

KUNSTHALL STAVANGER



I'm a hundred million farts (2020), 100 x 150 cm, watercolour on paper. Courtesy Vanessa Baird and OSL contemporary. Photo: Øystein Thorvaldsen.

For immediate release

VANESSA BAIRD

**HERE WE ARE AGAIN,
HAPPY AS CAN BE,
ALL GOOD PALS AND JOLLY GOOD COMPANY**

June 17 – September 5, 2021

In the largest and most significant presentation to date of Vanessa Baird's artistic universe, the acclaimed Norwegian artist is taking over all of Kunsthall Stavanger's galleries.

The exhibition comprises six galleries filled with Baird's works, from intimate self-portraits to large-scale room installations. Most of the works were produced during 2019-2021, and are shown here for the first time. Also on view are a selection of works by artists that are close to Baird: Her mother, Maureen Baird, and her long-time collaborator Mette Hellenes.

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"Kunsthall Stavanger is proud to present this substantial exhibition by Vanessa Baird, who is one of Norway's most important contemporary artists," says Kunsthall Stavanger's Director Hanne Mugaas.

"In the exhibition, Baird puts the spotlight on the ongoing coronavirus pandemic that has affected us all. Through her personal experiences, visitors will be able to reflect on the collective ordeal of living through the pandemic. In particular, Baird explores how women have once again been put in the position as full-time caregivers".

Baird's works are both highly provocative and emphatically individual. Through her unique voice, the artist captures something that is specifically Norwegian and decidedly grounded in her own visual culture, although her political and feminist engagement travels easily across borders.

FEATURED ARTWORKS

Behind the picket fence / I'll be pushing up the daisies (2020–21) is an extensive series of large-scale watercolours displayed in Kunsthall Stavanger's main gallery, where Baird provides us with near-daily updates of her life at home during the pandemic-mandated isolation. Through vivid images of herself and her family, Baird captures the states of exhaustion, boredom and frustration that accompany the everyday tasks of looking after a household, conjuring up the chaotic detritus of domestic life in a kaleidoscope of provocatively raw imagery.

A little red coat, a pair of beautiful blue trousers and a green umbrella lost at sea (2020) comprises fourteen large-scale watercolours on rolls of paper, four metres high and seventeen metres long. Whilst Baird's work is rooted in the autobiographical, here her scope widens: disturbing scenes of figures drowning in the waves might be informed by Norwegian folklore, pervaded by legends of the sea, as well as referencing international political issues such as the European refugee crisis.

Red Herring – Prednisolon ciclosporin (2014–18) is a series of intimate self-portraits in watercolour, made over a period of four years whilst the artist was being treated for a chronic illness. These works beautifully communicate the extreme physical and emotional effects the medication had on her: her bloated face and bleary eyes, expressing anguish and pain, stare out at us from her fiercely red face, whilst in another portrait, bleached of colour, her features ebb away into a kind of miasma.

Works by Baird's long-time collaborator, Mette Hellenes, is on view in a dedicated gallery. The works are cut-out pages from her diary, describing the dullness of her life during the pandemic. On view are also several collaborative works by Baird and Hellenes, among them the two videos **You bad animal! Can't you leave me alone just for one minute!** and **I see an angel. I think it's you** (both 2004). In these distorted self portraits of the good friends and collaborators, the artists explore decay and discomfort, an approach we can recognize from both Baird's and Hellenes' practices.

Upon entering Kunsthall Stavanger, you will find furniture decorated by Baird's mother Maureen Baird, who is also an artist. The furniture is in daily use at Vanessa and Maureen's shared home. Maureen's imagery includes feminist perspectives and figures in a visual idiom that clearly brings to mind her daughter's art.

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FROM THE PRESS

"Boiling with intergenerational resentments, annoyances, frustrations, argument and domestic incidents of one sort or another, Baird depicts a pressure-cooker life: boring, repetitive and extraordinary, the emotional weather intemperate and unpredictable. It is a rickety life, the walls closing in."

- Adrian Searle in his review in *The Guardian* of Baird's recent exhibition *If Ever There Were an End to a Story That Had No Beginning* at Drawing Room in London, March 1 - May 9, 2021.

ABOUT VANESSA BAIRD

Vanessa Baird (b. 1963) lives and works in Oslo. She studied at the Norwegian National Academy of Craft and Art Industry in Oslo 1982–85, the Royal College of Art in London 1985–87, and the Norwegian National Academy of Fine Arts in Oslo 1988–91. Her work is rife with dark, haunting allusions that often evoke fables. Baird's intense, meticulous drawings typically take the personal and the domestic as a starting point and usually also comment on contemporary political and social situations.

In 2015 Baird won the prestigious Lorck Schive Kunstpris, one of the premier art awards for artists living and working in Norway. She has also collaborated with the critically acclaimed author Karl Ove Knausgård and illustrated his novel *Om høsten* (*Autumn*, 2015). In 2017, Baird opened her solo exhibition *You are something else* at Kunstneres Hus. The exhibition was lauded by critics and curators alike as a standout event in recent Norwegian art history.

Baird has recently exhibited at Drawing Room in London (2021), the Kochi-Muziris Biennale in India (2019), KODE in Bergen (2018–19), OSL contemporary (2018), and Kunstneres Hus (2017) in Oslo.

ABOUT METTE HELLENES

Mette Hellenes (b. 1964) lives and works in Oslo. She studied at the Norwegian National Academy of Craft and Art Industry (1985) and the Norwegian National Academy of Fine Arts (1986–90) and works as a visual artist and cartoonist. In her work, Hellenes addresses current social and political events and also provides intimate and diary-like glimpses into her own life.

Hellenes is above all known for *Kebbelife*, a satirical comic strip featuring the recurring characters Mette and Vanessa, respectively based on Hellenes herself and her colleague Vanessa Baird. *Kebbelife* is featured in the weekly newspaper *Morgenbladet*, and several collections of the strip have been published.

Hellenes has exhibited at venues such as KODE (2018–19), Galleri F15 (2016–17), Tegnerforbundet (2010), and Kunstneres Hus (2002). Her works have been acquired by institutions such as the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Arts Council Norway, the Norwegian Ministry of Culture, and KODE.

ABOUT MAUREEN BAIRD

Maureen Baird (b. 1931, Glasgow, Scotland) lives in Oslo. She graduated from the Edinburgh College of Art (1954–56) and has worked as an artist since 1960. Baird also holds a degree in psychology from the University of Oslo. Baird is particularly well-known for her paintings and interiors, where furniture and textiles are stylized in an active, vibrant manner that presents a distorted view of reality. She is also

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known for painting on furniture and is especially interested in issues pertaining to women, and she often explores the idea of the home.

Throughout her career, Baird has been actively involved in political issues. She has fought for better rights for sick children and for the extension of visiting hours at hospitals and health institutions since the 1960s. Her political engagement is also visible in her artworks. She has exhibited her works in Norway since the 1980s.

Baird has held exhibitions at institutions such as Oslo kunstforening (2002), Skånes kunstforening (2006), and Kristiansand Kunsthall (2009), and she has also held exhibitions in the United Kingdom. Her works have been acquired by institutions such as the University of Oslo and Drammens Museum.

ABOUT KUNSTHALL STAVANGER

Kunsthall Stavanger is a contemporary art institution in Stavanger, Norway, that serves as a platform for the production, exhibition, and distribution of artworks that are part of a large international discourse. We collaborate with artists and guest curators to develop solo and group exhibitions with the goal of creating transformative experiences and in-depth audience engagement.

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