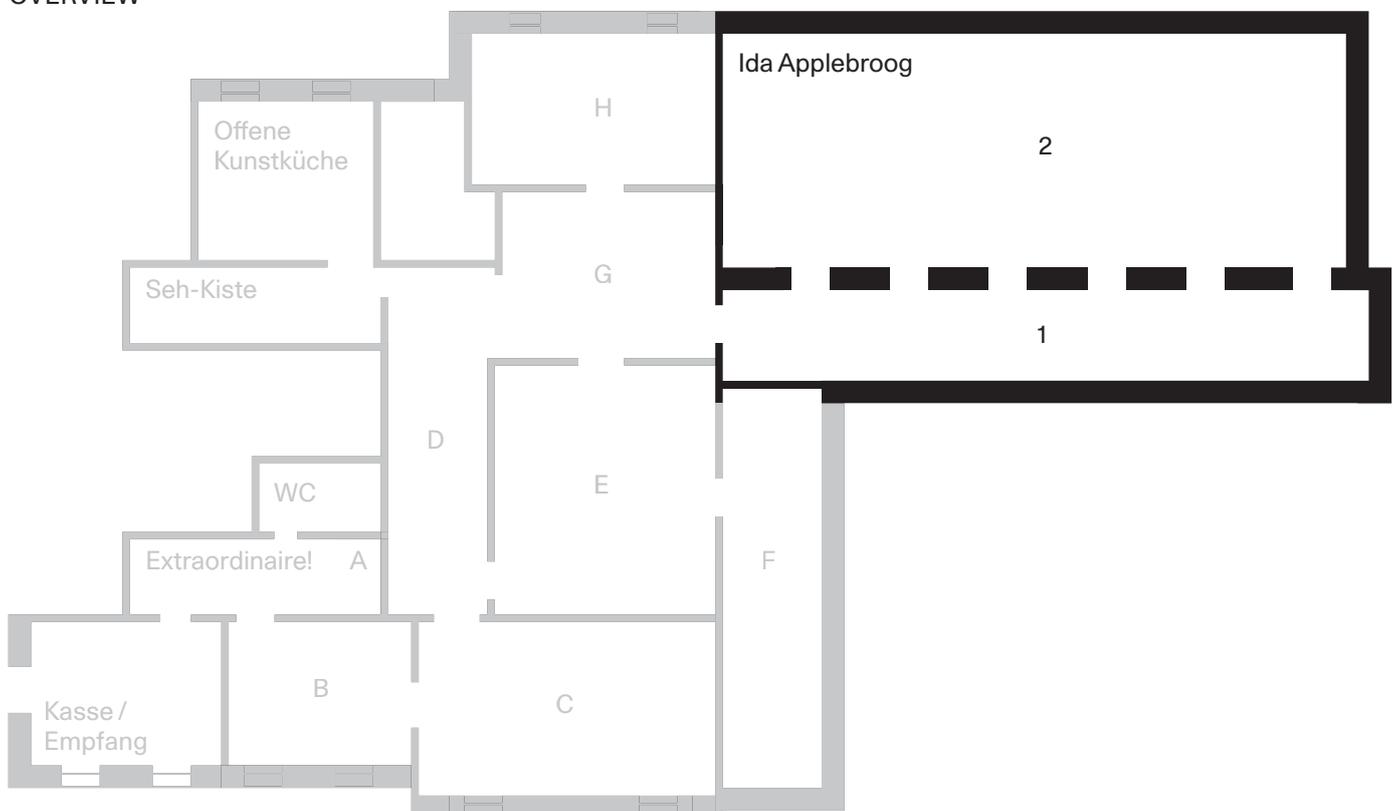
**IDA APPLEBROOG
9/2 – 19/5/2019**

ENGLISH

INTRODUCTION

A sketchbook rediscovered in an attic and angry, furious birds are the starting point for the exhibition *Ida Applebroog*. The Kunstmuseum Thun dedicates the first institutional solo exhibition in Switzerland to the American artist Ida Applebroog (*1929 in New York), organised in close collaboration with the artist and her studio. On the one hand, the work series *Mercy Hospital* (1969) can be seen. These are drawings which have been compiled in a sketchbook that she made during her stay at a psychiatric clinic during 1969–70. On the other hand, for the first time images and objects of the new work series *Angry Birds of America* (2018) are shown, which contain a brand new, top political component.

OVERVIEW



BIOGRAPHY

Ida Applebroog (*1929) is a painter and sculptor. Born in Bronx, New York, she studied at the NY State Institute of Applied Arts and Sciences (1948–50). In 1956 she moved to Chicago, where she attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (1965–68). She then lived in San Diego, California, became the mother of four children and was unsuccessful as an artist. In 1969 she admitted herself to a psychiatric hospital in San Diego, which changed everything. In tune with her independent spirit, Applebroog, whose actual name was Horowitz and maiden name Applebaum, reinvented her last name in the hospital. Instead of going for therapy, she decided to make drawings. After her time in the clinic, she studied at the University of California in San Diego in 1973 before returning to New York, where she was able to gain a foothold in the art scene. She began publishing books in 1977 and joined *Heresies*, a feminist newspaper on art and politics. From the point of view of a feminist artist, Applebroog explores issues such as violence and power, gender politics, sexual identity and domestic space, political and personal power struggles or the desensitisation to violence and the role of the media in that. She is further known for her sculptures, artist books and video works.

“It’s hard to say what your work is about,” she says, “but for me, it’s about how power works: male over female, parents over children, governments over people, doctors over patients.”¹ Her work skews ordinary images into anxious scenarios infused with irony and black humour.

Applebroog’s works have been shown in solo exhibitions in museums and galleries in the US and other countries, among others at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami FL (2016), Musée d’Art Contemporain du Val-de-Marne, Vitry-sur-Seine, France (2014), Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. (1998), the Brooklyn Museum, New York NY (1994, 1983), High Museum of Art, Atlanta GA (1989), Whitney Museum of American Art, New York NY (1978). She participated in numerous group exhibitions, for example at the documenta 8 in 1987 and at the documenta 13 in 2012 in Kassel, Germany.

Her work can be found in permanent collections of well-known museums, including the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York NY, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York NY, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York NY and the Museum of Modern Art, New York NY.

Applebroog has received numerous awards and accolades for her art, among others the Anonymous Was a Woman Award (2009), the Lifetime Achievement Award, Women’s Caucus for Art (2008), the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Achievement Award (1998) and the Lifetime Achievement Award, College Art Association (1995).

Today Ida Applebroog lives and works in New York.

1 MERCY HOSPITAL (1969)

The work series *Mercy Hospital* (1969) consists of a sketchbook with 109 drawings, which Ida Applebroog created during her stay in a psychiatric clinic, in 1969-70. Years later, in 2009, they were accidentally rediscovered in her attic by an assistant. The featured selection of images from the forgotten sketchbook gives an intimate insight into Applebroog’s struggle with depression during her six-week stay at the Mercy Hospital clinic in San Diego. They were created in a phase of intense introspection. Detached from the world, hardly able to speak, she began to draw, thus returning to herself and thereby back to life. She created works in graphite, ink and watercolour. The drawings oscillate between figurative and abstract representations, show partially self-contained human forms and body parts, contain text passages, and are simultaneously oppressive and inspiring. The work series not only serves as a proof of the visual implementation of psychic crisis situations, but also shows how moments of collapse change into a creative “breakthrough”. The works were shown for the first time in 2016 at the “Institute of Contemporary Art” in Miami. Their rediscovery was a shock to the artist. Applebroog did not recognise himself in the drawings, although they were influential in her further artistic development. She does not want to talk about the sketchbook, but also says, “I admire the person who created this.”²

Applebroog’s work *Mercy Hospital* also questions the significance of the biographical in art and, moreover, highlights the fact that a crisis can often also play a part in the production of works.

2 ANGRY BIRDS OF AMERICA (2018)

The images and sculptures of the work series *Angry Birds of America* (2018) carry a highly current political component. Ida Applebroog loves birds and is interested in ornithology. However, she is no longer able to paint birds in the wild because of mobility issues. Applebroog is in a wheelchair. She was inspired by the illustrated book *The Birds of America* by James La Forest Audubon, (1785, in Les Cayes, Haiti - 1851, in New York). *The Birds of America* was published between 1827 and 1838 in four large (98.5 x 66 cm) volumes with 435 hand-coloured plates. The birds are life-size, so that smaller species seem to fly around comfortably, while the larger ones bend their necks and wings carefully to fit the book pages. Of the 200 printed books, 120 officially exist at present. Today, the book is among the most expensive books ever sold.

The large-format works shown here are illustrations from various ornithology books that Applebroog enlarged, either printed on linen with ultra chrome ink and treated with oil paint or on polyethylene film and then the still damp paint partly mixed with colourless acrylic gel, or worked on only with a brush and hands. The drying of the images printed on polyethylene film took about one month. During this time, they lay around openly and show traces of Applebroog’s studio, i.e. (brushes) hair and dust.

1 <https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s3/ida-applebroog-in-power-segment/>

2 <https://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/ida-applebroog-ica-miami>

In addition, Applebroog bought preserved birds at auctions that nobody really wanted, as they are a bit appalling. Applebroog created birds from plaster, displaying them with identification plates as exhibited in a natural history museum. She calls her works "Angry Birds of America". She couldn't get this title out of her head. Then she realised that she was in the middle of the Trump era. Her emotions were coupled with angry, enraged, dead birds, no matter what she did. Applebroog felt as if she lived in a world where we are all angry, enraged, and even crazy. "The birds will kick this president out of office and bring to light all the terrible things of the past."³ Applebroog would like to let this happen, but doubts that she will live to see it.

The *White Birds* on the veranda represent birds full of life. They fly in a swarm through the air and carry hope into the world. "The birds are white, they are flying. There is hope."⁴

Please, also visit the exhibitions *Extraordinary! Unknown works from psychiatric institutions in Switzerland around 1900* and the project room enter with works from the *Open Art Kitchen*.

3 Ida Applebroog, November 2018.

4 Ida Applebroog, February 2019.



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Tuesday to Sunday 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Wednesday 10 a.m. – 7 p.m., Monday closed