
THE
DRAWING
CENTER

Huguette Caland: Tête-à-Tête

June 11–September 19, 2021



For press inquiries and images, contact:
Allison Underwood,
Director of Communications
212 219 2166 x119
aunderwood@drawingcenter.org

The Drawing Center
35 Wooster Street
New York, NY 10013
drawingcenter.org

Free Admission
Wednesday–Sunday: 12–6pm

“I love every minute of my life. I squeeze it like an orange, and I eat the peel, because I don’t want to miss a thing.” —Huguette Caland, 2003

New York... On view from June 11 through September 19, 2021, *Huguette Caland: Tête-à-Tête* is the Lebanese artist’s most comprehensive solo museum exhibition in the United States to date. Charting Caland’s unorthodox path to artistic success, the exhibition spans her five-decade career and features over 100 works on paper and canvas, as well as caftans, sculptures, and notebooks on and in which she wielded her pen. *Tête-à-Tête* celebrates Caland’s unconventional and exuberant perspective on both life and art, and surveys how she used the medium of drawing throughout her career to challenge traditional representations of sexuality, the body, and desire.

At the age of thirty-three, Caland declared her intention to become an artist and enrolled in art courses at the American University of Beirut. There she created some of her earliest compositions, including *Helen* (1967). These early works—characterized by thick, assertive lines that render simplified figures and landscapes—laid the foundation for her enduring fascination with bodies and human interconnectedness. In 1970, Caland moved to Paris, while her husband and children remained in Beirut, and delved in earnest into the eroticism that would become integral to her work into the 1970s and 1980s. During her first years in Paris, Caland made delicate line drawings of intertwined body parts, caressing lovers, and topsy-turvy personages. Around 1973, she began her best known body of work, *Bribes de corps* (Body Bits), a series of more abstracted, but equally sensual renderings of curvaceous forms resembling swollen breasts and vulvas, buttocks and puckered lips. Many of these vibrant and fleshy close-ups of body parts and orifices recall those of friends and lovers, or the weight of the artist’s own body. Even as Caland found new ways to distend and abstract human forms in her drawings, she translated these compositions back onto the body, embellishing the caftans that she wore in defiance of current trends, and tailoring them with the same continuous lines found in her works on paper. These caftans, decorated with embracing arms and X-ray-like renderings of nude bodies, caught the attention of French fashion designer Pierre Cardin, who, from 1978–79,

collaborated with Caland on a line of caftans inspired by the artist's provocative personal style.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, Caland embarked on a series of delicate color pencil drawings that borrowed from the same muted palette as many of the artist's paintings, while in the 1990s her lines began to take on a life of their own. The 1992 series *Homage to Pubic Hair*, executed after Caland moved from Paris to Venice, California, is a multicolored exploration of one body part of particular erotic interest. In these drawings, Caland used her signature linework to detail gently curling loops and triangles of hair sprouting from fleshy patchwork figures. The wavering figural geometry in the *Homage to Pubic Hair* series harkens back to her 1970s pen drawings, while the washes of bleeding color and increasing abstraction presage her later works from the mid-2000s, when she began to draw inspiration from Palestinian embroidery and the Byzantine aesthetic that permeate Lebanese culture. In these compositions executed on linen, the fluid lines of her early drawings and paintings—as well as their focus on the figure—give way to straighter, grid-like markings suggestive of urban topographies interspersed with curvilinear details invoking fields of flowers and other vegetation. To make these large-scale works, Caland folded and unfolded sections of unstretched canvas, working on one section at a time so that she was unaware of the whole until it was completed. The resulting compositions are rarely continuous or fused, and instead resemble patchwork quilts or bird's-eye views of composite terrains.

Throughout the works on view in *Tête-à-Tête*, Caland conveys the vitality of the human body and spirit with her fluid and candid use of the medium of drawing. Indeed it is the drawn line—whether on paper, canvas, sculpture, or cloth—that remains constant across her diverse bodies of work, and it is through line that one observes the themes of mutability, sensuality, and the basic human desire for intimate connection that motivated Caland in her work and life for over five decades.

Huguette Caland: Tête-à-Tête is organized by Claire Gilman, Chief Curator, with Isabella Kapur, Curatorial Associate.

Image: Huguette Caland, *Homage to Pubic Hair*, 1992, 10 × 10 inches (25.4 × 25.4 cm), ink on paper mounted on panel. Private Collection.

Publication

The exhibition is accompanied by an edition of the Drawing Papers series, which includes over 100 color illustrations and an introduction to Caland and her multifaceted approach to drawing by Gilman; an essay that explores the relationship between body and place in Caland's work by cultural theorist and art historian Hannah Feldman; and a collaborative text and conversation between Lebanese artist Marwa Arsanios and writer Mirene Arsanios.

The publication is available for purchase at The Drawing Center and in its online bookstore at drawingcenter.org. As with every publication produced by The Drawing Center, it is also available to read in a digital format, free of charge.

Credits

Major support for *Huguette Caland: Tête-à-Tête* is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts; The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; Lisa Silver and Jean-Christophe Castelli; and Amy Gold and Brett Gorvy.

Generous funding is provided by Étant donnés Contemporary Art, a program of the French American Cultural Exchange (FACE) Foundation. Étant donnés is developed in partnership with the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in the United States, with lead funding from the Florence Gould Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, Chanel USA, the ADAGP, the French Ministry of Culture, and Institut Français - Paris.

Additional support is provided by Zaza and Philippe Jabre, Kayne Griffin Corcoran, Lisson Gallery, Jane Lombard Gallery, Sarah Peter, Tony Tamer, Saleh and Hala Barakat, Marianne Boesky Gallery, Carla Chammas and Judi Roaman, Tammy and Georges Makhoul, and TOTAH NY.