

galerie Catherine Putman  
œuvres sur papier · works on paper

# GEORG BASELITZ

## PIED À TERRE

18.III - 13.V.2017



Georg Baselitz "Ich höre Stimmen" [I hear voices], 2015  
etching and aquatint in black (2 plates) on Somerset | 85,5 x 64,5 cm

At the occasion of edition of new engravings by **Georg Baselitz**, *Besuch von Hokusai*, 2015 and *Ich höre Stimmen*, 2015 the Gallery Catherine Putman is pleased to present «Pied à terre», an exhibition of the artist's prints dating from 1995 to 2015. The gallery edits his works for 20 years.

## GEORG BASELITZ | PIED À TERRE

Rainer Michael Mason, 19 february 2017

Put simply, feet and legs are the figurative elements of which the exhibition is comprised. Because of the technique employed, the works exhibited are prints: images produced by means of relief printing (wood engraving or xylography) and intaglio (dry point, etching, and aquatint).

Georg Baselitz—who was born in Saxony in 1938, and who has become one of the leading figures in European art over the last four decades—told me in 1984 that, for him, engraving opens up ‘an additional form of analysis’ that is conducive ‘to the development of refined forms in drawing and painting’. And printmaking, as defined and practised by the German painter and engraver, does not reproduce ‘things that have been planned and developed beforehand’ in a mimetic manner: it clarifies them, and even gives them a ‘definitive form’.

Five years later, he explained it in a more specific way to Ulrich Weisner: ‘my primary intention—when something is changed or a new idea emerges in my painting, sculpture, and drawing work—is to exploit this via a graphic technique and execute it as a correction or clarification, like an exclamation mark’. The engravings do correspond—depending on the period concerned—to a unique style, a datable style (the artist often refers to a ‘method’), which is distinct from the ‘motif’ represented.

The painted, drawn, or sculpted form ‘reproduced’ on the copper or wood, which is very often linked to the stage in the creative process that is underway, is therefore subject to variations and finalisation work via a series of clarifications and diverse graphic treatments. The engraving therefore ‘reassures’ the artist and invites the viewer to see things from a completely unfamiliar perspective.

The 2014 sculpture *Winterschlaf* [Hibernation]—carved in wood and in the form of a bundle of four legs shod in large stilettos, lying in a wreath bound by three large hoops—took on its definitive horizontal form before mid October (Georg Baselitz had initially worked on creating a vertical sculpture). Two weeks later, before the sculpture was cast in bronze, he began working on copper, producing a series of studies of the new form with which he was preoccupied. He channelled all his intuition and sculpture work into the experimental studies: between 24 October and 9 November 2014, ten etchings and aquatints concretised the visual content of the artist’s imagination.

A rough sketch dating from 8 October 2014 reveals the thought process that led to the choice of title for the sculpture. The sheet of A4 paper bears the words « *una donna à quattro piedi passa* » [a woman with four feet passing] and, beneath this, « *Schneefall* » (snowfall). This is how the bunched legs with the dual use of strong and rigid stems that terminate in feet or shoes suddenly came into being, because of the sculpture’s horizontality and the idea of a woman elevated on her high heels, evoking the famous work by Joseph Beuys (1965) in the Basel Museum, which is composed of three very thin stripped spruce stems, partially covered (like snow muffling sound?) by a pile of thirty-two felt tiles. Ultimately, as he confided to a friend, Georg Baselitz based his work on this in a clever and enigmatic way: *Winterschlaf* [Hibernation], due to the sculpture’s somewhat tense, rough, and sharp appearance, evokes *Das Eismeer* [The Sea of Ice], which is a famous painting by Caspar David Friedrich (Kunsthalle, Hamburg, 1824).

Just as the title of a piece does not explain everything about Georg Baselitz's work, the figurative content is not the only means of expression in his oeuvre. Rather, the form is the most important thing, as a plastic object in its own right, and this also has a history and connotations.

In 1963, the group of eleven works entitled *P.D. FüÙe* [**P**andemonium Feet] were fragmentary and archaic images that focused on serial analysis and an insistence on matrices. Although the subject matter is easily nameable (the foot), it was almost eliminated and was 'reduced' at the same time to the status of a painting support, a place for the application of paint, and a veritable battle waged on the canvas. Georg Baselitz paints with colours that are both discordant and subtle, and the brushstrokes attest to an approach that resembles stippling and mixing.

Certainly in harmony with the approach—for example, that of the Mannerists' addiction to excess'—conveyed by the two *Pandämonium* manifestos that the artist signed in 1961 and 1962 respectively with his friend Eugen Schönebeck (\*1936), these *P.D. Feet* were primarily a relatively brutal plastic crystallisation, rather than a programmatic and literary translation of Antonin Artaud's 'discordance' and 'ugliness'.

In Georg Baselitz's oeuvre, fragmentation quickly became and continues to be a priority, not solely as a detail that was analysed and reconstituted, but rather as an object that had acquired an aesthetic and formal autonomy that corresponded with his own metaphorical background. Although one cannot dissociate Baselitzian feet, knees, calves, and shoes from, for example, Alberto Giacometti's *The Leg* (1958), a bronze standing on its base as 'a part representing the whole body' that plays on the body's anchorage and sense of balance, they are also connected with the 'singular philosophical orientation' that Georg Baselitz outlined again in a conversation in his home on 16 February 2017.

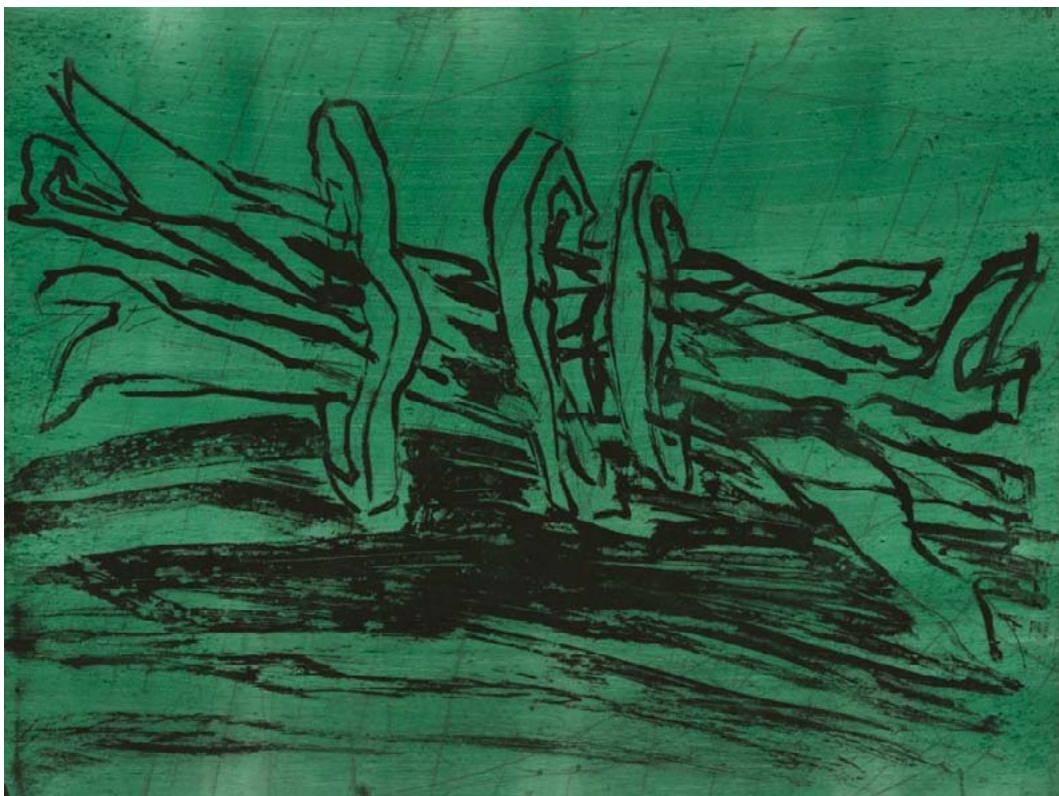
His feet are 'symbolic objects' that he has 'never worked from nature'; they are simply 'invented feet'. He refers to them as 'devotional pieces', as found to the Etruscans. In his opinion, 'parts of bodies painted like so many fragments are enough to create a picture' (which is the real challenge for an artist), because 'everything is image'. Initially, the decision to focus on feet—a part of the body he saw as the least attractive—was solely related to his desire to 'choose something disagreeable' (it is worth noting that the 'principle behind [his] oeuvre is contradiction, but contradiction applied to conventionalism, pictures, and art as everyday items'). As he explained in 2006, rather than painting flowers with the aim of conveying beauty, as his mother suggested, he decided to focus on the ugly and the grotesque. And without pausing to reflect on this, he never stopped painting, drawing, engraving, and sculpting feet for many years.

At some point, Georg Baselitz became aware of the reasons for this. He 'does not restrict himself to representing angels', which are associated with ancient Mediterranean and Oriental culture and are one of the major subjects of art. 'Our contact with the other world, he explains, does not occur via the sky but the earth. That's why north of the Alps, there are Germans, along with all these northern beings, trolls, forest creatures, water creatures, and nymphs—and all you need for that are simply feet! You are standing upright on the earth. You are not levitating. Your spirit is not flying away. That's it. A strange Nordic mythological construction.' Although one's head is still in the sky, even in Georg Baselitz's oeuvre, in which the subjects are generally upside down.



Georg Baselitz "Besuch von Hokusai I" [Visit of Hokusai I], 2015  
etching and aquatint in black (4 plates), on Somerset  
85,5 x 118,5 cm | 10 proofs





Georg Baselitz "Winterschlaf IX" [Hibernation IX], 2014  
etching and aquatint, in black on green background (2 plates), on Somerset  
69 x 82 cm | 10 proofs



Georg Baselitz "Winterschlaf X" [Hibernation X], 2014  
etching and aquatint, in black on yellow background (2 plates), on Somerset  
69 x 82 cm | 10 proofs



Georg Baselitz "Waldfuß" [Forestry foot], 1996 - 1997  
Woodcut, on Japan Hosho  
69 x 82 cm | 12 proofs





Georg Baselitz "Zelt" [Tent], 1995 - 1996  
dry point in colour (2 plates), on BFK Rives  
80 x 60 cm | 12 proofs