

**POETIC, CONFRONTATIONAL, VISIONARY: THE SCHIRN PRESENTS TWO NEW WORKS BY THE ARTIST SELMA SELMAN IN A MAJOR SOLO EXHIBITION**

## **SELMA SELMAN FLOWERS OF LIFE**

**JUNE 20 – SEPTEMBER 15, 2024**

The Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt presents a major solo exhibition by the artist Selma Selman (\*1991) from June 20 to September 15, 2024. Only a few years ago, she boldly and confidently entered into the spotlight of the international art world, describing herself as “the most dangerous woman in the world.” Together with her family, Selman disassembles former status symbols like Mercedes-Benz cars in front of an audience, in order to acquire the few precious metals that are still usable. The spoken performances by this artist with a Roma background are usually loud, for she gives expression to anger and her urge to reverse power relationships. In a variety of media, Selman’s art explores experiences of discrimination, violence, sexism, and patriarchy in a striking way. Her multilayered work comprises performances, sculptures, paintings on car parts and scrap metal, drawings, and video. At the Schirn, the artist presents prints, small sculptural works made from precious metals, and two performances that pick up on central themes of her oeuvre, as well as two newly created works. The installation *Flowers of Life* (2024), made from multipronged grabs, gestures to her family’s livelihood, which involves collecting and reselling scrap metal. The film *Crossing the Blue Bridge* (2024) is based on her mother’s memories of experiences in her hometown of Bihać during the Bosnian War (1992–95). Selman takes these family experiences as a point of departure to situate herself as a feminist and activist artist who now campaigns internationally for her community.

The exhibition “Selma Selman: Flowers of Life” is supported by the SCHIRN ZEITGENOSSEN with additional support from the Kummer-Vanotti Foundation and the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

**Sebastian Baden**, Director of the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, emphasizes: “Selma Selman is one of the most dynamic artists of the younger generation. She works closely with her family in her highly emancipatory work. In her performances, she transfers the reality of life for non-privileged minorities to the exhibition space. Selman’s work calls for a cultural and economic reinterpretation of seemingly established norms, values, and attributions. For the exhibition at the Schirn, the artist has created two new, expansive works. She draws on the traumas of her parents’ generation and works through them with powerful, poetic gestures.”

**Matthias Ulrich**, curator of the exhibition, on the artist: “Selma Selman combines participatory art, institutional critique, activism, and performance in her work. At the heart of it all is the artist herself. It is with a protesting voice and visionary presence that she speaks out in her art. She literally puts herself on show and uses her body, her voice, and her identity as a medium for her artistic practice and self-empowerment. Real social change and societal transformation, the visualization and empowerment of marginalized groups and their community always remain the absolute goal of her art.”

### **THE WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION**

The exhibition centers around the newly conceived work *Flowers of Life* (2024), which gives the exhibition its title. This expansive installation consists of four used multipronged grabs, typically found on construction sites and scrap yards. In Selma Selman’s appropriation, the massive machines are transformed into flower-like kinetic sculptures powered by a motor, their blossoms

slowly opening and closing. Inside, they reveal paintings by the artist, depicting the eyes of women with a haunting gaze. *Flowers of Life* ties in with Selman's well-known works with scrap metal, *Paintings on Metal* (since 2014), which oscillate between painting and sculpture and refer to her family's scrap metal trade. The sensual, floral interpretation of *Flowers of Life* reverses masculine and feminine connotations, at the same time revealing women as the key driving force of the community. With strong and defiant formal language, Selman reinterprets stigmatizing stereotypes that the social majority has constructed around Roma culture and the role of women. The installation is accompanied by the fragrance *The Most Dangerous Woman in the World* (2024), which the artist created in collaboration with experts and which spreads the smell of engine oil in the space around the sculptures.

Selman's origins and the inclusion of her family in her artistic practice form an integral part of her work. The intensive collaboration with her mother especially revolves around autobiography, visibility, and emancipation as a Roma woman, and has already been reflected in numerous works. The Schirn presents the new film *Crossing the Blue Bridge* (2024; 27:15 min.) in a two-screen installation. *Crossing the Blue Bridge* examines the lingering effects of historical trauma, as well as care, courage, and resistance. Selman inhabits the role of her mother and reenacts her memories. The film is based on her mother's experiences during the Bosnian war: On a day during a ceasefire in 1994, her mother went into town with Selman's sister to find food. On the way home, they had to cross Bihać's Alija Izetbegović Bridge, also called the Blue Bridge, which was strewn with corpses and animal carcasses. While trying to simultaneously cover her child's eyes and carry the heavy basket of food, the strong winds blew her hair around her face, obscuring her view. Selman recreates this image in her film, linking it to figures from Greek mythology, among others, in a hauntingly recited text in English, Bosnian, and Romani. She stylizes her mother as a heroine who is partially responsible for her daughter's ability to cope under the most adverse conditions in today's world. The Blue Bridge transforms into a symbol of Selman's artistic activism, which she uses to create new paths.

The two major new productions at the Schirn are complemented by additional selected works from Selman's oeuvre. Two seemingly minimalist objects have emerged from intensive body art performances. *Platinum (Axe)* (2021), a miniature axe made of platinum, resulted from the multi-week action *Platinum*, first staged in 2021. In this performance, she worked in collaboration with her father and other male family members on car wrecks in the exhibition space, using axes and angle grinders to extract the valuable metal contained inside their catalytic converters. The resulting axe represents a working tool, yet in the exhibition space it becomes a precious sculpture, displayed securely in a glass exhibition case. *Motherboards (A Golden Nail)* (2023), a ten-centimeter gold-plated nail mounted in the exhibition space at the artist's eye level, is actually an artifact from the performance *Motherboards* (2023). The family dismantled computers in front of a live audience, using an elaborate process to remove minute amounts of gold from the motherboards. Both performances directly transfer the processes and techniques of the scrap metal recycling industry into the art space and thus raise questions about the creation and appreciation of social value, as well as the sustainable use of resources.

*Superpositional Intersectionalism – Sleeping Guards* (2023–ongoing), a series of seventeen colored pencil drawings on round paper, as well as the fourteen-part series *Superpositional Intersectionalism – Ophelia's Awakening* (2024) revolve around Selman's self-portrait. The drawings depict intimate observations of female figures whose faces and bodies metamorphose into surreal hybrids with fluid identities, expanding and taking on abstract forms. The penetrating gaze of an eye, a recurring motif in Selman's work resurfaces in these pictures as a reference to identity and social systems of codification. Here, too, Selman addresses the possibilities and

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limitations of what she can be—a woman, an artist, a Roma person, an internationally successful star, a daughter, a Muslim, a European. The title combines the quantum physics phenomenon of superposition, which describes how an atom can be in different states at the same time, with the concept of intersectionality, which refers to the confluence of several forms of discrimination.

Two live performances by the artist will take place over the course of the exhibition. For the opening of the exhibition, Selman will present *You Have No Idea* (since 2015). Depending on the situation, the haunting performance can last between just five minutes and an hour and a half. With her continuous repetition of the phrase that gives the piece its title, she addresses social classification and confronts the audience with their subconscious assumptions about other people. For the closing event of the exhibition, Selman will perform the work *Letters to Omer* (since 2021). In the ongoing series of letters, which she is continuously publishing on her instagram account, the artist shares intimate thoughts, wishes, and visions of a possible future with a fictional character named Omer.

**SELMA SELMAN** was born in Bosnia and Herzegovina and lives and works in New York, Amsterdam, and Bihać. After completing her Bachelor of Fine Arts in the Department of Painting at the University of Banja Luka in 2014, she graduated from Syracuse University in 2018 with a Master of Fine Arts in Transmedia, Visual, and Performing Arts. From 2021 to 2023 she was a resident at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam. Her works have been exhibited internationally at Gropius Bau, Hamburger Bahnhof, documenta fifteen, Manifesta 14 in Pristina, Kunstraum Innsbruck, MO Museum in Vilnius, Kasseler Kunstverein, Museum Fridericianum, National Gallery of Bosnia and Herzegovina, acb Galéria, Budapest, and the FutuRoma Pavilion at the 2019 Venice Biennale. Since 2017, Selman has organized the film festival “The Open Screen at Selma’s” in her hometown of Bihać, promoting the exchange of local Roma artists with interested audiences. In addition, she founded “Get the Heck to School” (since 2017), a project that aims to provide school education to girls, and in particular to young Roma.

*Crossing the Blue Bridge* is realized in a collaboration between Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, Röda Sten Konsthall, Gothenburg, and the European Capital of Culture Bad Ischl Salzkammergut 2024.

The exhibition is, among other funders, supported by SCHIRN ZEITGENOSSEN, a circle of private patrons of young art at the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt. The Schirn would like to thank Jan Bauer and Lena Wallenhorst, Jochen and Anja Baumann, Olaf Gerber and Nicole Emmerling de Oliveira, Markus Hammer and Birgit Heller, Philip Holzer, Björn Robens, Reiner Sachs and Brigitta Bailly, Julia Schönbohm and Ralf Böckle, Hartmut and Petra Schröter, and Sascha and Sevilay Wilhelm for their commitment.

**OPENING** At the opening of “Flowers of Life” on Wednesday, June 19, 2024, at 7 p.m., Selma Selman will present the performance *You Have No Idea*. Afterwards there will be a DJ set by Shantel. Free admission, no registration required.

**ARTIST TALK** On Thursday, June 20, 2024, at 7:30 p.m., Selma Selman and Schirn curator Matthias Ulrich will discuss the works and the conception of the exhibition. Free admission, no registration required.

**PERFORMANCE & PANEL** On Saturday, September 14, at 6 p.m., Selma Selman will perform the work *Letters to Omer*. In a following panel, she will talk to artists, activists and academics about forms of collectivity and solidarity within the Roma community. Free admission, no registration required.

# SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT

**LOCATION** SCHIRN KUNSTHALLE FRANKFURT, Römerberg, 60311 Frankfurt am Main

**DURATION** June 20 – September 15, 2024 **INFORMATION** [schirn.de/en](https://schirn.de/en) **E-MAIL**

[welcome@schirn.de](mailto:welcome@schirn.de) **TELEPHONE** +49.69.29 98 82-0 **TICKETS** available in the online shop at [schirn.de/shop](https://schirn.de/shop) and at the Schirn box office

**ADMISSION** €8, reduced €6, free admission for children under the age of 8 **OPENING HOURS** Tues., Fri. to Sun. 10 a.m.–7 p.m., Wed. and

Thurs. 10 a.m.–10 p.m. **INDIVIDUAL TOURS** individual or group tours can be booked at

[fuehrungen@schirn.de](mailto:fuehrungen@schirn.de) **VISITOR INFORMATION** at [schirn.de/en/visit/faq](https://schirn.de/en/visit/faq) **CURATOR** Matthias

Ulrich **CURATORIAL ASSISTANCE** Theresa Dettinger **SUPPORTED BY SCHIRN**

ZEITGENOSSEN **WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FROM** Kummer-Vanotti Foundation, Kingdom of the Netherlands

**HASHTAG** #SELMASELMAN #SCHIRN **FACEBOOK, TWITTER, YOUTUBE, INSTAGRAM, PINTEREST, TIKTOK, SCHIRN MAGAZIN** [schirn.de/en/magazin](https://schirn.de/en/magazin)

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