

Sister acts: when the avant garde met feminism – in pictures

With 200 works by 71 female artists, a new exhibition of pioneering photography was ‘too quiet and poetic’ to be properly appreciated in the 1970s

Main image: 'Fascinating' ... Roberta Construction Chart #1 Photograph: Lynn Hershman Leeson

Wed 27 Jul 2022 02.00 EDT

Art is a criminal action No. 4, 1969- 1970

The Rencontres d'Arles present, for the first time in France, the exhibition A Feminist Avant-Garde: Photographs and performances from the 1970s from the Verbund Collection, Vienna, with over 200 works by 71 female artists. It will be held at Mécanique Générale, Parc des Ateliers, Arles, France until 25 September

Photograph: Ulrike Rosenbach / Bildrecht / Verbund Collection, Vienna



From the series **Bügeltraum, 1975/2019**

Actionist, provocative and poetic - the exhibition makes clear that the works are drawn from many different schools of feminism

Photograph: Karin Mack / Bildrecht / Verbund Collection, Vienna



Self portrait talking to Vince, Providence, Rhode Island, 1977/1999

‘They were too quiet to be noticed during the 1970s. Today we can also appreciate the poetic quality of feminist art’ - Gabriele Schor, curator and founding director of the Verbund Collection, Vienna

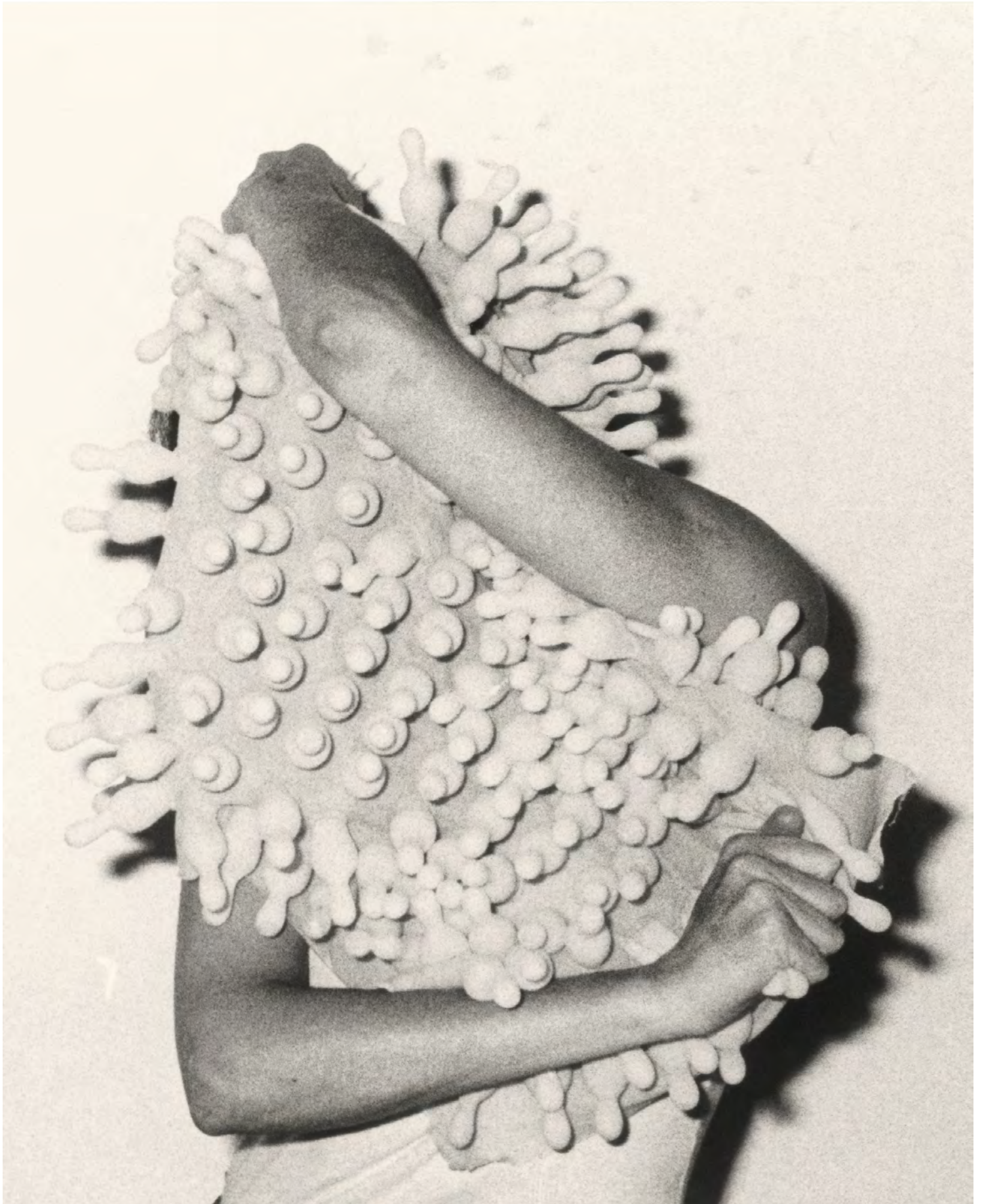
Photograph: Francesca Woodman / The Woodman Family Foundation, New York / Artists Right Society (ARS)/ Verbund Collection, Vienna



Ausstülpung, 1982

Schor: 'For the first time in the history of art, these women artists created an entirely new "image of woman" from a female perspective. Their pioneering achievement deserves a place within the canon of art history'

Photograph: Renate Bertlmann / Bildrecht / Verbund Collection, Vienna



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Tentative pour sortir du cadre à visage découvert, 1966

Exhibitions of work from the feminist art movement often have titles like ‘the feminist revolution’ or ‘radical women’. Gabriele Schor coined the term ‘feminist avant garde’ because of the art-historical significance of the term

Photograph: Orlan / Courtesy Gallery Ceysson & Bénétière / Bildrecht / Verbund Collection, Vienna



Hausfrauen-Küchenschürze, 1975

The exhibition is divided into five themes: women’s reduction to ‘wife, mother, and housewife’; their resulting feeling of ‘being locked up’; the questioning of ‘dictates of beauty and representations of female bodies’; explorations of ‘female sexuality’; and debates around ‘female roles and identities’. Birgit Jürgenssen revolts against being seen solely as ‘wife, mother, and housewife,’ with a nod to phrases such as ‘to have a bun in the oven’

Photograph: Estate of Birgit Jürgenssen / Courtesy Galerie Hubert Winter / Bildrecht / Verbund Collection, Vienna





• **A Portfolio of Models, 1974**

The French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir once declared: ‘One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one.’ In other words, social conditions are what give rise to the construction of femininity. Many female artists used role play to explore what it meant to be a woman in the 1970s. These artists disguised themselves with makeup, wigs and facial expressions, using these tactics to debunk cliches and stereotypes

Photograph: Martha Wilson / Courtesy P•P•O•W Gallery, New York / Verbund Collection, Vienna



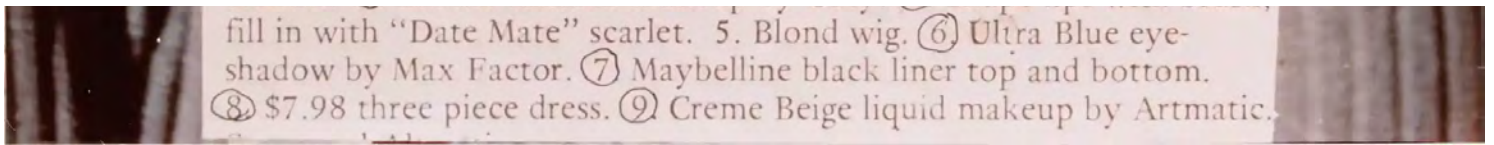
Roberta Construction Chart #1, 1975

Examples of this approach include the work of the American artists Martha Wilson, Suzy Lake, Lynn Hershman Leeson and Cindy Sherman. It is fascinating to see how Marcella Campagnano, a less well-known Italian artist, created very similar productions at the same time

Photograph: Lynn Hershman Leeson / Verbund Collection, Vienna



Constructing Roberta Breitmore *Lynn Hershman 1975*
① Lighten with Dior eyestick light. ② "Peach Blush" Cheekcolor by Revlon. ③ Brown contour makeup by Coty. ④ Shape lips with brush.



ICU, Eye Sea You, I See You, 1973

Exploring female sexuality, Penny Slinger puts her body in a wedding cake. She rejects the reduction of women to the status of objects - and highlights how women can actively acknowledge their sexuality, seeking to be perceived as sexual subjects in their own right

Photograph: Penny Slinger / Courtesy Blum & Poe / Artists Right Society (ARS) / Verbund Collection, Vienna



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Untitled (Glass on Body Imprints), 1972/1997/2009

Rebelling against the ‘dictation of beauty’, Katalin Ladik and Ana Mendieta - neither artist knowing the other’s work - both squash their faces against glass, contorting their noses and lips, thus subverting the idea that women should be nice and neat. Very often the work of female artists makes use of their own bodies. With these depictions of the female body, women artists occupy terrain which for centuries had been the preserve of male artists

Photograph: The Estate of Ana Mendieta / Courtesy of Galerie Lelong / Bildrecht / Verbund Collection, Vienna





- **Die Geburtenmadonna (The Birth Madonna), 1976**

Western countries saw the emergence of the second wave of the women's movement against a backdrop of the 1968 student movement, the 'sexual revolution' and efforts to overcome the traditional moral values of the wartime generation. Women came to see that their problems were not 'personal' but instead arose from established social structures of power and dominance. Women in western countries rebelled against legal discrimination which meant that a man, as head of a family, could make far-reaching decisions affecting women and children

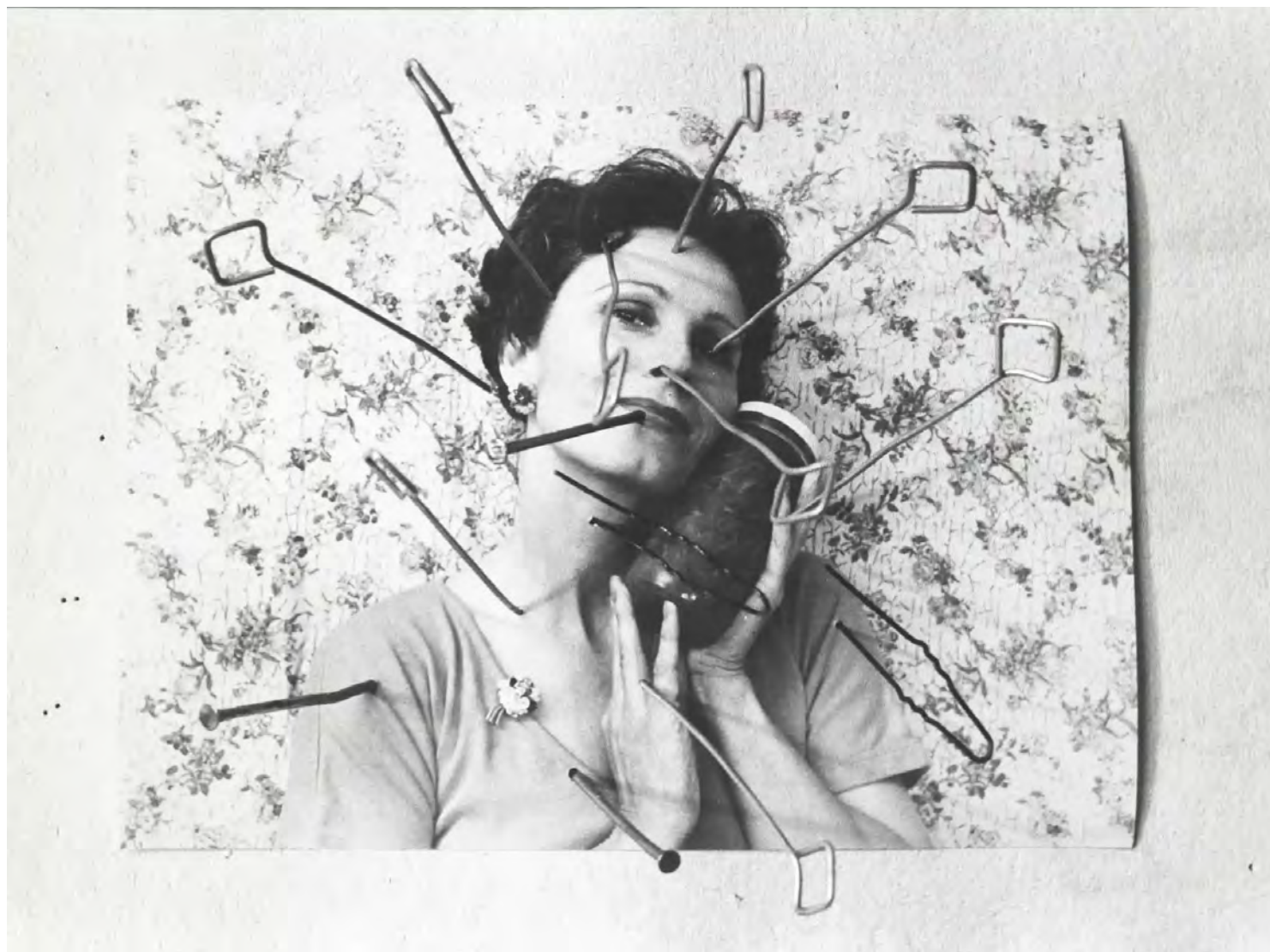
Photograph: Valie Export / Courtesy of Gallery Thaddaeus Ropac / Bildrecht / Verbund Collection, Vienna



From the series *Zerstörung einer Illusion*, 1977

The new media of photography, film and video were particularly useful for female artists, allowing them to break away from painting and its male-dominated traditions. Above all, photography was a historically unencumbered medium that allowed women to work without a studio, spontaneously and without spatial constraints

Photograph: Karin Mack / Bildrecht / Verbund Collection, Vienna



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Vernähungen, 1978

The exhibition is predominantly made up of a series of smaller black-and-white photographs. Photography was still not widely recognised as an art medium in this period, because it allowed the same image to be reproduced multiple times, a problematic aspect for those clinging to ideas of the ‘unique artwork’ traditionally associated with painting

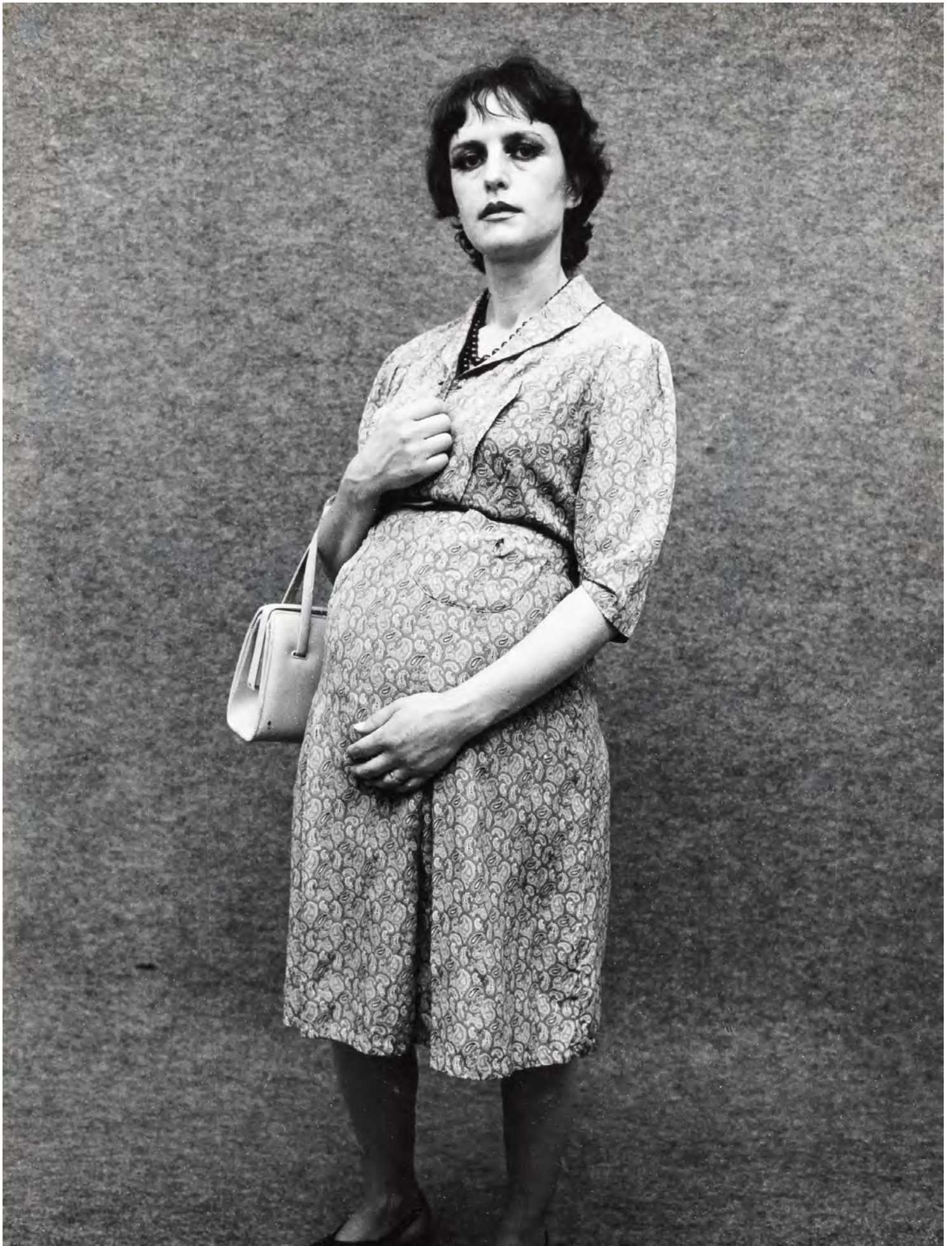
Photograph: Veronika Dreier / Verbund Collection, Vienna



• **L’Invenzione del Femminile: RUOLI, 1974**

Michael Strugl, Verbund’s CEO, says: ‘Verbund has had an art collection for the past 18 years. Verbund strives for social responsibility and supports a range of social, cultural and sporting projects. Within the field of art, it was decided that the “cultural work” should be carried out within the company itself. For Verbund, this commitment to contemporary art forms part of our corporate culture’

Photograph: Marcella Campagnano / Verbund Collection, Vienna





• **Sculpture #2, 1968**

‘What the Verbund Collection seeks to do is discover artists who were previously unknown. We raise their visibility in order to leave a trace within our cultural memory’

Photograph: Kirsten Justesen / Bildrecht / Verbund Collection, Vienna



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