

BUNDESKUNSTHALLE

Media information

JOSEPHINE BAKER

Freedom – Equality – Humanity

18 May – 24 September 2023

On 30 November 2021, Josephine Baker became the sixth woman ever to be inducted into the French nation's hall of fame, the Panthéon. An honour with a signal effect, because Josephine Baker was much more than a glamour girl, even if this aspect outshines many of her life's achievements. She was a freedom fighter who was intensely committed to equal rights for all people, regardless of their skin colour, religion, nationality, gender or sexual orientation. A reason to dedicate an exhibition to the rightly honoured woman, which is presented in our women's series and reminds us of the great presentation 1920s! *In the Kaleidoscope of Modernism.*

Josephine Baker, born in 1906 in St. Louis on the Mississippi in a poor black neighbourhood, experienced segregation and racial unrest as a child. After launching her career in America, she went to Europe and became the first female superstar with African-American roots and the highest-paid revue dancer in the world in Paris in the 1920s. With her wildly exotic stage performances, she thrilled the public and the Parisian art and literary scene. Picasso is said to have posed with her several times, Hemingway wrote about her, Henri Matisse made a silhouette and Alexander Calder several wire sculptures. Later, Josephine Baker inspired artists such as Andy Warhol, Keith Haring and Peter Lindbergh as well as performers such as Grace Jones, Madonna, Angelina Jolie and Naomi Campbell.

Josephine Baker may have been an icon of the 1920s, but her radiance has never waned because she dedicated her life to the struggle for freedom. She adopted twelve children of different origins and set an example against racism and for equality and equal rights with her rainbow family. After 1945, she was honoured by Charles de Gaulle for her commitment to a free France. For her commitment to the American civil rights movement, the Josephine Baker Day has been celebrated on 20 May since 1951. Martin Luther King brought her to America for the March on Washington in 1963.

The exhibition focuses on Josephine Baker as a world star, freedom fighter and icon. It sheds light on what her success as the first "black" superstar was based on and how she turned the supposed stigmas of her skin colour into her strength: Josephine Baker conquered a world audience as a dancer, singer and actress. Fame became her weapon in the fight against the racial policies of the Nazis, against racism within the American armed forces during the Second World War and finally in the civil rights movement. To this day, she remains a role model for self-empowerment and social engagement.

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The Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, is also planning an exhibition on Josephine Baker for 2023. While the Bundeskunsthalle will be dedicated to the life and reception of Josephine Baker, the Berline exhibition will be guided by the motto "Life is art, art is life".

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