



## Black Swans in Art *Part 3*

Adam Fuss:  
Untitled  
From the series  
*My Ghost*, 2000  
Daguerreotype  
27.9 × 35.6 cm

In 2019, expectedly or unexpectedly, the number of female buyers of art increased to 36%, a 9% increase compared to 2018. On average, they spent significantly more on art than men during the same period. The black swan called altruism, an animal that may have been looking for a different lifestyle for a long time, was already peeking out from beneath a blanket of numbers last year. Who or what is a black swan? “It appears very rarely in nature. But more importantly, it exists. It epitomizes residual risk,” wrote author and journalist Gabor Steingart, not yesterday but in March 2011, in a book titled “The End of Normality.” **The power of the black swan in art shows itself after a long foreshadowing not only in the form of calls for solidarity from the galleries and museums. The new power now inevitably emanates from female collectors.** Women are the unexpected harbingers of a new culture, if not a new form of economy, which was previously only rarely able to develop on the basis of powerfully new premises. Corona has come to the aid of women insofar as the lock-down has promoted and perhaps underwritten their particular kind of thoughtfulness, a reassessment of consciousness itself: Not yet where acute need is rampant, but where home offices are functioning and new forms of spiritual and intellectual creativity are flowering. We are ready, albeit often still in a theoretical mode, to deconstruct established habits of thought, evinced, for example, in Georg Baselitz’s assertion that women cannot paint. With a little tutoring, we are now prepared to examine the impact of various kinds of discourse. Normative ideals, for example the notion that wars are inevitable even though everyone wants peace, are now more often than before seen through as constructions that should be susceptible to deconstruction before we all enter the kingdom of heaven. The old culture, based on economic systems that have always been patriarchal and that have existed for thousands of years, is beginning to crumble, and not only in response to demands for gender quotas. **Many credos once thought to be exclusively feminist now have currency in the salons. The foes of the old patriarchs find themselves in the majority, much as most of us feel about drivers who stubbornly disregard sensible traffic rules. The tight concentration of power in the hands of a few is beginning to loosen.** We in the cultural field are sensing that the time has come to rethink many ties to the past. We recognize that nobody and almost nothing exists independently of cultural forms. Picasso, that indisputable genius, alarms us by his barely tolerable relationship with women. Warhol, on the other hand, the epitome of a man who seemed to have no opinion at all, embodied as a genius the kind of personality that perhaps all too frequently sees and paints with his ears.

We loved and love them both, but it may be that others inspire our admiration today. We have also been led to wonder, thanks to a 2019 exhibition, why Emil Nolde was able to paint his “unpainted pictures” during the years of the second world war and emerge after 1945 as Germany’s exalted hero of modernity and a personification of “inner emigration,” even though after 1933 he was an enemy of the Jews and a rather ardent Nazi. We see through words and signals that are used only for branding. We mistrust performative acts that are obviously aimed at promoting power and sales. The virus has stopped the manufacture of many products, has broken supply chains, closed down plants and abruptly reduced the amount of loud, CO<sub>2</sub>-causing traffic on the streets, on the rails, and in the air. Unsold oil now lies in the holds of the supertankers, which will not be able to unload their cargo for a while to come. The current quantity of many airplanes and other means of transport will no longer be needed in the near future. It is therefore not only a disease, Covid-19, that is coming to an end. Together we are envisioning a changed future and looking for words, perhaps without the slightly inflationary implications of the term “a new era”. **What are we looking for? Perhaps for what has long since ceased to be the preference of women alone: friendlier forms of physicality, a more thoughtful ethics, more appreciation of what is different and other. Perhaps more civil disobedience when oppressive images and norms, as well as economic inequalities, persist too blatantly and for too long.** The point is not to punish and stigmatize individual figures, this or that unloved artist, politician, entrepreneur, or person in whom we may identify a stereotype of what we have come to loathe. There is an obvious need for a new art and new forms of socially appropriate behavior; and there is the perennial need to regulate our social existence in large and small ways, and to establish these new forms in a manner that is both clear and benign. Art and the contribution of women as well as men, today and in the near future, will consist in saving the planet, as well as in trying to save those people who are still too rarely or not at all able to experience the love of life, which includes a natural death, with dignity and with the leisure it takes to reflect on that love in peace and quiet. If these days Woodstock is happening at home, perhaps the spark may leap from our heads into many hearts.

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