



Berlin, 17 September 2020

EXHIBITION PREVIEW

Kulturforum, Exhibition Hall

Matthäikirchplatz 6, 10785 Berlin

Tue, Wed + Fri 10am – 6pm, Thur 10am – 8pm, Sat + Sun 11am – 6pm

Claudia Skoda. Dressed to Thrill

18 December 2020 – 11 April 2021

A special exhibition of the Kunstbibliothek in cooperation with the Kunstgewerbemuseum – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, supported by Hauptstadtkulturfonds

Claudia Skoda's fashion made her a key figure and icon of the West Berlin underground scene in the 1970s and 1980s. She revolutionised the concept of knitwear fashion through her unconventional designs; her spectacular fashion shows attracted international attention. With this first solo show, the Kunstbibliothek pays tribute to Claudia Skoda's work – in her home city of Berlin. The multimedia exhibition presents around two hundred works, some previously never shown before, by Claudia Skoda and her art, film and music scene associates, including Martin Kippenberger, Tabea Blumenstein, Luciano Castelli, Ulrike Ottinger, Kraftwerk, David Bowie, Jim Rakete and many more.

Claudia Skoda (b. 1943 in Berlin) was considered by Elle magazine to be one of the women – along with Coco Chanel, Vivienne Westwood and Madonna – who shaped the look of the 20th century. Her designs were called “knitted genius”, and she was known internationally as the “queen of texture”. Skoda continues to work with creative minds from a wide range of disciplines – and remains preeminent in her chosen creative field of knitting – preferably done on a machine. Beginning in the mid-1970s, West Berlin's bohemian scene of musicians, filmmakers, artists, and fashion designers came together in her living and working community *fabrikneu* (factory new) in a loft in Zossener Straße in Kreuzberg.

The exhibition at Berlin's Kulturforum explores Claudia Skoda's life and work in seven thematic sections: The section ***fabrikneu*** focuses on Skoda's early years and her first fashion shows in Kreuzberg, incl. *Shake Your Hips* (1975), *Neues Spiel* (1976) and *Pablo Picasso* (1977). Martin Kippenberger, who was still unknown at the time, created a floor out of some 1300 photographs by himself, Ulrike Ottinger and Ester Friedman, titling it *Eine Woche aus dem Intimleben der Fam. Skoda und Bekanntenkreis* (*A Week in the Intimate Life of the Skoda Family and Friends*). The exhibition includes that floor, using it as a display space for examples of Skoda's early knitting designs. In addition, super 8 films, slides and photographs bring the *fabrikneu* fashion shows to life once again.

The next section looks at Claudia Skoda's special relationship with ***Music***. Not only did her clientele include numerous musicians, among them David Bowie, Malaria!, Tangerine Dream, the Neonbabies, Donna Summer, Cher, Tina Turner, and Rufus Wainwright, but her collections have also brimmed with allusions to manifold musical styles – jazz, glam rock, disco,

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punk, and electronic music. In 1981 Skoda switched disciplines for a short time, landing an underground hit together with Rosie Müller with the EP *I bin a Domina*. Electronic music pioneer Manuel Götttsching mixed the song; Ralf Hütter and Karl Bartos from Kraftwerk designed the cover.

Another section is devoted to Claudia Skoda's **Spectacular fashion shows**, in particular *Laufsteg* (1978), *Big Birds* (1979), *Trommelfeuer* (1982), and *Veit Fights* (1983). For each of these shows, Skoda chose a theme that she then rigorously implemented as a concept in the choreography, styling, music, and poster design – to a degree still uncommon in the fashion industry of the day. Her *Gesamtkunstwerk*-approach, involving a multidisciplinary synthesis of the arts, made her a pioneer in the artistically contextualised presentation of fashion. *Big Birds*, for example, did without a catwalk; instead the space was divided up using wire-mesh barriers and illuminated only with a few powerful spotlights. The Australian performance duo Emu hatched from a large egg at the beginning of the show, accompanied by a film of penguins in Antarctica. Nearly naked performers covered in makeup swung on a trapeze above the models, who moved like birds to rhythmic electronic music. Skoda had previously sent them to the Berlin Zoo to study bird behaviour.

Skoda's do-it-yourself attitude is highlighted in the next section: as a **Self-made woman** she has worked independently from the beginning. The complexity of the individual collection pieces' ingenious design makes their production in larger series unprofitable. Claudia Skoda often chooses yarns that cannot be industrially processed. She has always taken an unconventional approach in advertising and sales too. Until 1980 she used *fabrikneu* as a knitting studio, promoting her fashion exclusively at trade fairs and fashion shows, and supplying particular selected boutiques in Düsseldorf, Paris, London, and New York with individual collection pieces. Skoda opened her first store in New York's SoHo district – on advice from David Bowie. In 1988 the West Berlin Senate brought her back to her native city to organize the opening gala for the European City of Culture. Skoda curated the inaugural *Dressater – Dressed to Thrill* as a multidisciplinary show, inviting fashion designers from around the world. When the Berlin Wall came down a year later, she decided to stay, and shops on Kurfurstendamm, Linienstraße, and Alte Schönhauser Allee followed.

Claudia Skoda's iconic "jazz" pattern was particular popular as unisex leggings in the late 1970s. Yet it is the female body that she particularly likes to flatter with her creative use of yarn. Her dresses are characteristically knit for the self-confident woman: skin-tight, transparent, expressive, and frequently in amazing colour combinations. This playful and permissive approach to the body is a Skoda hallmark. In the **section Women's friendships and roles**, the exhibition depicts how Skoda and her colleagues and friends collaborated. For instance, photo series from the nocturnal sessions show how Skoda, together with Tabea Blumenschein and Jenny Capitain, spontaneously ran through feminine looks – from glamorous divas of the 1920s to blonde bombshells of the 1950s – while role-playing in front of Ulrike Ottinger's camera.

The section on **Fashion photography** reveals Skoda's unusual approach and her fondness for photography. Skoda has not had her knitwear de-

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signs photographed by established fashion photographers, but rather by art photographers, such as Silke Grossmann, Tina Winkhaus, and Daniel "DJ Punk" Josefsohn. For Skoda, fashion photography is not primarily about the presentation of her product, but about an aesthetic concept, about mood, about materiality.

In her collaborations Skoda has consistently been drawn to art. For her 1986 collection *Masterpieces*, she garnered designs for her limited edition knitwear from artists belonging to the *Neue Wilde* circle who had been part of the former Galerie am Moritzplatz – Rainer Fetting, Anne Jud, Salomé, and Luciano Castelli. These designs will be shown in the **Art and Fashion** section of the exhibition. The performance *Deep Diving for Whales*, which Skoda conceived in 1997 for the Deutsche Guggenheim, is also documented. For that occasion she knitted colourful bodysuits, from which large helium-filled balloons enclosed in a knitted tube rose towards the ceiling, while the models moved through the space like amphibians.

The 400-square-metre exhibition uses **diverse media such as photographs, posters, films and music** to document the work of fashion designer Claudia Skoda in all its diversity. At the same time, it gives an impression of the experimental energy and zeitgeist of the late 1970s and early 1980s in West Berlin. A large number of the exhibits stem from Claudia Skoda's own archive and from the private archives of contemporary witnesses and friends. Many of the works displayed have never been publicly exhibited or have not been shown for a long time.

With this exhibition, the Kunstbibliothek, which hosts the Fashion Image Collection at the **Lipperheide Costume Library** – one of the world's most significant image and text archives on the history of fashion – is increasing its scholarly research into Berlin's late 20th century fashion networks. The exhibition also marks the transfer of a major portion of Claudia Skoda's private archives to that collection, making them available to future generations of researchers.

Claudia Skoda. Dressed to Thrill is curated by Britta Bommert, head of the Fashion Image Collection, Kunstbibliothek. Co-curator: Marie Arleth Skov, research associate, Kunstbibliothek. The exhibition is supported by the Hauptstadtkulturfonds. Media partners are rbbKultur and tip Berlin.

The exhibition is accompanied by a **catalogue** published by Kettler Verlag, with contributions by Heidi Blöcher, Fiona McGovern, Esther Ruelfs, as well as a personal homage to Claudia Skoda by Wolfgang Joop. German/English, hardcover, approx. 248 pages, approx. 200 illustrations, ISBN 978-3-86206-829-6, retail price 42 Euro.

Please note that until further notice, **special admission and hygiene rules** will apply in our museums due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of visitors is limited in accordance with the available space. All visitors over the age of 6 are obliged to wear a face covering over their mouth and nose and keep a minimum distance of 1.5 meters to other visitors. To visit the museum, you must book a time-slot, which you can do in advance: www.smb.museum/tickets

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