

GIRLS/MUSEUM

A Film by Shelly Silver

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

