

## Goodbye to Berlin

**Sarah Haffner (1940–2018)**

### On the Occasion of Her 80th Birthday

Opening: Thursday, 16th January 2020, 6-9 p.m.

Introduction (around 7 pm): Ingeborg Ruthe,  
art critic for the *Berliner Zeitung*

Exhibition from 17th January to 29th February 2020

Reading and Discussion: 27th February 2020 at 7 p.m.

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Tues-Sat, 12 am to 6 pm

and by appointment

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On 27th February 2020, Sarah Haffner would have turned eighty years old. In honour of this occasion, Galerie Poll is dedicating an exhibition to the painter and writer, entitled *Goodbye to Berlin*, with works from various periods of her creative production. The title refers to Christopher Isherwood's book of the same name, which was very dear to the artist's heart. To celebrate her birthday, companions from her life's journey will read from texts written by Haffner – an engaged member of the '68 generation and daughter of the journalist and author Sebastian Haffner.

"Painting is not only abstract like music. Nor does it narrate like literature, but rather it lies in between. One needs the object as resistance for abstraction" (Sarah Haffner). These theses, formulated early on, influenced Haffner's artistic work throughout her life.

As an artist, Haffner first finds her themes in everyday life. She paints the dishes, her record collection, her worktable, or a shelf with books as it would have been found in every left-wing household in the 1960s. And again and again, she paints views from the window looking out upon the chestnut tree in the courtyard of her apartment on Uhlandstraße, where she lived for over fifty years, her personal shelter. She paints cityscapes, many with the firewalls typical of Berlin; later, landscapes and people – especially large heads and self-portraits – are among her motifs. Occasionally Sarah Haffner also paints her pictures in series, presenting a motif in a range of different colour schemes in the different moods of light of a time of day or season.

Haffner's paintings are characterised above all by clear forms and by their colour palette, for which the artist developed a special mixed technique of oil paint and egg tempera. Next to composition, for Haffner colour is the most important thing in her paintings. She uses colour not naturalistically but expressionistically, and at the same time spatially. Colour is what

carries the mood in the pictures – often a Mediterranean blue or blue-green, which is for Sarah Haffner the colour of the soul and not infrequently of melancholy.

"It is only at first glance that Sarah Haffner paints realistic pictures in a figurative sense. Object and figure are put into tension within a compositional framework that might be called constructivist, which abstracts forms into colour fields. Space and corporeality emerge as pictorial plasticity primarily in this dialogue of colours, not through suggestive perspective. ... That's what gives her paintings this emphatic stillness" (Jörn Merkert).

Sarah Haffner was born in 1940 in Cambridge (England), where her parents had emigrated from Berlin in 1938 because of her mother's Jewish background, and grew up in London. In 1954 she moved with her family to West Berlin, where she attended the Master School for Arts and Crafts (Meisterschule für das Kunsthandwerk, 1956-57) and studied painting at the University for Visual Arts (Hochschule für bildende Künste, HfbK) under Professors Hans Jaenisch and Ernst Schumacher (1957-60). Sarah Haffner lived in Berlin, with two short interruptions by stays in Paris and London, until shortly before her death. Her son David was born in 1960. In 1973, she finally obtained her diploma as a master student at the HfbK. In 1975-76, Sarah Haffner authored a television report and edited a book about the abuse of women. As a result, Berlin first women's shelter was founded in 1976, where she worked as a volunteer for six months. Works by Sarah Haffner can be found in numerous private and public collections, including the Berlinische Galerie, Museum für Moderne Kunst, the Jewish Museum Berlin, the Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin, and the Collection of the Federal Republic of Germany.