

Emmy Hennings (1885–1948) was co-founder of the artists' bar with Hugo Ball, and probably the most present figure at Cabaret Voltaire. The fact that she received little attention as a writer and artist may be due to various reasons. Perhaps it was the distinct language, or the general uneasiness at dealing with her Catholicism; whatever it was, her trace is missing in the male-dominated Dada historicisation. Only recently has Hennings received recognition, and indeed beyond the role of cabaret star. Whoever reads her novels, poems, and reviews will encounter a woman for whom writing was a survival strategy. She astutely analyses her existence and stages herself as a «multiple». The aim of this exhibition is to examine her oeuvre seriously and to promote the opinion that there is continuity within it. For example, ecstasy and faith lie close together, and the themes of captivity and freedom run throughout her work. Motifs like the rose are recurring. For the first time, stained glass from the last years of her life can be viewed in an exhibition. In the past, little claim to art was attributed to them.

At Cabaret Voltaire, Hennings' writings and paintings enter into an associative dialogue with the works of Sitara Abuzar Ghaznawi (\*1995). The young artist stages Hennings' literary and artistic works in showcases that can also be understood as sculptures. The exhibition display as a place of encounter and a focal point of standardised ideas is part of her artistic questioning. Ghaznawi focuses her attention on power structures, possibilities of participation, forms of aesthetics, craft and knowledge. She questions her environment from a position between autonomy and dependence, the private and public spheres, collectivity and individuality. Characteristic of her formal language is the self-made and the use of everyday, often worthless, materials. The works appear fragile and poetic, a characteristic she shares, amongst other things, with Hennings. Thus, repetitive subjects such as specific flowers, materials and patterns are also present in her work. They result from her engagement with socialized taste and circulating motifs.

Room plan and details of the works can be found on page 3–4. Please also note the update (\*) on page 4 concerning the handling of the originals/facsimiles for the reopening on 8 June 2020.

Short tour of the exhibition on request: [info@cabaretvoltaire.ch](mailto:info@cabaretvoltaire.ch)

Due to the current situation the opening hours will be adjusted continuously: [www.cabaretvoltaire.ch](http://www.cabaretvoltaire.ch)

Cabaret Voltaire	Exhibitions	Dada Library	Tuesday Soirées
Spiegelgasse 1	Mon, Wed, Thu, Fri: 10:00–18:00	Mon, Wed, Thu, Fri: 10:00–18:00	Bar / Café
8001 Zurich	Tue: 10:00–20:00	Tue: 10:00–20:00	weekly: 20:00
<a href="http://cabaretvoltaire.ch">cabaretvoltaire.ch</a>	Sat/Sun: 11:30–18:00	Sat/Sun: 11:30–18:00	Mon–Thu: 17:30–24:00
<a href="mailto:info@cabaretvoltaire.ch">info@cabaretvoltaire.ch</a>			Fri–Sat: 11:30–02:00
			Sun: 11:30–23:00

Sitara Abuzar Ghaznawi's sculptural series refers to traditional modes of presentation, questioning value attributions, where things and people are subject to temporal and spatial categorizations. Showcases promise transparency, but comprise a system of specific, superimposed and at the same time opaque notions of interpretation and preservation. They direct perception to artefacts, and ascribe auras to individual objects, thus marking them as privileged symbols of a certain time. Meaning is generated largely through contextualization and the act of showing.

What happens when a protagonist of recent contemporary art gives space to historical objects but also takes up a position? To what extent are works placed in the birthplace of anti-art, within the opinion that Dada negated bourgeois and Eurocentric ideas of the time while also partially reproducing them? How does one stage a woman who was repeatedly relegated to the margins of society and history, whose face and life story are equally subject to voyeurism?

Sitara Abuzar Ghaznawi chose exhibits with which she questions norms. The different display hoods stand on fragile feet, appearing animal-like, then again classic, delicate, and massive at the same time. As a basis for Hennings' legacy, she chose fabrics that follow different material rhetoric: Depending on the context, lacquer can appear noble, festive, cheap, or kitschy. As a common (BDSM) fetish material, the texture also comments on the desire for historically charged objects, and perhaps also the compulsion to seek out a relevant past without asking who is entitled to that past. The metal sculptures that protrude into the room like flagpoles continue this thread. Accompanying the exhibition, they allow associations with power, freedom, or oppression, stimulated by the airy textiles and the whip-like device.

Well-protected in the table showcases are both original and facsimile exhibits from the Swiss Literary Archives. Between them are flowers, a motif that appears again and again in Ghaznawi's work—in this show also on the self-designed textiles in the wall showcases. The artist is interested in symbols and patterns which she recycles herself and feeds into her environment and the art world as circulating aesthetic communication—like letters in verbal language. Thus, not only the motifs but also the author find a place in the artistic distribution logic. The origin of the patterns or subjects often remains unexplained, and their meaning varies depending on the milieu or cultural area. Because aesthetics is not only personal but also social and always political.

When we think of flowers in display cases, and the transfer of meaning and belonging, reference can also be made to the *Wardian Case*. In these mini-greenhouses, designed by Nathaniel Ward in the 1830s, plants from colonized countries were imported into Europe. Today, the showcase is considered an instrument of colonial micro-politics, and raises questions about global circulation and violence in seemingly insignificant processes. In this light, Hennings' view from her Catholic, Western perspective also becomes a blind spot. Equally, this form of exhibition brings her out of the periphery into the field of vision.

## Emmy Hennings

The display cases contain writings, documents, and works of art by Emmy Hennings. Emma Maria Cordsen, born in Flensburg in 1885, escaped the narrow confines of the city near Denmark early on. From 1905 onwards, she toured Germany in traveling theatres, for a short time with her first husband, the typesetter Joseph Paul Hennings, performed in European cabarets, and experienced drug addiction, poverty, prostitution and prison. The hypocrisy of the middle class—the street seemed more honest to her—horrified her. In Munich and Berlin, she met bohemian types who fascinated her, such as artists from the Expressionist circle. In 1914, working as a freelancer for the magazine *Simplicissimus*, she met her husband-to-be Hugo Ball. They travelled together to Switzerland in 1915, and on February 5, 1916, they founded the Cabaret Voltaire at its current address. In 1917 they opened the Dada Gallery in the Sprüngli House on Bahnhofst-

rasse; later that year, they moved to Ascona in Ticino; Ball died there in 1927 and Emmy Ball-Hennings in 1948. During her lifetime, she also worked in Bern, Cologne, Budapest, Paris, and Rome.

The fascination with Emmy Hennings' unusual life runs through the history of her reception. She is portrayed as a muse, writer, lover, disease, actress, and singer, but she was also the mother of two children, Joseph Ernst Ferdinand Hennings (died in 1905) and Annemarie Schütt-Hennings, who moved to Zurich in 1916 to be with her mother. At the beginning of the 20th century, Hennings got a certain amount of attention, and among her acquaintances were greats like Walter Benjamin and Hermann Hesse. Then she disappeared to a large extent as a single player in the writing of history. It is only in more recent times that she has received attention again—thanks to the efforts of Hennings biographer Bärbel Reetz and the Swiss Literary Archives, among others.

Emmy Hennings did not write any «Lautgedichte» (sound poems), nor did she sign any of the manifestos. «Dada—the word comes from me,» she nonetheless explains in *Rebels and Confessors* (1929), but immediately adds that she had no desire to join a less than halfway art movement as a serving member. And yet Hennings was Dada. Dada was understood as a unifying stage in the Cabaret Voltaire, Dada as an attempt to find a language in the horrors of the First World War, Dada as a possibility to understand language as an art material, Dada as a «Gesamtkunstwerk» (total work of art), Dada as interdisciplinary and experimental work, Dada as a confrontation with one's own time, its rules, its means of expression, and the field of tension between individual and collective.

#### Glossary of the individual exhibits

#### A

Sitara Abuzar Ghaznawi, *Showcase (Pure White 2)*, 2020  
steel, lacquer, plexiglass, plastic  
flowers, MDF panel

1

*Emmy Hennings, flower picture, 1930–1940 (original\*)*  
This collage was created between 1930 and 1940 in Ticino.

2

*Emmy Hennings, stained glass: Two bouquets, Madonna and Child (originals, both created shortly before her death in 1948\*\*)*  
Hennings was inspired by her daughter Annemarie, who as a visual artist made tapestries, and produced stained glass and the flower collage, among other things. The paintings shown here for the first time were created shortly before her death in 1948, and the Madonna painting is based on the Mother of God of Kazan. A picture of this icon hung in Hennings' apartment in Magliaso.

3

*Emmy Hennings in an armchair, photograph, 1946 (original\*)*  
Emmy Hennings sits in the armchair with her head held high and a book. The Second World War was not long over, and she tried to get her daughter and grandson to enter Switzerland from Germany. In the years before that, she published, for example, *Das flüchtige Spiel. Wege und Umwege einer Frau* 1940 at Benziger-Verlag or 1945 *Das irdische Paradies und andere Legenden* at Stocker-Verlag in Lucerne. But the money as a writer and journalist was not enough. In 1946, she also worked in the tobacco factory and as a broom-maker. Two years later, on 10 August 1948, she died in Soregno near Lugano.

#### B

Sitara Abuzar Ghaznawi, *Showcase (Pure White 1)*, 2020  
steel, lacquer, plexiglass, plastic  
flowers, MDF panel

4

*Emmy Hennings in the hospital room, photograph, 1927 (original\*)*  
The photo was taken in the summer of 1927 when Hugo Ball was in the Zurich Red Cross Hospital and had a stomach cancer removed. Ball died of this condition on 14 September 1927. In addition to Hennings, Hermann Hesse visited him almost daily at his bedside.

5

*Emmy Hennings dressed up with daughter Annemarie, photograph, 1930–1940 (original\*)*  
This photo, which cannot be dated exactly, was taken sometime between 1930 and 1940 and shows Emmy Hennings kneeling in front of the damsel, who is Annemarie Schütt-Hennings, Emmy Hennings' daughter.

6

*Emmy Hennings in the Ensemble Marcelli, photograph, 1915 (original\*)*  
In this group photo Emmy Hennings can be seen in the front left corner. Before her time at Cabaret Voltaire, she was a member of the Marcelli ensemble, which performed at Cabaret Hirschen in Zurich.

7

*Cabaret Unity Contract for Emmy Hennings, document, 1912 (original\*)*  
The contract was issued on 10.11.1912. Hennings was engaged as «female humourist called Kobold» in Bromberg. The fee was 100 Marks. During this time she struggled with morphine and branch addiction. Her first published poem *Ether* appears in *Die Aktion*.

#### C

Sitara Abuzar Ghaznawi, *Showcase (Traffic Red)*, 2020  
steel, lacquer, plexiglass, plastic  
flowers, MDF panel

8

*Emmy Hennings, Das Brandmal. Ein Tagebuch, first edition of the novel, 1920 (original\*\*)*  
Hennings gave her novel the subtitle «a diary», the protagonist is not Emmy, but Dagny. The descriptions can be read as partially fictionalized episodes of her life. It is probably Hennings most famous writing.

9

*Emmy Hennings sitting at a table in Agnuzzo, photography, ca. 1917/1918 (original)*  
The photography was created shortly after the move to Ticino. They lived in Agnuzzo on the bay of Agno of Lake Lugano at Piazzetta Roncorino.

10

*Emmy Hennings portrayed by Hans Holdt, Photography, 1921–1922 (original\*)*  
The German photographer Hans Holdt photographed Hennings around 1921 in Munich.

11

*Emmy Hennings, Von Gärten und Frauen in Sizilien, 1952 (original\*\*)*  
The travelogue was published posthumously in 1952 in the *Schweizer Rundschau*, Vol. 51, Issue 11/12 on pages 726–727.

12

*Emmy Hennings, Die letzte Freude, 1913 (original\*\*)*  
*Die letzte Freude* was Henning's first own book of poems. Poems in it are, for example, *Ätherstrophe*, *Ein Traum*, *Hypnose*, *Im Krankenhaus* and *Bei mir zu Hause*.

13

*Emmy Hennings, enumeration of recommended German newspapers, document, 1938 (original\*\*)*

The organisation paper, dated 18.10.1938, almost a year before the outbreak of the Second World War, shows how professionally and carefully Emmy Hennings organised her writing. It contains «commendable German sheets» for sending out reading samples of her writing *Blume und Flamme*. Hennings' relationship with Germany was difficult at that time. In 1933, she made some efforts to obtain the release of Erich Mühsam in Oranienburg, and even travelled to Berlin in 1934 in the hope of being able to visit him. Mühsam was murdered by the SS in 1934.

14

*Mechthild von Magdeburg, Deutsche Mystiker: Band II:—«Das fließende Licht der Gottheit», 1911 (original\*\*)*  
The *Flowing Light of the Divinity* by the mystic Mechthild von Magdeburg (1207–1282) is the earliest surviving document of female mysticism in the German language. The book comes from Emmy Hennings' private library.

#### D

Sitara Abuzar Ghaznawi, *Showcase (Deep Black)*, 2020  
steel, lacquer, plexiglass, plastic  
flowers, MDF panel

15

*Emmy Hennings, «Little Variety Theatre», in: Die Schaubühne, 1915 (re-print)*  
Hennings wrote this text shortly after arriving in Zurich and describes a scene on the Limmatquai.

16

*Emmy Hennings, letter to Hugo Ball, 1916 (original\*)*  
Hennings tells Ball that she hired a temp for the dressing room at Cabaret Voltaire because Lilly's friend is not coming to the party. (Source: Schweizerisches Literaturarchiv).

17  
*Cabaret Voltaire booklet, illustration with dolls by Hennings on page 20, 1916 (original\*)*  
 This booklet is the first publication of the Dadaists, which was produced at the end of May 1916 on the occasion of a soirée. As a collection of artistic and literary contributions, it documents the activities in the early phase of Cabaret Voltaire. The word Dada appears in this issue for the first time in printed form.

E  
 Sitara Abuzar Ghaznawi,  
*Sculpture 2*, 2020  
 steel, fabric, chains

F  
 Sitara Abuzar Ghaznawi,  
*Showcase (Flower 2)*, 2020  
 Laser print on cotton, plexiglass, steel

18  
*Emmy Hennings, postcard to Hugo Ball, 1914 (facsimile)*  
 First card received from Emmy Hennings to Hugo Ball, written from prison. The postcard shows a sample drawing by Engert from *The New Art*. Hennings thanks Hugo Ball for the visit, that he would have given her hope. She writes that she will have a lot to tell when she gets out of prison, doesn't know what she looks like anymore and is reflected in the soup. She would have liked to be closer to Ball, but not possible through the bars. She is looking forward to freedom. (Source: Schweizerisches Literaturarchiv).

19  
*Emmy Hennings with pageboy cut and scarf, photograph, 1912/1913 (facsimile)*  
 The picture was taken in 1912/1913, probably in Munich. There she worked, among other places, in the Linden Cabaret and the Beer Cabaret, where she performed as

a futuristic Danish woman. But she also had engagements in Bromberg (see cabaret contract) and in the Apollo Theater in Katowice.

20  
*Emmy Hennings, Gefängnis I, Text, 1914/1915 (facsimile)*  
 Hennings was imprisoned three times between 1914 and 1915: for an alleged theft during sexual intercourse or for suspected aiding and abetting the forgery of the passport of Margot Jung, wife of the anarchist writer Franz Jung. Hennings' literary adaptations were already published in 1915 in the magazines *Die Aktion* and *Revoluzzer*. Topics such as justice, guilt, innocence and jurisdiction remained relevant for her. She also recited her prison texts in Zurich on 14 July 1916 in the Zunfthaus zur Waag.

21  
*Police Report of the Zurich City Police, 2 July 1919 (facsimile)*  
 From the file: Surveys on Bolshevik activities of the Dadaist group in Zurich.

G  
 Sitara Abuzar Ghaznawi,  
*Showcase (Flower 1)*, 2020  
 Laser print on cotton, plexiglass, steel

22  
*Emmy Hennings, Verse und Prosa, 1917 (facsimile)*  
 Emmy Hennings completed the manuscript of verses and prose in Ascona. Poems from the manuscript include *Mädchen am Kai*, *Morfin* or *Meine kostenlose Blumen*.

23  
*Emmy Hennings, «Macht», in: Zurich Post and Commercial Newspaper, 1917 (facsimile)*  
 The text appeared in the evening edition of the Züricher Post- und

Handelszeitung on 24 December 1917.

24  
*Emmy Hennings, Rebellen und Bekenner, 1929 (facsimile)*  
 After the death of Hugo Ball in 1927, Emmy Hennings published three biographical writings on his life. *Rebellen und Bekenner* (ca. 1929) fits into this autobiographical tradition. In it she describes, among other things, her time in Zurich and Bern. The typescript was first published in 1984 in the Hugo Ball Almanac, which is still published annually in Pirmasens.

H  
 Sitara Abuzar Ghaznawi,  
*Showcase (Flower 3)*, 2020  
 Laser print on cotton, plexiglass, steel

25  
*Emmy Hennings with Dada doll, photograph, 1916 (facsimile)*  
 Emmy Hennings made dolls like the one in the picture at Cabaret Voltaire. Unfortunately, none of them are still in existence.

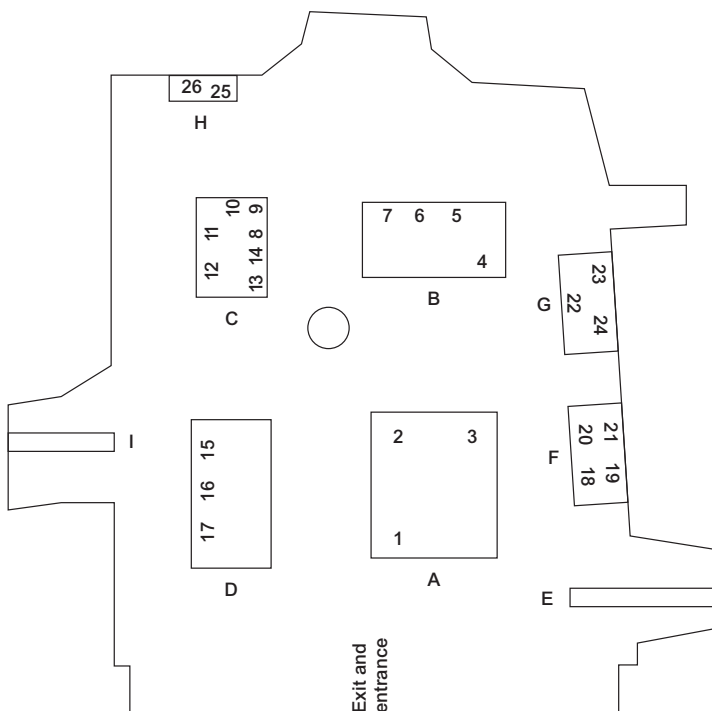
26  
*Emmy Hennings, The Mystic Rose, 1940 (facsimile)*  
 This collection of typescripts from 1940 was compiled by Hennings for publication, but remained unpublished. In 1911 Emmy Hennings converted to Catholicism in Munich after a life-threatening typhoid fever and from then on collected images of saints. In Christianity, the rose stands for purity and innocence, the red rose—the Mary's flower—is understood as Our Lady's share in Christ's suffering.

I  
 Sitara Abuzar Ghaznawi,  
*Sculpture 1*, 2020  
 steel, fabric, chains

The information on Hennings was obtained from the Swiss Literary Archives (Especially Lucas Gisi), writings by Bärbel Reetz (biographer) and Christa Baumberger, among others.

Emmy Hennings, who was born 1885 in Flensburg/D and died 1948 in Soregno near Lugano, was a writer, actress, cabaret artist and co-founder of the Cabaret Voltaire and the Dada Gallery. During her lifetime, the following writings were published among others: *Die letzte Freude* (1913), *Gefängnis* (1919), *Das Brandmal. Ein Tagebuch*, (1920), *Helle Nacht* (1922), *Die Geburt Jesu* (1932), *Der Kranz* (1939). But she also wrote for magazines and newspapers (including *Revoluzzer*) and painted.

Sitara Abuzar Ghaznawi, born 1995 in Ghazni/Afghanistan, lives and works in Obwalden and Zurich. In 2019 she received her Bachelor at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences of Arts and presented, among others, in the following group exhibitions: Gallery Maria Bernheim (Zurich, 2019), Fri Art, (Fribourg, 2019), Museum in Bellpark (Kriens, 2019), Édouard Montassut (Paris, 2019), Material Art Fair (New Mexico City, 2019). Solo exhibition: Luma Westbau | schwarzescafé (Zurich, 2019).



The information on Hennings was obtained from the Swiss Literary Archives (especially Lucas Gisi), writings by Bärbel Reetz (biographer), Christa Baumberger and Nicola Behrmann.

\* For conservation reasons, the originals had to be facsimiled by the Swiss Literary Archives for the reopening on 8 June. As this exhibition also explores the question of the value attribution and aura of works and the desire for historical objects, this change is interesting.

\*\* The first editions are part of the Cabaret Voltaire collection.

\*\*\* The glass paintings, originally shown as originals, were lovingly facsimiled by Ulrich Stückelberger, reverse glass painter from Zurich.