ALMINE RECH

Portrait of a Lady

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From prehistoric times onwards, and echoing different iconographic codes according to the era, the representation of women is omnipresent in the history of art. Whether in religious or profane contexts, the portrayal of women, their faces or their bodies, has inspired the greatest artists throughout the world.

Portrait of a Lady brings together eighty-five works by major artists around this recurring motif and its variations. Covering artistic creation from the Palaeolithic era to contemporary art, the exhibition invites the public to explore the feelings and universal representations that the female portrait inspires.

The exhibition circuit pursues five themes, entitled respectively *Originally*, *Women in an interior*, *Nude, model, muse*, *Portraits and self-portraits* and *The question of gender*.

For centuries, the absence of women on the art scene has meant that the history of art has been devised and constructed by men. Despite a few exceptions like Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt, represented in the exhibition, women artists remained marginal for a long time. Thus, the portrait reflects to a very large extent a male way of seeing.

Nevertheless, the twentieth century is that of the emancipation of women in the West. From 1900 onwards, then generally in the 1960s, women have had access to artistic education. Today they outnumber men in art schools.

Responding to aesthetic currents and evolving ideals and criteria of beauty, the portrait questions the extent to which the individual remains a unique and irreplaceable being. The exhibition offers the opportunity to discover a great diversity of works and to shed light on the complexity of artistic thought and practices around this timeless theme.

The exhibition features a dialogue between the portraits produced by modern Belgian artists like James Ensor, Constant Permeke, Paul Delvaux, Léon and Gustave de Smet and Oscar Jespers, and the works of modern European artists such as Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso and Edgar Degas.

The video of the Brussels artist Ariane Loze and the photography by the Finnish Elina Brotherus were done at the Villa Empain. Finally, the installation '*A Mile in My Shoes*' invites you to slip into the shoes of sixteen women and listen to their testimonies of life.