



Clockwise, from far left: Isabelle Bscher (holding Lollipop) and her mother, Krystyna Gmurzynska, at their Zurich gallery, flanked by Joan Miró's *Homme et Femme*, 1962 (left) and Tom Wesselmann's *Brown Nude Banner*, 1971; Gmurzynska, with Karl Lagerfeld, at the opening of his exhibition "Visionen," in Cologne, 1996; Antonina Gmurzynska, Krystyna's late mother, who founded the gallery, in 1965; an exterior view of the Cologne space, 1980.



FAMILY VALUES

Three generations of art-mad women have led Zurich's Galerie Gmurzynska to the forefront. Christopher Bagley pays a visit.

Last year during Art Basel, the annual feeding frenzy for all things new and fashionable in contemporary art, one of the hottest shows stood apart from the rest. Its subject was a German artist who has been dead for almost 70 years and whose work wasn't particularly sought-after even while he was alive: the Dada fixture Kurt Schwitters. More significantly, it wasn't held in Basel, but at Galerie Gmurzynska, an hour away by train. Nevertheless, a parade of the world's top curators and collectors made the pilgrimage to the space in Zurich's historic city center, where the late architect Zaha Hadid, in what turned out to be one of her final projects, had reconfigured the interiors with a series of dramatically swooping Schwitters-inspired walls.

You'd be forgiven for assuming that the show was yet another case of a major gallery dabbling in the sale of 20th-century artworks while riding out the current softening in the market for brand-new art. In fact, Galerie Gmurzynska has been exhibiting Schwitters and other modern masters for 50 years. Under the aegis of three generations of women, the family gallery has developed a knack for mixing the classic and the contemporary, recontextualizing both in a way that now seems very of the moment. On the afternoon I stop by the Zurich headquarters, Flavin Judd (the son of late artist Donald Judd) is upstairs in the office, planning the opening of an exhibition of his father's work alongside that of the Russian Suprematist Kazimir Malevich at the gallery's new space. "A lot of our shows are about artists people think they know, but then realize they actually don't," says Krystyna Gmurzynska, the gallery's 66-year-old matriarch.

Veterans of the European art world still speak reverently of Krystyna's late mother, Antonina Gmurzynska—a tiny woman with a formidable intellect who was left without a family in her native Poland at

age 13, after the Nazis killed her parents and siblings. In the early 1960s, following a stint at a museum in Warsaw, Antonina escaped to the West and landed in Cologne, Germany, where, with no social connections or business experience, she opened a gallery. She began exhibiting work by Malevich and other artists from Russia's early-20th-century avant-garde, who were out of favor at the time but soon caught on with big-deal collectors, like Baron Heinrich "Heini" Thyssen-Bornemisza.

After Antonina's death, in 1986, Krystyna began signing on more-contemporary artists and raising Galerie Gmurzynska's profile at art fairs. In 2005, the gallery relocated to Zurich, and lately it has received a new injection of glamour from Krystyna's statuesque 30-year-old daughter, Isabelle Bscher, whose immersion in the art scene began early: "I learned to walk at either Art Basel or FIAC, I can't remember which," she says. As part of a social circle that includes Diana Widmaier-Picasso (Picasso's granddaughter) and Joan Punyet Miró (Miró's grandson), as well as contemporary cohorts like Ed Ruscha, she's determined to expand the gallery's eclectic old-new mix: Last summer she spent several weeks in Los Angeles, making studio visits and scouting for a pop-up space for an upcoming show of American masters.

Throughout the years, Galerie Gmurzynska has managed to preserve its highbrow reputation despite a few pointedly unsavory ventures. There was the 2014 collaboration with director Baz Luhrmann and his wife, the costume designer Catherine Martin, at Art Basel Miami Beach, called "A Kid Could Do That!," which riffed on the dismissive cliché about contemporary art. Gmurzynska was also the first serious gallery to sign Karl Lagerfeld before he was established as a photographer. Certainly, the most surprising addition was Sylvester Stallone, who initially came to the gallery as a collector; later, Krystyna visited his home studio in Los Angeles, saw "something special" in his paintings, and offered him a show. She shrugs off the snickers from those who see it as an attempt to trade on Stallone's celebrity. "Maybe he's Rocky, but he's also very cultivated and very sensitive. And the physical side of him is something you feel in his paintings."

This month, the gallery will debut nearly 3,000 square feet of exhibition space with the Judd/Malevich show in a former Zurich hat factory, offering more room for large works—but not the Gerhard Richters and Richard Princes that have become ubiquitous at auction. Mathias Rastorfer, the gallery's co-owner and CEO, notes that its longtime core clients—the connoisseurs, as opposed to the speculative buyers—are finally making a comeback. "If the market is going up like crazy, you don't need us," he says. "But during times where you go for substance and longevity and real value again, that's always when we advance even more."

Meanwhile, the gallery's newest partner is Isabelle's younger brother, 27-year-old Lucas Bscher, an avid race-car driver whose social media feeds are overrun with shots of polo matches and Formula One events. (The siblings' father is Krystyna's ex-husband, the former banker and Bugatti president Thomas Bscher.) Lucas still gets to the track whenever he has time, but when our conversation turns to art, he makes it clear that a healthy skepticism about all things facile and flashy still runs in the family. "What I find a bit sad is that now you have a very young generation of artists who cater to Instagram too much," Lucas says. "They make art that photographs well. I think you have to see art in real life. Not everything looks good on a phone screen." ♦