The Baroness

extraordinary poems

Published 11/07/2022

Cybernetic Serendipity - a walk around the exhibition

Newsletter Join our mailing list to receive the latest reviews of exhibitions and interviews with artists subscribe







was for us the least interesting



Pesellino: A Renaissance Master Revealed

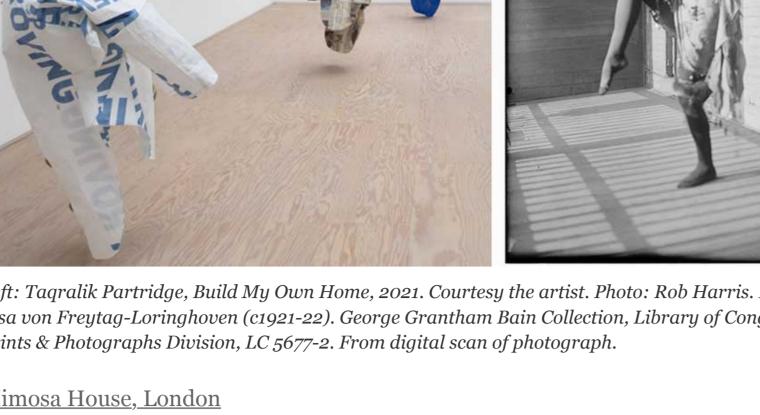


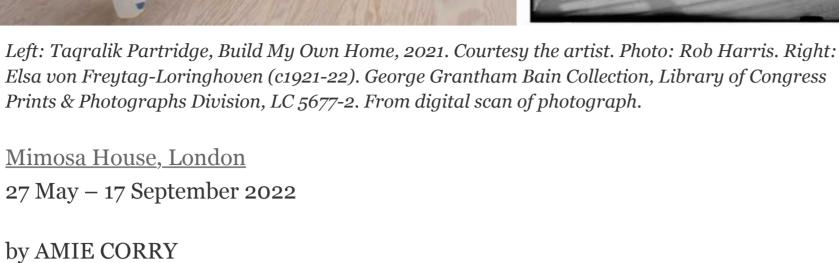
Don Van Vliet: Standing on One Hand





BARONESS V. FREYTAG-LORINGHOV

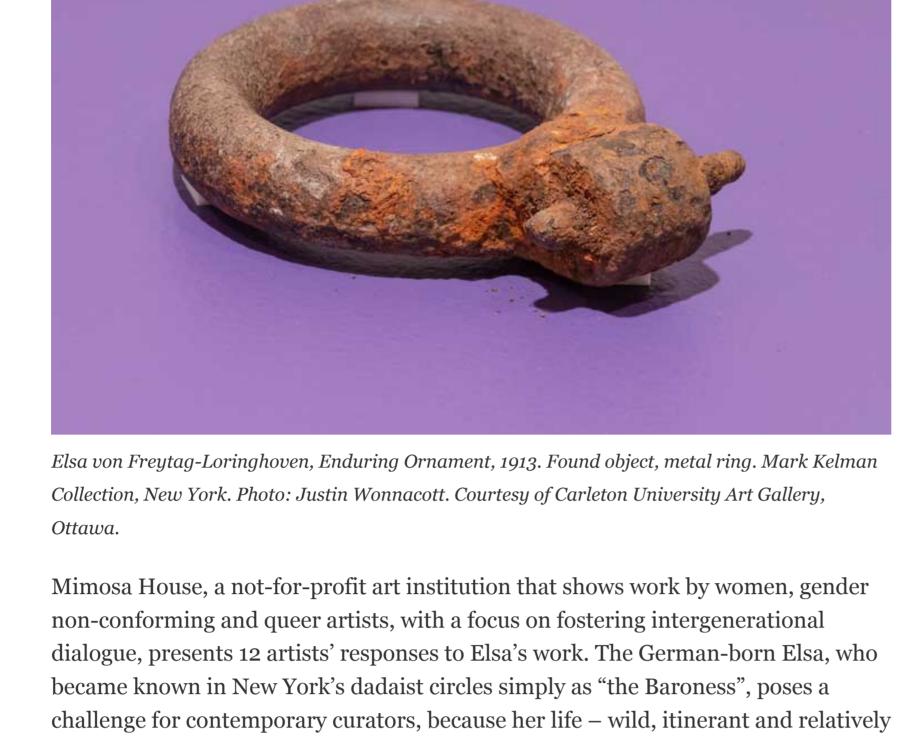




On 19 November 1913, Elsa Greve (1874-1927) – protopunk poet and performance artist - married an impoverished German aristocrat at New York's City Hall. With

this marriage, Elsa's third, Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven was born. On

her way to City Hall, Elsa found an abandoned iron ring, orange with rust, which she titled Enduring Ornament to mark her (short-lived) nuptials. The bracelet-sized object, one of three small works by von Freytag-Loringhoven featured in The Baroness at Mimosa House, London, stakes a solid claim to being one of the first readymades in art history.



undocumented – really was her work. Jane Heap (1883–1964), Elsa's editor at the Little Review, one of the few titles that dared to publish her incomparably radical poetry, described her as, "the only one living anywhere who dresses dada, loves dada, lives dada". It is thus mainly Elsa's spirit that the artists are responding to.

Sensitive curation propels the woman described by poet Hart Crane (1899-1932) as

tone, the show reminds us that a dadaist approach still holds significant merit as a

a "lunatic" but "right about society", firmly into the frame. Diverse in theme and

response to life's ills and absurdities. Along the way, it reflects on embodied

In 1910, Elsa moved from Berlin to New York, where she scraped a living as an

incorporating readymade, often ephemeral, elements into her costume, she

artist's model. She remained in material poverty for the rest of her life. Famed for

subversion and the vagaries of history.

pioneered an avant-garde assemblage that centred her body. Signature looks, which she commonly took to the streets of Greenwich Village, included cancelled postage stamps worn on each cheek in lieu of makeup, gilded vegetables, a pack of dogs at her heel and a shaven head. Her biographer, the American writer Djuna Barnes (1892-1982), described her donning a giant, homemade, plaster phallus, which she would brandish at impromptu intervals at passersby. Her extraordinary poetry, meanwhile, with its strange syntax and elongated em-dashes, tackled typical dadaist concerns alongside the pleasures, injustices and uncertainties of life in a woman's body. Against the backdrop of suffragist and birth-control activism in New York, Elsa ruminated on urban anonymity, consumerism, gender codes, women's right to pleasure, ejaculation, orgasm, anal sex, venereal disease ("every cloud has its sable rim") and sex toys ("no spinsterlollypop for me"). Given the scant physical archive, and the Baroness's foregrounding of her personhood, it is unsurprising that Mimosa House, like this year's Venice Biennale exhibition The Milk of Dreams, has placed imagery of Elsa at the heart of the exhibition. In both London and Venice, Elsa towers over proceedings in performance mode. Slides at Mimosa House include an image of a naked Elsa

strutting for the camera, which was probably taken during the production of a film

portraits of the Baroness, taken by an International News photographer in 1915 and

published only a decade ago, in which she poses, lunging or arms outstretched in

made in collaboration with Man Ray and Elsa's close friend Marcel Duchamp, in

which she shaved her pubic hair. Next are some of the most famous existing

DIY costume in a cluttered New York apartment.



fragment representing New York's skyscrapers, which touches on the dada concerns

watch spring and pearl earrings. The Polish artist Zuzanna Janin (b1961) responds

to these small-scale remains – objects to be worn or held or tossed away – in kind.

matter are interred within epoxy resin spheres dotted around the gallery. In Janin's

Home Transformed into Geometric Solids (2016-18) series, building materials and

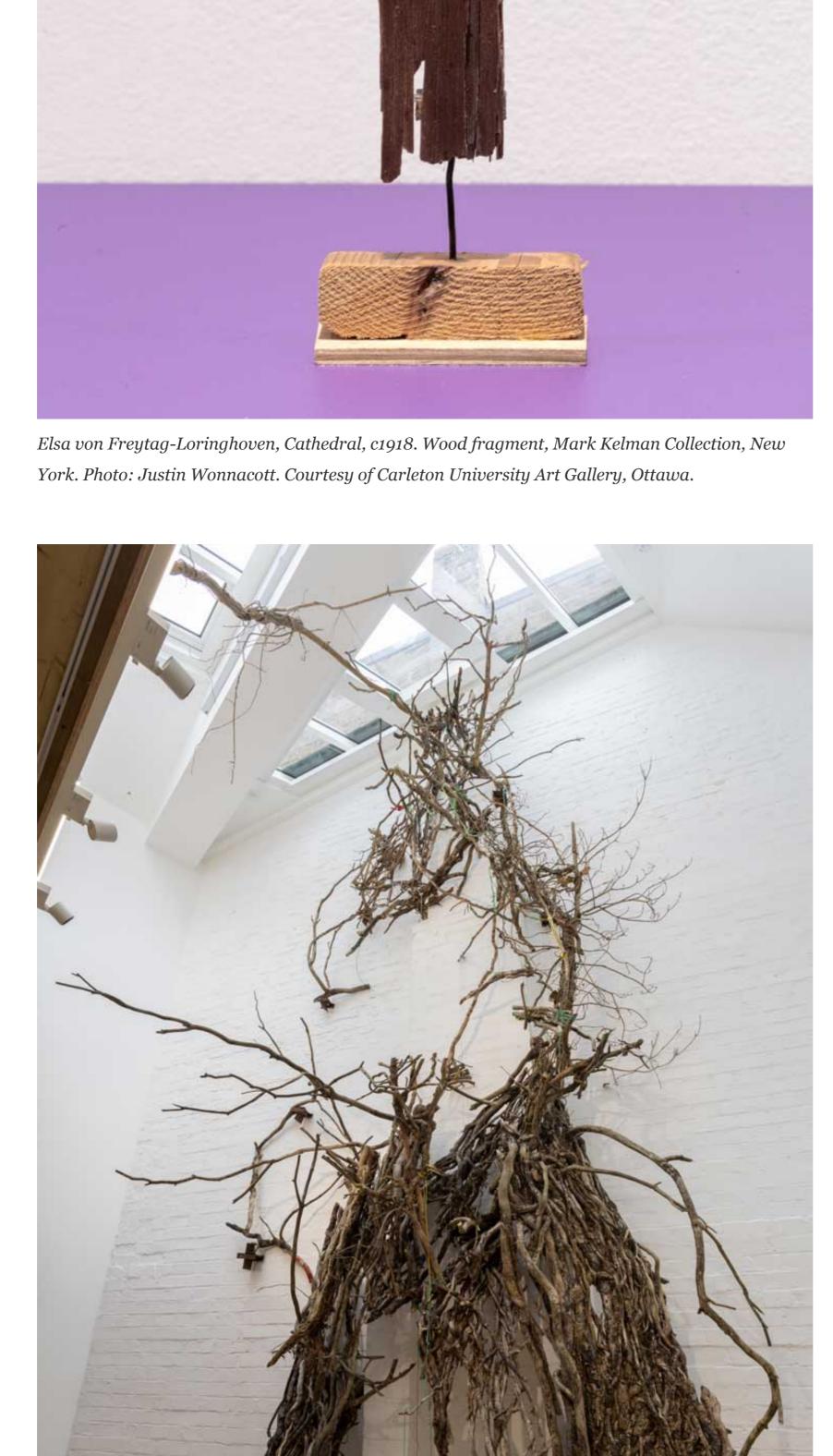
detritus salvaged from her family home, which was destroyed by bombing in 1944

and rebuilt for her mother and grandmother after they had survived being

transported to Auschwitz, are preserved.

of man/machine, automation and industry, and Earring-Object (c1918), a steel

Asking how we might memorialise loss, mementos, photographs and scraps of



Linda Stupart. Cathedral, 2022. Assemblage of sticks and branches. Installation view, The Baroness, Mimosa House, London. Photo: Rob Harris. Linda Stupart's Cathedral (2022) is a homage to Elsa's readymade of the same

assemblage of sticks and branches, collected from the banks of Birmingham's River

name, its expansive scale befitting her ambitions, if not her means. Stupart's

Cole, occupy the double-height section of the gallery, creating a shrine-like

provides one of the most powerful moments in the show. A series of parkas

alternative to brick, glass and steel. Upstairs, Taqralik Partridge's installation

traditionally worn by Inuit women (amautiit) are suspended mournfully from fine wires. Pointing to the precarity of life for Inuit communities, the amuatiit are crafted from offcuts of newspaper, tarp, plastic tubing and packing tape. Delicate silver teaspoons strung from their navels nod to Elsa's use of cutlery in her costume. Clothing is political, Partridge suggests, and assemblage, reframing and recycling are helpful tools when faced with a hostile and rapidly shifting environment.

Taqralik Partridge, Build My Own Home, 2021 (detail). Tyvek, canvas, newsprint, tarpaulin, hula hoops, thread, dental floss, synthetic sinew, silver teaspoons. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Rob Harris. The exhibition wisely accords Elsa's poetry ample space. Facsimiles of her iconoclastic, free-verse texts are vinyled on to the gallery's walls and each exhibiting artist has recorded a poem. Their voices roil and stutter through the space, introducing an important performative element (supplemented by a series of live events). Artist and political dominatrix Reba Maybury goes one step further and, in a move that would surely delight Elsa, has one of her male submissives read To

Home (1923), more sound art than poem ('...Diamond nostrils ejaculate / Brilliant

Maybury's A-good-individual (2019), which greets viewers on their entrance to the

gallery offers a rare glimpse of flesh in the show, playing on Elsa's famed love of

nudity but twisting the subject position. While Elsa described her performative

poses as "aggressive — virile extraordinary — invigorating — ante-stereotyped",

combine to make a kinetic "exquisite corpse". Backs to the camera, they appear

small, soft and vulnerable, their voices awkwardly reciting poetry at Maybury's

received during a tabloid media storm about her work as a dominatrix, who,

men in order to turn them into socialists".

request. The words of these cut-up verses are taken from misogynistic abuse she

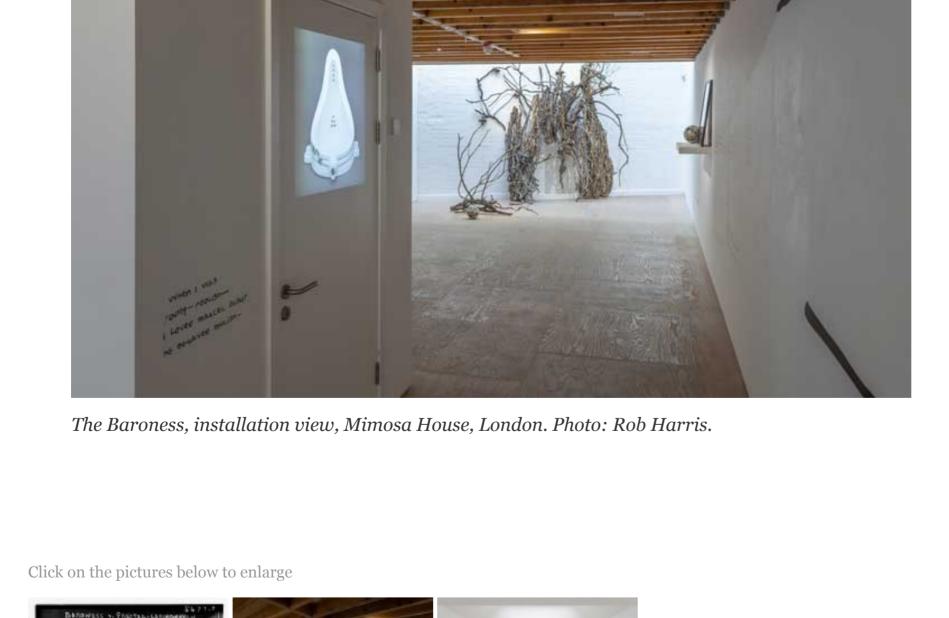
reported the <u>Daily Mail</u>, in <u>2018</u>, "focuses her unique skills on white, right-wing

Elsa remains most famous for her purported authorship of Fountain, the urinal

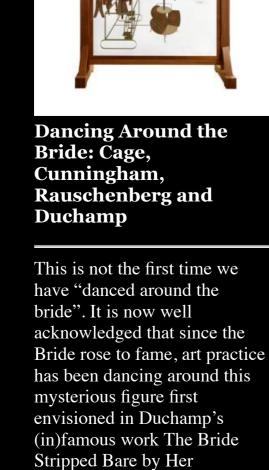
Maybury presents us with body parts of five different submissive men, which

carousel / Mine — thine — / To home! / Hussa! / Toot! / Ree daareee —...').

Duchamp submitted to the Society of Independent Artists in 1917. The battle over art history's most famous readymade rages on (Dawn Adés, professor emerita of art history at the University of Essex, wrote to the Guardian on the subject last month), and Mimosa House handles the affair's dominance of the conversation surrounding Elsa with suitable irreverence – its only reference, a projection of Fountain on the door of the gallery's toilet. Hopefully, exhibitions like this will prove her relevance extends beyond the Fountain affair.



related articles...



Bachelors, Even (1915-23) in

studio international

one way or another.







DC and the Museum of Modern

About Studio

Yearbooks

Contributors

Cybernetic Serendipity

Art in New York.

Home

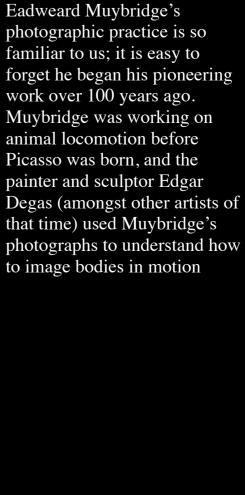
Archive

Video

Interviews



SOFFICI



Eadweard Muybridge: Shaping and Shifting

Our Point of View

the Studio International Foundation, PO Box 1545,

Accept Cookies

Close

Privacy and Cookie Policy

We use cookies to improve your experience on our website. By browsing this website, you agree to our use of cookies.