

Morgaine Schäfer

Schwestern

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Opening: September 3rd

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The second solo exhibition *Schwestern* by artist Morgaine Schäfer at Galerie fiebach, minninger guides us through a part of the history of our society and raises questions that search for female identities, their possibilities and visibility.

Deaconesses (The word comes from a Greek word, *diakonos* (διάκονος), for "deacon", which means a servant or helper) are women who live celibate lives in a Protestant community of life and faith in deaconess mother houses, founded in the 19th century. The matron distributed different tasks among the women, so they learned professions in nursing and care of the elderly or as pharmacists and got a comprehensive education. With the industrialization, the organization of many professions also changed. For example, childcare and waiting schools were founded to relieve working women. Deaconesses still exist today and yet their images seem to have disappeared almost imperceptibly from the cityscape. In order to protect the deaconesses from attack and to emphasize their lifestyle, they were given a habit and guidelines were established to structure and regulate their daily routine. The circumstances of women and the motivation of young women to work independently in the context of charity were a guiding principle of the foundation. Thus, in the 19th century, many women were motivated to enter the deaconess ministry not only by spiritual motivation but also by the need to secure their livelihood. They usually wore a sister's habit, which consisted of a dark blue, gray or black dress, an apron and a white hood or veil. As novices, the future deaconesses were allowed to wear a broad stripe on their hoods for the next five to seven years, virtually as a sign of recognition. The hoods in their original form were small works of fine tulle with spotted gauze woven into them. Long ribbons at the front were finely crimped after washing and starching; a work of many hours.

Schäfer herself speaks of her own family. There were over eight children, only the oldest of whom, for dowry reasons, were married off. The remaining unmarried women were mostly passed on as maids. In order to escape this fate, many women saw in the Christian community of values a chance to learn a profession and thus to be socially secured and also to be guaranteed protection and security in old age or in case of illness. In her exhibition *Schwestern*, the artist presents three oversized, colorful hoods whose pattern is reminiscent of early versions of deaconess hoods. They bear the names of three women, deaconesses whose life stories impress or amaze. For example, Dorette, an economic criminal - this can be seen from the artist's notes - distributed food intended for day children in the children's home if they had not signed out and the small portions of chocolate and milk were thus left over, and gave it to mothers with younger children or people in need. Dorette was sent to prison for several years for her actions. Hilde and Anna are the names of the other two, Schäfer also reveals their story in her research work and exhibits what the hoods also tell, besides their surface, their materiality and impressive presence. What remains open are reflections on head coverings of female identities in broader faiths or cultures, or dystopian visions of the future that - whether as oppression or empowerment - refer to or even exhibit people's binary thinking. Bringing together her family's private archive, private photographs, and this examination of women functionaries in a society, the artist's results in a profound aesthetic experience whose historical imprint seems to manifest only a small part of its magic.