

inner motivations, and tensions that are often amplified by expressive hand gestures. This vitality within the sculptures is even more evident against the backdrop of formal archaism, staticity, and a certain rigidity, giving her sculptures a strong existential energy. Emerita's figures stand firmly, as if embedded in the ground. In contrast, her *Gret Palluca*, a sculpture of an avant-garde dancer and dance teacher, attempts to take flight, driven by the tension between inner lightness and physical heaviness. Outstretched arms, wide palms, large head, slender body, and legs ready to jump – all express a desire for free movement, the human desire for freedom.

Margot Pilz (*1936)

In 1939, she moved with her parents from the Netherlands to Indonesia. As a child, she spent two years in a concentration camp. In 1948, she returned to the Netherlands. Later, between 1954 and 1957, she studied advertising photography at the Higher School of Graphic Arts and at the Testing Institute in Vienna under Leo Ernst. She graduated with a degree in photography in 1976. In 1978, she joined IntAkt and staged her first solo exhibition. Within Austrian art, Pilz is a pioneer of staged photography and digital media. From the outset of her artistic career, she demonstrated an experimental approach, exploring possibilities of the medium of photography. For her, photography is not regarded as the simple recording of original motifs with a camera, but as a tool for realising artistic intentions. In terms of content, she addresses topics that critically examine the social status of women, as well as her own situation as a woman and artist in a society and art scene dominated by men. Accordingly, even in her early works, she used long exposure, blending, and multiple exposure to introduce various meanings and the factor of time into the image.

Margita Titlová Ylovsky (*1957)

is an intermedia artist and educator. Between 1977 and 1983, she studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague under prof. Oldřich Oplt. In her work she combines traditional, even archetypal, ideas about the world and human existence with modern theories from the fields of physics and mathematics (chaos theory, quantum physics, etc.). Her main means of expression is the recording of quick gestures, often implemented through imprints that respond to her current emotional state. The artist thematises touch and uses it as one of her basic creative techniques. The originator and instrument of touch is her own body, which in a specific way records and leaves its mark. This trace serves as an index sign whereby the part naturally represents the whole. She also critically activates touch in relation to apparatus – for example, thermal vision in the painting *Josephine Baker* and in *Portrait of Brigitte Bardot*, created with Kirlian's device for visualising energies and internal processes, including psychological states. It is her unique series of Brigitte Bardot portraits that highlights an important theme of Margita Titlova Ylovsky's work – the role and fate of women, often shaped by the contemporary ideal of beauty and by its societal demands.

Monika Verhoeven (*1941)

In 1962–1968, she studied at the Academy of Applied Arts in Vienna (decorative arts and textiles under Rader-Soulek). Following the influences of American abstract expressionism, Henry Moore and Alberto Giacometti progressively became of importance to her. Shortly after graduating from Hans Knesel's sculpture class at the “Angewandten”, she met Gerda Fassel in the early 1970s. A close lifelong friendship developed. At Fassel's instigation, Verhoeven turned to sculpture in the early 1980s, with Fassel supporting her work in a shared studio. Her intellectual circle includes writers such as Julian Schutting and Heidi Pataki. While in Otto Lorent's ceramics class, she created the figural

group “Das Floß” (1999), which alludes to her renewed engagement with Giacometti, while the title of the series of clay reliefs *Conversation with Picasso* reveals the source of her inspiration. Verhoeven's larger static sculptures express her self-standing. In a series of female, mostly fragmented, standing figures, this self-affirming attitude is unmistakable. Amazon, Boxer, Swimmer – these female warrior figures all stand in opposition to the normative ideals of society. By shifting the proportions, Verhoeven emphasises their message. In her late work *Marsyas*, she becomes increasingly interested in androgynous forms that thematise the animal and creative aspects of being.

Heliane Wiesauer-Reiterer (*1948)

She was born in 1948 in Salzburg, and lived in Buenos Aires (1948–1957), Schleswig-Holstein (1957–1965), and in Vienna from 1968, where (until 1973) she studied painting at the Academy under G. Hessing. The sculptor Otto Eder invited her to Krastal (Carinthia), where she began to work as a sculptress. Since then, she has contributed significantly to local exhibitions and publications. Wiesauer-Reiterer's work crosses a variety of media. In addition to stone sculpture, she creates material images, paintings, photographs, and works on paper. Her approach is determined by respect for the material. The forms remain close to their natural state, with interventions as precise and economical as possible. Her focus is on searching for the essence of form – whether architectural or existential. Wiesauer-Reiterer is one of the few female artists who could be included within the Neue Wilde movement of the 1970s.

Jana Želibská (*1945)

graduated in graphic design, illustration, and monumental painting at the AFAD in Bratislava. She belongs to a progressive generation of unofficial performance and conceptual artists who emerged on the Czechoslovak art scene in the 1960s. With a touch of critical irony, latent feminism, provocation, and humour, she has for several decades systematically addressed taboo issues related to transformation of the female body, sexuality, limits of gender determination, and the problematic relationship between men and women from a (proto)feminist perspective. In her early work, she reevaluated the influences of international trends, particularly pop art and French new realism. Želibská stood at the forefront of developments within environmental art and objects, performance art, conceptual art, land art, postmodern objects, intermedia installations, and video art. From the outset, she perceives the female body as a space which, when critically touched, appears to represent resistance to various power codes and their strategies. She uses elementary bodily shapes and symbols (female breasts, the rhombus) to demystify aesthetic experience and academic artistic practices. It is as if she disembodies that which is embedded in human culture through eternal gender prejudices. Repetitions of acts or significations of pictorial sequentiality, examples of which we observe in her exhibited photographic record of the event *Mirage of Breast* (1990), are strategies that unmask how women are regulated by social mechanisms and control. The female subject and its biological determination are categories that the artist demonstratively frees from power limitations and, in contrast, exposes to defensive, self-determined, and self-identifying touch.

EN

Bratislava City Gallery, Mírbach Palace

11 December 2025 to 17 May 2026



GREY GOLD: Touching

Curators
Berthold Ecker
Vendula Fremlová
Anna Vartecká

Touch as a potential architecture of gender and age layering

“In a sense, I am my own layered and overlapping time, the multitude of traces stored within my body’s memory, but also within my mental memory, in my memories... life, so to speak / from the layered/ from the intertwined / interwoven / from the many connections / which (seemingly?) / have no beginning / and no end: / only occasional knots / in which a thread of memory / and perhaps even a dream / inclined towards the following morning / becomes entangled.”¹

This is how contemporary Slovak philosopher and writer Etela Farkašová describes the metaphor of layering in her essay titled *The Temporality of Human Life*. We borrowed this image because it connects many themes from our long-term exhibition project *Grey Gold*. The international exhibition *Grey Gold: Touching* is a continuation from the earlier projects *Grey Gold: Czech and Slovak Women Artists Over 65* (2014) and *Grey Gold: At My Fingertips* (2017). The concept of these projects has long been united by a desire to contribute to the discussion about the position of women artists in the wider Central European space, an ambition to thematise the connections between age, gender, and creativity, and, last but not least, an aspiration to make the later works of Slovak, Czech, German, and Austrian women artists of the post-war generations more visible (in collaboration with curator Berthold Ecker). These are generations of women artists who foresaw, shaped, and formed conditions for the gradual professionalisation and emancipation of women’s artistic production, facilitating its full and unequivocal integration into the Czech–Slovak and Central European history of art.

The current GMB exhibition shifts focus to the phenomenon of touch itself, whether physical, tactile, emotional, or mental. Human (including spiritual) experience has until recently been predominantly physical in nature, although industrial, post-industrial, and contemporary post-material times have heralded experience of the world as a heterogeneous field of human and non-human actors, often oscillating between physical and virtual forms. For the generations of female artists represented within the exhibition, the idea of virtual forms is certainly not unrealistic or unimaginable – quite the contrary. Yet it is undoubtedly different from that of younger generations, some of whom were born into the digital or virtual world and navigate it highly intuitively. The selected artists are far more attuned to the idea of the physical body, or rather the human figure, that is missing, absent, and can be made present, materialised, visualised, or referred to in artistic creation through, for example, body fragments.

Through the trends of new figuration and new sensitivity, which Czech and Slovak female artists had the opportunity to encounter, perceive, and to a greater or lesser degree be influenced by during their studies and artistic careers, the figure is a central starting point. The artists quite naturally combined this premise with their own female perspective and experience, in some cases exceptionally formulated as feminist or latently feminist (Mária Balážová, Milota Havránková, Margita Titlová Ylovsky, Jana Želibská), or with a queer perspective (Libuše Jarcovjáková).

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^[1] Farkašová, Etela. Vrstvenie času. Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Spolku slovenských spisovateľov, 2014, p. 214.

^[2] The origin of this now popular term dates back to Pierre Bourdieu's reflections in the mid-1980s. In The Forms of Capital, Bourdieu describes cultural capital and its three forms. In addition to the objectified and institutionalised form, capital also occurs "in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body". See Bourdieu, Pierre. The Forms of Capital. In Richardson, J. (ed.). Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986, p. 241–258. However, Maurice Merleau-Ponty already referred to the absolute inertia of the human body, to the body as a means of communication with the world, in his Phenomenology of Perception.

^[3] Jakalová, Zuzana. „Až zase začnu pracovať, bude to lepší!“ Dilo Evy Kmentové v kontextu chronické nemoci. In Eva Kmentová. Brno: Host, 2023, p. 107.

^[4] Wallenborn, Grégoire; Wilhite, Harold. Rethinking embodied knowledge and household consumption. Energy Research & Social Science, Volume 1, 2014, p. 57, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2014.03.009.

^[5] Lippard, Lucy R. From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art. New York: Dutton, 1976.

^[6] Ibid, p. 145.

Her contribution lies primarily in articulating the reasons by which women’s art is not biologically determined, but is socially, culturally, and politically shaped by a combination of women’s life circumstances.

The theme of touch and its relationship to our embodied consciousness is part of a broader, perhaps even nostalgic, turn of visual art towards humanistic and post-humanistic levels of corporeality and physical materiality. In relation to touch, we attempt to capture a form of friction between its personal and collective social dynamics by analysing various strategies of its representation within visual culture. Gesture, touch, and seemingly natural reflex are all critically examined. It transpires that our reactions are conventionalised, deriving from the everyday social roles we hold or, in Judith Butler’s words, perform. An important theme that emerges in the context of touch for these artists is as a reference point for interpersonal behaviour: the dynamics of familial and other socially defined relationships that involve intimacy, violence, control, or self-defence. Women artists frequently reveal moments of care, hierarchies of power, and forms of anxiety from imposed conventions, which, paradoxically, also take place in the domestic sphere (Mária Balážová, Margita Titlová Ylovsky, Karin Mack, Margot Pilz). Touch, however, can also function as an architecture of the lost traditional bond of human perception and understanding (Milota Havránková, Milada Othová) or of subversive, humorous self-enlightenment, de-pathetisation, and demythologisation through which the woman–artist can often catalytically disembody that which is blocked in human culture by eternal gender prejudices (Jana Želibská, Lieselott Beschorner, Gerda Fassel, Monika Verhoeven, Heliane Wiesauer-Reiterer). Many of the artists have fully completed their academic education, but most importantly they radically intervened in the post-revolutionary process of academic transformation of art education and the establishment of studios focused on sculpture, conceptual art, intermedia, and new media at Czech and Slovak art academies after 1989 (Adéla Matasová, Milada Othová, Libuše JarcovjÁková, Milota Havránková, Margita Titlová Ylovsky, Mária Balážová). Similarly to the previous exhibitions, personalities appear here who, unfortunately, hitherto eluded the attention of the central Czech–Slovak exhibition space, which may make the impact of their work on the contemporary audience and its resonance with the current artistic scene all the more pronounced today (Milada Othová, Emerita Pansowová).

It is with great satisfaction and without artificial pathos that we observe that there are several exceptional women artists in this project who are, and have always been, consistently capable of cultural self-transcendence, of exercising their freedom by continually extending and traversing to other freedoms (Simone de Beauvoir), and, through the art form, of touching upon their own and society’s temporal layering. Even they do not age in a social or cultural vacuum, and they are confronted with not always positive signals that cannot be ignored. But perhaps it is precisely because of the historical necessity constantly to defend and pursue their own freedom that they have internalised for this discomfort a type of latent force of creative transcendence that is highly inspiring for all of society.

Mária Balážová (*1956)

studied at the AFAD in Bratislava from 1978 to 1984. She habilitated as docent in the field of fine arts at the AFAD in Bratislava (2004). From 1984 to 1997, she worked as a freelance artist. Currently (since 1997), she leads the studio of 2D media in the Faculty of Education at Trnava University. Over the past thirty years, she has been exhibiting in the field of post-geometric abstraction, but with a semantically complex image structure. Her recent works are characterised by feminist and conceptual influences. She often exposes the employment practices of multinational corporations in third world countries. The serpentine geometry that the artist has used continually over several decades creates a form of schematic framework that critically reflects dangerous gender and social stereotypes. The works *Seamstresses 2* (2025), *MultiWoman 1* (2020), as well as the works from the series *Unpaid Domestic Work* (2019), in which Mária Balážová reduces a woman to a pictogram of a mechanical arm robotically performing domestic duties, are exceptionally efficient confirmation of the dark dynamics of power relations.

Lieselott Beschorner (*1927 †2024)

Between 1945 and 1954, Beschorner studied painting and fresco technique at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts under H. C. Andersen, A. P. Gütersloh, and E. Huber. In 1951, she was one of the first women admitted to the Vienna Secession. She has staged numerous exhibitions at home and abroad. In the 1980s, she withdrew from public life and did not hold further exhibitions until 2011 (MUSA), 2021 Landesgalerie Lower Austria, 2022 Secession, and 2023 Miles McEnery Gallery, New York. Beschorner approaches reality with a sense of the grotesque, to which she has devoted numerous graphic and sculptural series. Her most famous series is *Puppas*, which features fetishist, crocheted, and embroidered figures created during the 1970s and influenced by the tribal art of Africa and Polynesia.

Gerda Fassel (*1941 †2025)

Fassel studied at the Vienna Art School (under Hans Staudacher) in 1960/61, in the USA 1962–1965, at the Art Students’ League in New York 1964/65, and she studied sculpture at the Vienna University of Applied Arts under Hans Knesl and Wander Bertoni 1965–1972. In 1982, she received the City of Vienna Award. From 1996, she held the position of professor at the University of Applied Arts, where she succeeded Alfred Hrdlicka.

Already within her diploma thesis, she demonstrated a completely new understanding of the female body – full of strength, in offensive positions, yet also vulnerable, open, and repeatedly torn. Fassel cultivated this personal artistic language from 1972 until her death, and had a decisive influence on Austrian sculpture. Her significance as a high-quality illustrator has not yet been sufficiently appreciated. Fassel did not consider herself explicitly a feminist, but her work does represent the act of self-assertion and self-confidence of a strong woman.

Milota Havránková (*1945)

studied art photography at FAMU in Prague. Since 2001, she has headed the Photography Studio at the AFAD in Bratislava, and has worked at leading Czech and Slovak art universities (e.g., FAMU Prague, AU Banská Bystrica). Her work is characterised by diverse technological and ideological approaches and by a broad range of artistic disciplines ranging from design, monumental photography in public spaces, and staged free photography, through to experimental film. The exhibition includes an earlier series of photo illustrations for a book by the Bulgarian writer Vani Filipovova titled *Milena*, part of the Priatelìa series published in 1983 by Mladé letá. This relatively unknown work of Milota’s features pictorial collages that encapsulate all her previous creative approaches: a refined sense of

composition and expressive stylisation, graphic quality of greater or lesser tonality, a fitting degree of abstraction and colour manipulation, and the ability to reveal “*the poetry of detail in the prose of the whole*”. Even the presence of the main character, a girl from Sofia who tells her story of searching against the backdrop of the post-war period for the ambiguous truth about her father, is often only hinted at in fragments of the body, in its symbols, and in the fragile, almost dreamlike remnants of her unique tale. The inner world of the main character is immersed in external reality within a juxtaposed visual overlay, and this play of associative connections in an exceptionally sophisticated visual execution stood out prominently from the contemporary standard of Czechoslovak photographic, monumental, and other book illustrations.

Libuše JarcovjÁková (*1952)

studied photography at FAMU in Prague. After 1985, she officially relocated to West Berlin. In 2017, she published her comprehensive monograph *Black Years*, which straddled the line between a literary diary and a photographic album. In 2019, her solo exhibition and accompanying book of the same name, *Evokativ*, were a great success. This project was the main exhibition at the prestigious Les Rencontres d’Arles 2019 photography festival. Since 2022, she has led the Photography Studio within the Ladislav Sutnar Faculty of Design and Art at the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen. The artist has long documented the Roma and Vietnamese communities in Czechoslovakia, as well as Prague’s T-Club, which focused on the homosexual minority. Her photographic approach to the absurdity of 1980s–2000s reality is an authentic, personal diary-like, even brutally intimate, confession of a photographer concerning the emptiness of the time in which she had to spend the most productive years of her life. The naturalistic and existential character of her documentary photographs, self-portraits, and self-nudes reflects the personal story of a woman who never allowed herself to be constrained, corrected, or broken by the stereotypical functioning of mainstream heteronormative society. In a sense, her work can be seen as a constant ritual of self-identification, one that has helped the artist to affirm that, in a world from which she has become completely estranged, she still remains herself and, as such, continues to discover herself.

Karin Mack (*1940)

Since 1961, she has worked with architectural photography, portraits of artists (Wiener Gruppe and others), and documentary production on the Viennese art scene. Since 1973, she has worked as a freelance conceptual photographer. She studied art history from 1978 to 1988. Between 1977 and 1982, she was a member of IntAkt, the most important association of feminist artists in Austria, the history of which she explored in her publication *Freischwimmen* (2011). Her work is shaped by a bipolar inner perspective: on the one hand, she reflects on her personal situation since the 1970s as a female artist in a male-dominated artistic environment; on the other hand, she examines artistic life itself from an internal standpoint. Through her marriage to the well-known artist, architect, writer, and poet Friedrich Achleitner, Mack became part of the inner circle of the Viennese avant-garde. In later years, she explored nature as a carrier of human emotions and projections.

Adéla Matasová (*1940)

is an intermedia artist, educator, and curator. Between 1958 and 1964, she studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague in the studio of monumental painting under prof. Vladimír Sychra and, in her final year of study, under prof. Arnoř Paderlík. Her work touches on several areas of contemporary culture – she explores spatial relationships and their temporal variability, the spiritual dimension of life, and

the intertwining of emotional and intellectual perception and understanding of the world, including fictional and futuristic visions. During the 1990s, she was among the first artists to begin working with new media; she created large-scale installations from linen paper, worked with reflective steel surfaces, and explored the environmental dimension of installation. In recent years, she has focused primarily on monumental video installations. Her artistic approach is accurately captured by the art historian Marcela Pánková as being “*to define the emotional and intellectual self in visual terms*”; it is precisely the connection between these spheres, one that takes place only within our bodies, that deeply fascinates and interests her to this day. For example, we find it together with an association to movement in her linen paper reliefs from the series *Movement and Stopping* (1990), and in the performative aspect of the video *We Have All Sworn Sometimes* (2019). The video projection, with its bright, pantomime-like hand moving against a black background, stretching a white rubber band that at one point resembles the form of the Czech flag, allows for multi-layered interpretations: from personal to general, from human to social or political messages, accentuated by the universal gesture of an oath.

Milada Othová (*1944)

is a sculptor and educator. Between 1963 and 1967, she studied under prof. Jan Kavan in the studio of applied sculpture at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague. She works as a freelance sculptress. Her domain is small sculpture, relief, and medal making, but also stone. She additionally composed introverted poetry. She creates delicate artifacts of modest dimensions in which she makes unique use of the techniques of casting bronze into sand and, particularly, lost wax casting. Her small sculptures allow the medium itself and its specifics to speak for themselves – remnants of moulds and casting channels remain on the surfaces, elements that she deliberately leaves in and works with from the outset. Her sculptures are lyrical entities, much like her poems. Two different types of expression – sculptural and poetic – interconnect and yet remain separate. Each works independently, even though they share many common features: modesty, economy of form, partial brevity, and elementary expression. In her writing and sculptural work, the artist emphasises awareness of the uniqueness of the moment, of what the instant of creation itself, creation as such, and concentrated listening and connection, brings. Her reliefs often feature a conscious thematisation of touch, touching, and imprints – whether in the form of indentations left by elbows, imprints of hand joints including their phasing, depressions left by eggshells, or a cut surface of the relief. Physicality, haptic perception, and tactile presence are therefore important themes, but more than that—they are also a fundamental starting point, a means, and an artistic stance in themselves.

Emerita Pansowová (*1946)

is a German–Slovak sculptress. Between 1962 and 1966, she studied sculpture at the AFAD in Bratislava, and in 1967 moved permanently to Berlin. There she continued her education at the Berlin-Weißensee School of Art under Karl-Heinz Schamal and Arnd Wittig. She later became a student of Ludwig Engelhardt at the Academy of Arts in the GDR. She has designed numerous sculptures for public spaces in Germany. Her monumental figures (but also smaller variants, sketches, and sculptural bozzetti) resemble, in their static nature, ancient sculptures. Despite their decisive vertical orientation – the uprightness and frontality of most of her figures reflect the human posture that gave our species its scientific name – they paradoxically reveal the characters’ inner lives, their psychological movements, which are the main focus of the artist’s attention. Emerita Pansowová’s works function as projection screens for thoughts, emotions,