

Christa Walhof

Extended Artist Text & CV

Artistic practice between painting, pictorial tradition, and contemporary discourse

Christa Walhof has been engaged since the late 1980s in a sustained investigation of painting as a medium. Her work operates in the tension between figurative representation, conceptual reduction, and a critical reflection on art-historical premises. Rather than focusing on the individual motif, her practice is driven by the question of what painting can achieve today—beyond illustration, narration, or symbolic attribution.

Walhof's work is characterized by a deliberate restraint toward fixed interpretations. Meaning is not asserted but opened. The paintings demand attention without directing it, relying instead on a form of presence that unfolds only through sustained viewing.

Education and Early Context

After studying at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, Walhof's artistic development took place in an environment that increasingly questioned painting as a viable contemporary practice. In the class of Jörg Immendorff, she encountered an explicit demand for artistic position and political awareness. By contrast, Bernhard Johannes Blume emphasized a philosophically informed engagement with questions of perception, temporality, and identity.

The widely proclaimed thesis of the "end of painting" did not constitute a rupture but rather a point of departure. Instead of turning away from the medium, Walhof consciously chose to continue working within painting and to examine its capacities. This understanding of painting not as a historical style but as an open field continues to inform her work today.

Painting as a Deliberate Choice

Walhof approaches painting not as a nostalgic gesture, but as a conscious decision. Against the backdrop of art-theoretical diagnoses of exhaustion, painting became a testing ground: the central concern shifted from questions of novelty to questions of viability.

Early large-scale figurative works already reveal an interest in precision, measure, and distance. The paintings resist clear narratives and avoid expressive excess. Rather than foregrounding subjective expression, they assert a controlled and restrained visual language that is acutely aware of its own means.

Painting here functions not as an outlet for personal sentiment, but as a structuring medium—one that organizes perception while remaining open.

The Horse as an Artistic Field

After a temporary engagement with video works addressing gender-related issues, Walhof returned to painting, accompanied by a deliberate and radical reduction of subject matter. Her decision to work with the horse—one of the most traditional and heavily codified motifs in art history—was a strategic one.

Precisely because of its historical charge, Walhof withdraws the horse from symbolic, narrative, or ironic interpretation. The motif is neither narrated nor commented upon, nor is it deconstructed. Instead, it functions as a test of painterly precision. A horse must read unmistakably as a horse—without interpretive evasions, gestural blurring, or projections of meaning.

Within this restriction, a complex field of tension emerges between control, corporeality, and vitality. The works operate at the threshold between realistic legibility and painterly autonomy, asserting their contemporary relevance precisely at this boundary.

Transatlantic Context and the Present

In recent years, Walhof has employed the motif of the horse as a transatlantic framework of reference. Drawing on American imagery—both historical and contemporary—her work engages with questions of cultural memory, power structures, and the shifting relationship between nature and society.

The political dimension of the works is not explicitly articulated, but operates implicitly. It remains legible without imposing itself, opening a space in which viewers can establish their own points of reference. Meaning does not arise through explanation, but through confrontation with scale, presence, and pictorial effect.

Thus, the horse functions less as a symbol than as a framework within which contemporary questions can be addressed—openly, precisely, and without didactic positioning.

Image as System

In her most recent work, Walhof shifts from painting as surface to image as system. The digital panel series no longer treats the motif as central. Instead, photographic fragments of functional environments – corridors, storage rooms, infrastructures, transitional spaces – serve as neutral grounds for coded textual interventions.

The panels combine minimal Python-like syntax with declarative statements. The code is readable but does not execute. It simulates structure while suspending function. The viewer encounters language not as explanation, but as operational suggestion.

This shift does not negate painting. It extends its inquiry.

Where earlier works tested precision within figuration, the digital panels test precision within structure. The image is no longer a representation but a field in which meaning is delayed, suspended, or quietly reorganized.

The works resist irony and moral commentary. They operate in a zone of calibrated neutrality. The environments depicted are neither criticized nor celebrated. They simply exist – functional, constructed, system-bound.

Meaning emerges not through symbolism but through friction:
between code and architecture,

between statement and environment,
between structure and human projection.

Walhof's current practice can be understood as a continuation of her long-standing investigation into the viability of image-making – now transferred from the painterly gesture to systemic form.

Selected CV

Education

Academy of Fine Arts Munich

Master student, including studies with Jörg Immendorff and Bernhard Johannes Blume (both Documenta artists)

Selected Exhibitions

2014 – *To the Stars on the Wings of Art*, HF Contemporary Art, Schloss Gabelhofen, Fohnsdorf (AT)

2014 – Art Fair Innsbruck (AT)

2014 – Art Monaco, Monte Carlo (MC)

2013 – *Orchestrated Harmony*, HF Contemporary Art, London (UK)

2011 – *The Horse Fascination*, Gallery 27 / HF Contemporary Art, London (UK)

2011 – *Walhof Horses*, HF Contemporary Art, Berlin (DE)

2011 – *Wondering about the Past*, HF Contemporary Art, Berlin (DE)

2001 – *mypoweralwaysincreases*, Galerie Neues Problem, Berlin (DE)

Collections

Neue Pinakothek, Munich

Collection Schoerghuber, Munich

Duke Franz of Bavaria Collection, Munich

Mentions

2025 – Saatchi Art, Los Angeles: selected for the international newsletter (April)

2025 – Aedra Fine Art: curator invitation for the annual *Artist Feature Catalogue*

Lives and works

Germany