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Sipping from a furry teacup

Since 1983, Waisenhausplatz (Orphanage Square), just around the corner from the Berne Museum of Fine Arts 200 metres away, has been home to “The Spiral Column” – a fountain that artist Meret Oppenheim (1913–85) created two years before her death. Water drips down the tower-like structure, now covered at the top in plants, mosses and lichens. Icicles form when the water freezes.

Initial reaction to the artist’s work was also chilly. Locals called it the “column of shame”, or even the “urinal”. The fountain was certainly a talking point. It also showed how little the world-renowned Meret Oppenheim cared about

what other people thought of her work. Almost 40 years later, the Berne Museum of Fine Arts has been hosting a retrospective of this incredible woman who lived in the Swiss capital for so long. Entitled “My Exhibition”, the show provides a wide-ranging appreciation of Oppenheim’s immeasurable body of work. Oppenheim used almost every material in the book. It was her 1936 furry teacup (“Object”) that won plaudits from the outset. Oppenheim thought this iconic work was just quite strange, whereas the art world fell over itself to imbue the teacup with meaning.

Meret Oppenheim was labelled a surrealist. However, visitors to “My Exhibition” will dis-



My Nurse, 1936/1967

Metal platter, shoes, string, and paper; 14 x 33 x 21 cm

Moderna Museet, Stockholm

Photo: Albin Dahlström; 2021, © ProLitteris, Zurich



This work was missing from the exhibition in Berne:
Meret Oppenheim, "Object",
Paris, 1936. MoMA
Artists Rights Society, New York / Pro Litteris, Zurich

cover a fascinating array of original works by an artist who refused to be pigeonholed – and who suffered from artist's block for years but never lost her self-deprecating style. One of her works, "My Nurse", shows a pair of women's high-heeled shoes trussed together like a chicken and "served" sole side up on a silver platter.

"Freedom is not given to you – you have to take it," Oppenheim once said. She never veered from this ethos. Her furry teacup was missing from the exhibition in Berne – she probably would have been relieved to hear.

JÜRIG STEINER

Tour of "My Exhibition" by television presenter Ueli Schmetzer (in Swiss German): [revue.link/oppenheim](https://www.revue.link/oppenheim)

After its Berne residency, "My Exhibition" will be housed at The Menil Connection in Houston, USA (25 March to 18 September 2022) before moving to the Museum of Modern Art in New York (30 October 2022 to 4 March 2023).



Spring Day, 1961
Oil on plastic material and wood with wire basket, 50 x 34 cm
Private collection
© 2021, ProLitteris, Zurich



Six Clouds on a Bridge, 1975
Bronze; 46,8 x 61 x 15,5 cm
Kunstmuseum Bern, Meret Oppenheim Bequest
Photo: Peter Lauri, Berne, © 2021, ProLitteris, Zurich



Squirrel, 1960/1969
Beer glass, plastic foam and fur; 21.5 x 13 x 7.5 cm
Kunstmuseum Bern
Photo: Peter Lauri, Berne; © 2021, ProLitteris, Zurich