

GIRLS/MUSEUM

A Film by Shelly Silver



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LOGLINE

Girls | Museum (71:00/2020) is a voyage through the historical art collection of the MdbK/Museum of Fine Art Leipzig, guided by the expertise and insights of a group of girls, ages 7 to 19. Moving from artwork to artwork, century to century, they tell us what they see.

SYNOPSIS

We are born into an already-constructed world. We each enter with new eyes into a culture that has already been shaped and structured based on the desires and power of others. Historical art museums are charged with preserving and interpreting the tangible evidence of a civilization's cultural trajectory and artistic achievement. The artworks they display have overwhelmingly been made, collected and contextualized by men. On the walls of their hushed galleries, there is no lack of depictions of women on display – mothers, wives, prostitutes, artist's models and muses, all seen through the eyes of male artists.

Girls | Museum takes the viewer through the historical art collection of the MdbK/Museum of Fine Art Leipzig, guided by a group of girls, ages 7 to 19. Moving from artwork to artwork, century to century, the girls tell us what they see. Art is typically the reserve of anointed experts and girls rarely take or are given a central and unfettered place to speak from. From imaginative leaps of storytelling to curt pronouncements, from gender fluidity to power, inequality, precarity and war, **Girls | Museum**, in its quiet way, calls for questioning basic assumptions of what and who we value.

ONLINE SCREENER

Please contact info@shellysilver.com for screener link

LINKS

Website: <https://shellysilver.com/girls-museum>

Trailer 1: <https://vimeo.com/559753420>

Trailer 2 <https://vimeo.com/559753420>

[Hires Photos \(jpg/tiff\)](#)

Hires Photos (tiff)



[Hires Photo 1](#)



[Hires Photo 2](#)



[Hires Photo 3](#)



[Hires Photo 4](#)



[Hires Photo 5](#)



[Hires Photo 6](#)



[Hires Photo 7](#)



[Hires Photo 8](#)



[Hires Photo 9](#)



[Hires Photo 10](#)



[Hires Photo 11](#)



[Poster](#)

DESCRIPTION

What and who is an art museum for? What works are selected to be collected and exhibited? Who created these precious objects? Who deems them so? What do these objects hold within them? What chains of associations are set off when viewed?

Set in the MdbK Leipzig/The Museum of Fine Arts Leipzig, **Girls | Museum** engages three types of protagonists in its exploration of history, art, and institutions. The first is the museum building, with its austere architecture, soaring atriums and terraces. Its hard surfaces bear little trace of human use, its filtered windows allow for a constant play of light, its hushed galleries that are sporadically interrupted by alarms when visitors get too close.

The second protagonists are the objects that make up the collection. Paintings, sculpture, drawings and photographs – fragile objects that have been deemed precious representatives of their time. The unadorned glass building, like a huge vitrine, allows for their naked display. Though inanimate, these artworks are not inert – they dry, crack, yellow and fade, the aging process starting as soon as they are completed. Each stroke of paint is evidence of an artist's gesture, perhaps the motion was made centuries ago – the landscape no longer existing, the artist long dead. A series of repeated lumps of color, when seen at a distance, make up an eye or small pond. Cumulatively, these marks form an image, a certain kind of window into a particular time and way of life.

The third group of protagonists are girls between the ages of 7 and 19, who circulate within the museum space. They are the film's guides and experts, speaking to each art object with gravity, respect, derisiveness and humor, weaving fantasy stories or making curt pronouncements. They often reference personal feelings and histories, because when one speaks of art one is also speaking about oneself. Through their discourses, the film explores a wide-ranging territory which expands out from the art works, to power, history, identity, the questioning or repeating of accepted values, and the need for change. The film is held in the tension between looking back and building forward.

THE LOCATION: LEIPZIG

Leipzig is the largest city in the German state of Saxony. A trade city, going back to Roman times, it is also a university town, known for the great composers such as Bach, Wagner, Mendelssohn, Schumann and Mahler that took up residence in the city. In 1989, Leipzig saw the most prominent demonstrations against the East German Government. Currently, the largest political parties in Leipzig are the Christian Democrats, the Social Democrats and the Green party, unlike the rest of Saxony which has a much higher percentage of supporters for the right-wing party, Alternative for

Deutschland/AfD. The largest first and second-generation minorities living in Leipzig come from Syria and Eastern Europe.

PROTAGONIST 1/The Museum: The MdbK/Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig, The Museum of Fine Arts, Leipzig

The MdbK Leipzig opened its doors in 1858, in a building constructed in the style of a 16th century palazzo with a collection, influenced by what was in fashion at the time, amassed by the city's wealthy merchants. When the National Socialists took power, they confiscated a portion of the collection deemed 'degenerate,' though the MdbK's collection also benefited from the compulsory sale of Leipzig's Jewish collections which were then 'acquired' by the museum. The original building was destroyed in 1943 in an Allied bomb raid. After decades in temporary spaces, a permanent home was constructed in 2004. Made up of sheets of blue green glass walls broken into vertical rectangles, the MdbK is an imposing classical modernist glass cube located in Leipzig's historic center.

PROTAGONIST 2/The Artworks in the MdbK Collection

The collection of the MdbK comprises 3500 paintings, 1000 sculptures and over 60,000 works on paper, only a fraction of which is on display at any given time. The work spans the late Middle Ages through the Nazi and GDR times up to the contemporary, with strong holdings by Cranach the Elder and Younger, Max Beckmann, Max Klinger, the Leipzig School, and contemporary painters such as Neo Rauch and Daniel Richter. The collection reflects Leipzig's particular history, in the 20th century alone, Leipzig's embrace of National Socialism, the bombings of World War II, the founding of the GDR and the reconstruction by the Communist Party, the fall of the Wall and Reunification, with its shift towards democracy and capitalism. A curator at the museum estimated that, of painting and sculpture, 19th century to the present, the work of male artists made up 95% of the collection, if not more.

PROTAGONIST 3/The Interviewees/Experts

The seventeen girls taking part in the film come from Leipzig, Halle and Berlin. Most were born in Germany, but some girls originally came from Afghanistan, Syria and Eastern Europe. Some speak to their relatively sheltered lives, while others allude to the more difficult trajectory of refugees and foreigners. The girls arrived to the interviews at their appointed time with no preparation or advance knowledge of what would be asked. They weren't selected because they were classically knowledgeable or passionate about art. The only requirements were curiosity and an interest in taking part in the film, and especially a desire to openly speak about the objects they saw. The typical interview lasted several hours. The girls and the director both had a hand in selecting which artworks were spoken about. Once an artwork was chosen by multiple girls, other girls were encouraged to speak about it.

DIRECTOR STATEMENT

The MdbK is the main historical art museum in Leipzig, German, a city of roughly 600,000. Their collection starts with the Italian Renaissance moving through the German Democratic Republic to the contemporary. It reflects Leipzig's political trajectory as well as the particular tastes of the collectors and curators who amassed the collection. It is a museum largely made up of figurative works - representations of people, frozen, or caught in motion midway through complex scenes. The way the paintings and sculptures are organized, one can start to imagine relationships, looks exchanged across rooms containing longing, anger, ownership or recognition.

Though there is no lack of depictions of women – mothers, female nudes, prostitutes, classical and religious figures, artist's models, muses and wives – the work on display is made largely by male artists. This is typical for historical art collections around the world. Museums, even the most comprehensive ones, only show us a narrowed view of the world, even as they imply that they show a comprehensive history of cultures and civilizations. Through what lens should these institutions and these works be viewed? What exactly are they showing and teaching us, and why?

I decided to start by asking the next generations of artists and audience - interviewing girls, ages 7-19, about their thoughts on individual works of art, as well as the museum's collection as a whole. I wanted to know what they saw, how they were moved or influenced by a work, and if and how they integrated each work into their personal and world view. I finally asked them if they were instantly made collector, curator and director of the MdbK, how would they change this museum?

The girls stand squarely in front of each artwork speaking directly and movingly. These artworks provide an illusionistic window into another time and space, while still being an amalgam of inanimate stuff — paint, varnish, wood, plaster, bronze. With the help of the camera's lens we can see far closer than the human eye the thick cracked brushstrokes of clashing colors, tentative pencil lines under the more expert washes of color or a spider's web of cracks, fracturing the eye, hand and mouth. And then there's the container, the physical museum, which holds and offers up these works, the proximity of the walls allowing for a ricochet of different looks across different centuries and social milieus, the rooms, with tastefully colored walls and blonde flooring allowing for the longing gazes and angry glares, while the halls echo with hushed footsteps and then a child's frustrated cry. Shelly Silver, November 1st, 2020, NYC

DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHY

Shelly Silver is a New York based artist working with the still and moving image. Her work explores contested territories between public and private, narrative and documentary, and--increasingly in

recent years--the watcher and the watched. She has exhibited worldwide, including at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Tate Modern, Centre Georges Pompidou, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, the Yokohama Museum, the London ICA, and the London, the Singapore, New York, Moscow, and Berlin Film Festivals. Her films have been broadcast by BBC/England, PBS/USA, Arte/Germany, France, Planete/Europe, RTE/Ireland, SWR/Germany, and Atenor/Spain, among others. Silver is Associate Professor and Director of Moving Image, Visual Arts Program, School of the Arts, Columbia University.

[Photo 1 of Shelly Silver](#)

[Photo 2 of Shelly Silver](#)



FILMOGRAPHY

Girls | Museum (2020, 71:00, HD, documentary)

Score for Joanna Kotze (2019, 4:09, HD, experimental short)

a tiny place that is hard to touch (2019, 38:52, HD, experimental fiction)
 Turn (2018, 4:42, 16mm, experimental short)
 This Film (2018, 6:53, 16mm, experimental short)
 A Strange New Beauty (2017, 50:40, HD, experimental narrative)
 THE LAMPS (2015, 4:10, HD, experimental short)
 frog spider hand horse house (2016, 49:00, HD, experimental)
 觸摸 TOUCH (2013, 68:00, HD, fictional essay)
 關於唐人街的五堂課與九個問題 5 lessons and 9 questions about Chinatown (2009, 9:54, HD,
 experimental documentary)
 in complete world (2008, 52:00, SD, documentary)
 What I'm Looking For (2004, 15:00, HD, experimental short)
 SUICIDE (2003, 62:00, SD, experimental fiction)
 1 (2001), 3:00, SD, experimental short)
 small lies, Big Truth (1999, 19:00, S8/SD, experimental document)
 37 Stories about Leaving Home (1996, 52:00, SD, documentary)
 Former East/Former West (1994, 62:00, SD, documentary)
 The Houses That Are Left (1991, 52:00, 16mm/SD, experimental fiction)
 We (1990, 4:00, SD, experimental short)
 getting in. (1989, SD, experimental short)
 Things I Forget to Tell Myself (1989, 2:00, SD, experimental short)
 Meet the People (1986, 17:00, SD, experimental, short)



CREDITS

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TECHNICAL DATA

SHOOTING FORMAT

Video: HD 1080 30p
Sound: Stereo
Color: Color

SCREENING COPY/PRINT FORMAT

Video: DCP 30fps/ProRes/Mp4
Sound: 5.1/Stereo Dolby Digital
Color: Color
Ratio: 16:9
Running time: 71:00
Original language of dialogue: German, Dari
Subtitles: English, German/English
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