

THE BEGINNING

Art in Austria
1945 to 1980

ALBERTINA modern

27 May until 15 November 2020

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Duration	27 May until 15 November 2020
Venue	ALBERTINA MODERN, Ground floor and Basement floor
Curators	Prof. Dr. Klaus Albrecht Schröder, Director General ALBERTINA Dr. Brigitte Borchhardt-Birbaumer Dr. Elisabeth Dutz, ALBERTINA Dr. Berthold Ecker Dr. Antonia Hoerschelmann, ALBERTINA Dr. Angela Stief
Works	ca. 360
Artists	74
Catalogue	Available for EUR 49.90 (in German) onsite at ALBERTINA MODERN and ALBERTINA as well as via www.albertina.at
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The Beginning

Art in Austria, 1945 to 1980

until 15 November 2020

The opening exhibition of ALBERTINA MODERN, entitled *The Beginning. Art in Austria, 1945 to 1980*, offers the first-ever comprehensive overview of a period that numbers among Austrian art history's most innovative. *The Beginning* presents the most important artistic stances situated at the threshold of postmodernism—from the Vienna School of Fantastic Realism to early abstraction, Viennese Actionism, kinetic and concrete art, Austria's own version of pop art, and the socially critical realism so characteristic of Vienna.

The artists of this historical period have in common their radical opposition to authority and hierarchy, their critical stance towards the denial and repression of guilt for past misdeeds, and the uncompromising rejection of a reactionary notion of art that continued to represent the dominant ideal in Austria long after 1945.

The horrific images in the early works by Ernst Fuchs, Anton Lehmden, and Rudolf Hausner represented a violation of this ideal. The Viennese Actionists from Otto Mühl to Günter Brus made frequent allusions to it, while the abstract painters Wolfgang Hollegha and Markus Prachensky opposed it in their paintings. The socially critical realists from Alfred Hrdlicka to Reimo Wukounig and on to Gottfried Helnwein likewise execrated the prevailing norm, while Vienna's art brut vanguard from Franz Ringel to Peter Pongratz made fun of it.

Another group of artists who fought against Austria's reactionary postwar paradigm were those women who, beginning in the late 1960s, took gender conflict as the starting point for their rebellious works. Actionist VALIE EXPORT and the later feminist avant-garde from Renate Bertlmann and Friederike Pezold to Birgit Jürgenssen and Karin Mack were more than just fed up with being represented and portrayed by men: they also took a stand against an ideal of masculinity that was still defined by the gender roles, dictates, and taboos of Austrofascism and the Third Reich.

This presentation thus highlights a transitional period between eras that extended beyond the Allied occupation and only gave way to a truly new and different chapter of art history during the 1980s. And in 2021, a major exhibition at ALBERTINA MODERN entitled *The Eighties* will place this subsequent chapter in focus.

The Beginning accords the towering, singular figures of Friedensreich Hundertwasser, Arnulf Rainer, and Maria Lassnig their own separate rooms. And just what sculpture and object art were capable of during this period becomes clear in masterpieces by

artists ranging from Joannis Avramidis and Rudolf Hoflehner to Wander Bertoni and Roland Goeschl and on to Curt Stenvert, Bruno Gironcoli, and Cornelius Kolig.

The opening exhibition of ALBERTINA MODERN presents works by a total of 74 artists from this almost thirty-year period at the threshold of postmodernism. And both the way in which these works grapple with the Austrofascist state and National Socialism and the international networking engaged in by virtually all of their creators represent characteristics of these Viennese avant-gardes that have often been overlooked in the past.

This exhibition is based on the holdings of the ALBERTINA Museum, which have now been greatly enriched by the ALBERTINA's acquisition of the Essl Collection. But an exhibition project of this ambition and magnitude, with its approximately 360 objects, also depends on the support of numerous lenders: artists, private collectors, and museums.

The development of this exhibition's concept and the selection of the artworks to be shown—which include paintings, sculptures, objects, drawings, videos, photographs, and installations—were undertaken by an exhibition team headed by ALBERTINA Director General Prof. Dr. Klaus Albrecht Schröder and furthermore including Dr. Brigitte Borchhardt-Birbaumer, Dr. Elisabeth Dutz, Dr. Berthold Ecker, Dr. Antonia Hoerschelmann, and Dr. Angela Stief. The extensive exhibition catalog includes contributions by the members of this curatorial team as well as by further authors.

ALBERTINA MODERN

Vienna's New Museum of Modern Art

With its over 60,000 works by 5,000 artists, the ALBERTINA MODERN is set to be among the world's major museums of art from the present era. As the newest addition to Austria's federal museum landscape, ALBERTINA MODERN will open with the exhibition *The Beginning. Art in Austria, 1945 to 1980*, which will be the first-ever complete overview of an era of Austrian art that encompasses those three important decades following 1945.

The Founding of ALBERTINA MODERN

ALBERTINA MODERN was born out of Hans Peter Haselsteiner's question to Klaus Albrecht Schröder, Director General of the ALBERTINA Museum, as to what vision he would develop for the Essl Collection. The common objective that they soon worked out was the collection's permanent preservation and its transfer to the Austrian capital of Vienna.

Haselsteiner, the Essl family, and Schröder ultimately agreed to establish a dedicated museum of modern art managed by the ALBERTINA Museum as soon as the ALBERTINA's holdings had been combined with those of the Essl Collection.

Since the very beginning, all of the federal ministers of culture who have been in office have supported their undertaking, including the plan to eventually establish the ALBERTINA Museum's second venue. And in terms of this venue's location, the Künstlerhaus on Vienna's Karlsplatz—in which Hans Peter Haselsteiner had acquired a controlling interest in 2016—was successfully reserved as the future home for Vienna's new museum of modern art.

The founding of ALBERTINA MODERN serves to more strongly underline the significance that art from the present and recent past, following many decades of disinterest and stagnation, now enjoys in Austria's capital.

Moreover, Hans Peter Haselsteiner—with his establishment of the company *Künstlerhaus Besitz- und Betriebsgesellschaft*—additionally committed to renovating this formerly magnificent exhibiting facility (which had fallen victim to increasing neglect) as well as modernizing it in keeping with the ALBERTINA Museum's museological requirements. About 57 million euros were invested in this project.

It is thus that this masterpiece of historicist architecture has now become the home of ALBERTINA MODERN (which occupies over 2,000 m² of floorspace) and also remains home to its original occupant's successor organization, the artists' association *Künstlerhaus – Gesellschaft bildender Künstlerinnen und Künstler Österreichs*.

A Gift to Artists

The Künstlerhaus was originally presented to the city's artists in 1865 as a gift by Emperor Franz Joseph; it was to be constructed near Vienna's magnificent Ringstraße as a model work of architecture and a prestige project together with Hotel Imperial and the Musikverein building on Karlsplatz.

Following multiple remodeling projects and repeated plans to tear down this masterpiece of Viennese Historicist architecture (the earliest of which came about in 1906) as well as the decline of the resident Association of Austrian Artists (*Verein der Künstler Österreichs*) during the interwar and postwar periods, the Künstlerhaus eventually experienced a second golden era during the 1980s and 1990s when its spaces were made available to the music and theater festival Wiener Festwochen and then to both the Historical Museum of the City of Vienna and the Kunsthistorisches Museum, which used them for successful major exhibitions including *Türken vor Wien*, *Traum und Wirklichkeit. Wien, 1870–1930* (for which the architect Hans Hollein created elaborate designs) and Werner Hofmann's *Zauber der Medusa. Europäische Manierismen*.

During the past 20 years, however, the building has frequently been hidden from public view behind construction scaffolding.

Renovation – Expansion – Modernization

The past three years have seen this prestigious historicist building restored to its original appearance both inside and out under the aegis of the ALBERTINA Museum's Architecture Collection in consultation with Austria's Federal Monuments Office. The original wall paintings and decorations from that era have been re-created, as has the original terrazzo flooring. At the same time, the Künstlerhaus has been adapted to comply with today's standards for public buildings; changes in this respect include the barrier-free accessibility of all galleries as well as the construction of two new fire escape stairwells.

Finally, this 150-year-old exhibition building has been modernized according to the ALBERTINA Museum's museological requirements in terms of security, lighting, and climate control as well as expanded on both its lower and upper levels.

The upper level of this magnificent historicist structure continues to be the domain of the association *Künstlerhaus – Gesellschaft bildender Künstlerinnen und Künstler Österreichs*, and they now have the use of an additional space called the "Factory". This space has been designed both as a gallery and as a venue for performances and multimedia productions.

Contemporary Art at the ALBERTINA Museum

Following the World War II and prior to the establishment of the *20er Haus*, the ALBERTINA Museum was Austria's leading federal museum of modern art. And under the general direction of Klaus Albrecht Schröder since 2000, the ALBERTINA Museum has been and continues to be expanded and renovated with its contemporary art collection also being substantially enlarged.

Major retrospective exhibitions featuring important names such as Baselitz, Richter, Kentridge, Kiefer, Rainer, Lassnig, Brus, Helnwein, Fischl, Sturtevant, Katz, and Gertsch have taken place at this new ALBERTINA Museum.

And with its recently enlarged holdings of contemporary art, the collection of ALBERTINA MODERN—now home to altogether 60,000 drawings, watercolors, printed graphics, and photographs—numbers among the world's great collections of art from the present era.

A major emphasis is embodied by the collections of Austrian art with extensive and important holdings of artworks by Arnulf Rainer, Maria Lassnig, Franz West, Erwin Wurm, and VALIE EXPORT. Outstanding features of the museum's international collections are large blocks of works by the German artists Georg Baselitz, Anselm Kiefer, Markus Lüpertz, Jörg Immendorff, and Günther Förg. And the most important groups of works in its American art holdings are by Andy Warhol, Alex Katz, Eric Fischl, Robert Longo, Cindy Sherman, Sherrie Levine, Ross Bleckner, and Michael Heizer.

Klaus Albrecht Schröder, Director General of the ALBERTINA Museum and ALBERTINA MODERN, states: "With the opening of ALBERTINA MODERN, we can finally show our collections of contemporary art in a way that is better and more sweeping than ever before. ALBERTINA MODERN also entails that Vienna is to become home to a new museum of modern art where masterpieces from the Essl Collection and from our most recent acquisition, the Jablonka Collection, will be shown together with our longstanding holdings and serve as the basis of major exhibitions the likes of which have never before been seen in this city. And last but not least, the museum intends to bring about an entirely new status for Austria's post-1945 art history."

Wall texts

Introduction

The Beginning

Art in Austria 1945 to 1980

The opening exhibition of ALBERTINA modern is dedicated to the renewal of Austrian art after 1945, whose grounds and driving belt are to be found in the reappraisal of the corporate state (Ständestaat), the dictatorship of National Socialism, and the horrors of the Second World War. The radical rebellion against an ideal of art that was still contaminated by Nazi ideology for a long time spanned more than three decades in Vienna, where all of Austria's artistic movements intersected. The innovators' anti-fascist consensus, however, did not level out the deep rifts between the various groups in postwar Austria. Its avant-garde of the zero hour existed only in the plural: as avant-gardes.

The new beginning is marked by affiliations to that international modernity from which Austria was cut off after the collapse of the monarchy rooted in economic crisis, Austrofascism, and National Socialism. The only possible future the innovators accepted was the present, which they first encountered in the educational exhibitions of the occupying powers, before they came to study the avant-garde directly on site like Rainer, Lassnig and Fuchs, Hundertwasser, Hollegha and Prachensky, Schilling and Kogelnik: in Paris and Milan, and from the 1960s in New York.

Vienna, 60 kilometers from the Iron Curtain, was a "city of remnants": of what had remained of the former imperial residence after the disappearance of the aristocracy, the upper middle classes, industry, and the city's Jewry. Vienna was not a place for meetings with the foreign.

One square kilometer of Vienna, its first district, accommodated Galerie St. Stephan and Zedlitzhalle, Galerie im Griechenbeisl and the Art Club, the Academy of Fine Arts, as well as the city's "Forum Romanum" where public actions could get the attention guaranteed by the provocation of the audience as a precondition for subversive border crossings.

The international networking of postwar artists has been underestimated so far, as has the role of women artists, who, like Rainer, Hundertwasser, or Franz West, equally led the Austrian art scene from the scene of destruction to international significance.

While VALIE EXPORT, Helnwein, and Wukounig dealt directly with Austria as a country of perpetrators in the 1970s, the aesthetics of Viennese Actionism can only indirectly be understood as a gesture of resistance against the background of Austria's involvement in National Socialist barbarism. Like Frohner's disembowelment of mattresses, Gironcoli's and Pichler's sculptural installations refer to the gas chambers and incinerators of the concentration camps.

By adhering to the figure and the traditional materials stone, bronze, and wood, the genre of sculpture did not include the innovators of art history in the beginning. Fritz

Wotruba, an outstanding figure both as an artist and as a teacher, allowed only marginal extensions of the concept of sculpture.

However, if one leaves Wotruba's continent, sculpture in its expansion to object, installation, and assemblage proved to be the very art genre in whose field the most radical innovators of Austrian art history gathered. Padhi Frieberger's pedestal-less assemblages probably rank among the most radical sculptural solutions of all. But it was only with Gironcoli and Walter Pichler that the expanded concept of sculpture gained international recognition. Their objects reify an existential understanding of the torn human being.

In the 1970s, the archaic and the fetish character of objects also became the breeding ground of feminist art in Austria. Soft and artless materials such as plexiglass, knitwear, and latex subversively define the objects of Cornelius Kolig, Erwin Thorn, Lieselott Beschorner, Linda Christanell, and Renate Bertlmann: all these artists crossed the boundaries of three-dimensional composition in terms of form, content, and medium with a consistency that made the transformation of sculpture into object one of the most fruitful contributions of the Austrian postwar avant-garde.

In 13 chapters with almost 400 artworks by more than 70 artists, The Beginning presents the canon of Austrian art after the Second World War.

Fantastic Realism: The Early Years

The “Viennese School of Fantastic Realism” stands at the beginning of Austrian postwar art. It was an attempt to make a new start, to achieve a reorientation away from the pathetic heroism and false idylls of National Socialist art toward an opening for the international movements of Surrealism, without understanding itself as a late form of its French manifestation. The unconscious and the supernatural do not serve as enigmatic descriptions of spatial or psychological situations but are used as instruments for an analytical *mise-en-scène*. In the 1940s and 1950s, this great theater of painting was dominated by the trauma of the war that had just been survived, by profound reflections on the human condition and by one’s personal situation. Only Wolfgang Hutter’s works radiate a serene atmosphere full of *joie de vivre*.

The five most important representatives of the movement called the “Viennese School of Fantastic Realism” since the 1960s—Ernst Fuchs, Rudolf Hausner, Anton Lehmden, Wolfgang Hutter, and Arik Brauer—as well as Curt Stenvert had still witnessed the devastations of the war. With their elaborate old-masterly style of painting and a stupendous drawing technique, they concretized the traumas of persecution and destruction, turning them into apocalyptic visions in a manner trained on Hieronymus Bosch. There are no Surrealist models for the pictorial inventions of Rudolf Hausner’s capital early works and the frightening drawings of Ernst Fuchs, who was not even twenty years old at the time. With his claustrophobic pictorial spaces and distorted body proportions, Ernst Fuchs proved to be just as independent of role models as Rudolf Hausner’s invention of “Adam” as an anamorphically distorted archetype of restless human existence. The bottomless insecurity of his identity becomes—painted in detail—a disturbing panorama of the artist’s existence.

Today, from a distance of nearly seventy years, these major works of early Fantastic Realism are not only a testimony to their time. As an innovative and original reaction to the artists’ dark present, they belong to the canon of images of Austrian postwar art. Rudolf Hausner’s iconography of the lonely man locked up in the dungeons of his origins is just as much an expression of a pessimistic view of the world after the barbarity of a world on fire as Anton Lehmden’s wedged fighting men and tanks or Ernst Fuchs’s labyrinthine city views of horror.

Abstraction in Austria

After the war, Austria catapulted itself into the middle of the international avant-gardes' ongoing artistic discussions with a fireworks of the most diverse and completely new abstract positions. Whether the innovators arrived at abstraction through the human figure like the painter Josef Mikl or the sculptors Otto Eder, Rudolf Hoflehner, and Andreas Urteil, through nature like the painters Wolfgang Hollegha and Max Weiler, through a stringent reduction of their pictorial language like Arnulf Rainer, or through the dominance of their individual gestural handwriting like Markus Prachensky and Hans Staudacher—all their works pursued entirely untrodden paths and broke with traditions and familiar contents, above all with the trauma of the idealistic-heroic aesthetic of National Socialism.

Although abstract tendencies had already made themselves felt in the visual arts in Austria before 1945, it was not until after 1945 that abstraction as a self-confident artistic expression became characteristic of the country's art scene, inspired by the confrontation with French Art Informel and American Abstract Expressionism.

Two venues in Vienna established themselves as centers of abstraction and the international avant-garde: Galerie Würthle under the direction of Fritz Wotruba and Galerie St. Stephan founded by the cathedral priest Monsignor Otto Mauer in 1954. Exhibiting abstract as well as concrete and constructivist art, Galerie St. Stephan became the most important hub of contemporary international art. Soon, the four abstract painters Hollegha, Prachensky, Mikl, and Rainer, who also determined the gallery's exhibition program, were called the "Group of St. Stephen." For a long time, abstraction in Austria was primarily associated with only these four of its exponents.

The chapter on abstraction, however, highlights an all-Austrian phenomenon of the post-war period that stands for awakening and renewal, for breaking down narrow boundaries, and for opening up to the international avant-gardes and contemporary discussions in art.

Friedensreich Hundertwasser 1928–2000

Friedensreich Hundertwasser occupies a special position within Vienna's post-war generation of artists. He was exceptional in every respect: in his art's world of colors and forms, which comprises both representational and abstract elements, and as an artist who dealt with the relationship between man and nature. He was a universal artist and social utopian who included all areas of life in his art, which made him a pioneer of "ecological aesthetics." He sought to put the relationship between human civilization and planet Earth on a new footing.

Hundertwasser expanded his international connections from Paris and Venice to Africa and Japan thanks to his first Art Club meetings with John Cage, whom he had got to know in Italy in 1949. He exhibited at the Venice Biennale as well as in Senegal in 1973; yet it is more than just his travels and exhibitions that provide evidence for the early international affiliations of Austrian post-war art. Hundertwasser also became the most famous Austrian artist abroad at an early stage, not least due to his participation in several "documenta" exhibitions in Kassel.

The artist's early work ranks among the achievements of the international avant-garde and is characterized by an extraordinary blaze of color, by poetry, and by an eagerness to experiment. With his friend Yves Klein, Parisian paint dealers, and chemists, Hundertwasser carried out numerous experiments and developed his own color palette of intense, bright colors.

Not least because of his very early and consistent advocacy of nature as the teacher of all creativity, his rejection of the throwaway society, and his commitment to a humane architecture, Hundertwasser's oeuvre and thinking are more relevant today than ever before.

Arnulf Rainer (b. 1929)

Arnulf Rainer's works illustrate the artist's fundamental dialectical attitude: they unfold a dialogue about painterly qualities and graphic line structures, about the relationship between surface and space, color and reduced black-and-white, fullness and emptiness, rest and movement, stillness and excitement, abstraction and figuration.

From his early richly detailed surrealist drawings and his involvement in Art Informel to his "Centralizations," his engagement with Art Brut, and his reworked photographs, his production reveals the ambiguity and enigmatic nature he strives for. Emotion and contemplation oscillate, as do loud gestures and the retreat into silence.

The color black has become the program defining Arnulf Rainer's work. Black is predestined to set strong accents on a light background and to have an effect through its symbolism. By restricting himself to black, which is considered the zero point of all colorfulness, Rainer defines what is important to him in his art: its expressive potential. For Rainer, black signals reduction, concentration, and gestural expression.

In his uncompromising search for rigorous means of expression, Arnulf Rainer has developed radically new artistic methods from the very beginning. Since the 1960s, Rainer, along with Gerhard Richter, Georg Baselitz, Maria Lassnig, Bruce Nauman, and Yves Klein, has ranked among those influential contemporary artists in the international arena who are loners and cannot be categorized as belonging to a movement such as Pop Art, Minimal Art, or Concept Art.

Vienna Actionism

Viennese Actionism is one of the most radical and significant artistic expressions of twentieth-century Austrian art. From about 1960, its protagonists Günter Brus, Otto Muehl, Hermann Nitsch, and Rudolf Schwarzkogler, as well as other artists, extended the traditional boundaries of painting and sculpture, transferred painting to the body, and, from 1962 to 1970, used the body in actions that transgressed boundaries in every respect—in terms of content, material, and aesthetics.

Viennese Actionism, which received its name through a publication by Peter Weibel and VALIE EXPORT in 1969, became mainly known through a number of public performances regarded as scandals—as was particularly *Art and Revolution* at the University of Vienna 1968—but the diversity and nuances of its artistic expressions deserve a more precise perception than their denunciation and rejection as perverse and pathological provocations.

Vienna Actionism not only crossed artistic divides but also defied social conventions, boundaries of shame, pain, and disgust, and violated taboos—knowing that, within a stagnating society, relevant art can only become possible through direct confrontation and provocation and not by adhering to a traditional aesthetic or retreating into abstract or informal art. The use of garbage and blood, punishment rituals and (self-)injury scenarios—symbols of suffering from society—provoke immediate reactions on the part of the viewers. Making the suppressed and hardly bearable perceptible elicits different ways of thinking and feeling.

The abandonment of the image and the performative turnaround occurred in parallel with the emergence of the international Fluxus and happening movements, but was initially not informed by them. It was only later that manifold interrelationships evolved. Since the 1980s, Viennese Actionism, still relevant today, has widely echoed internationally, as the counter-model to postmodernism of Mike Kelley's and Paul McCarthy's Californian Neo-Actionism around 1990 and artists like Sarah Lucas and Pipilotti Rist demonstrate.

Arnulf Rainer, "Face Farces"

Soon after discovering self-portraiture, Arnulf Rainer presented his face painted with bold black lines to the public in 1967. In 1968 and 1969, he captured grimaces and other non-sanctioned facial expressions in pictures taken in photo booths. The title Rainer chose for these "soliloquies in front of the camera" was "Face Farces." The pictures were soon not only shot in booths but also by the professional photographer Alexander Prinzjakowitsch. Driven by the artist's need to externalize certain sensations or inner tensions, Rainer's performative utterances led to pictures that both stand for themselves and, following an examination of their contents, became the starting point for new pictures. "When I draw, I am very excited, talk to myself, am full of anger and wrath. I hate the world, insult many people, am full of discontent with myself. Critical, hostile against everything, I succeed in correcting or painting things over. Only now do I dare to destroy something, because better things arise from it. Indistinct ideas fill me, differentiate and concretize only while I draw and merge into new ones." (Arnulf Rainer)

Even though Rainer's pictures, like those of the Vienna Actionists, are characterized by the fact that the dynamic movement of the body intervenes in the act of painting in a formative way, conquering (pictorial) space, Rainer is concerned with reworking the photograph and not with action. Rainer does not regard himself as an Actionist either, and thus his "Face Farces," in spite of all materiality and all action on the pictorial surface, do not push beyond the margins of the picture, do not question the tradition of the panel painting.

Although only a few years older, Rainer became a father figure for the Vienna Actionists, mainly because of his early overpaintings—a model "that had to be overcome to clear the way for one's own work" (Günter Brus).

The notion that man is under psychological pressure and at the mercy of horrendous compulsions also made Günter Brus, in his actions, adopt postures that expose the body in convulsive distortions as if it had received electric shocks. The Actionists confronted Rainer with a body that suffers pain, is injured, and stands as symbol of an individual whose soul is subjected to inhuman conditions.

Vienna Actionism and Photography

Photography played an important part for the artists of Vienna Actionism. Many of their actions—of which only a few were presented to a public, while many had only some or no viewers at all—could only be conveyed to a larger audience and captured for posterity in films or photographs. The pictures of their performances might also have provided an important source of income for the artists but could hardly be sold at first.

Otto Muehl and Rudolf Schwarzkogler regarded the photographs of their actions as independent works of art. After they had broken away from the painted image and replaced it with action, they turned to photography. The pictures not only document their performances but aestheticize them and are as constructed and well-composed as paintings. The same applies to the photographs of Günter Brus's actions taken by Ludwig Hoffenreich and Siegfried Klein, even though Brus did not want to see them as autonomous works for a long time. The pictures of such actions as *Self-Painting* and *Catalepsy* focus on the artist's body parts as the actual location of the performance; everything secondary is excluded. The "stills" carefully selected for publication visualize key statements of the artist's actions.

By contrast, the films and photographs documenting the performances of Hermann Nitsch's "Orgies Mysteries Theater" do not pursue an aesthetical objective. The focus is on the real event, which alone makes it possible to act out existential feelings. The pictures that capture the goings-on, on the other hand, are completely external to the artistic statement, the cathartic abreaction theater.

Pop in Austria

Close to modern life and flirting with the taste of the people, this art is, in many respects, pivoted on the broad masses' preferences: shrill colors, hard contours, and two-dimensional representations are the order of the day—an aesthetic reminiscent of the advertisements and eye-catching illuminated signs to be found in big cities in the economically prosperous 1960s. At first sight, striking visual appeals promise light and shallow entertainment. Comics from the nursery are considered subjects worth depicting, and the sexism of stylized pin-up girls becomes socially acceptable.

Actually, the quotations of trivial images, kitsch, illustrations for children, and advertising motifs by Attersee, Klemmer, Pongratz, Kogelnik, Pluhar, and Lettner are profoundly ambiguous.

High art combines with low art. The aesthetics of goods and the promising appearance of surfaces become cult, and art uses the methods of graphics and design. Austrian Pop Art tends toward branding and shows a penchant for star cult and icon building.

In Austria in the 1960s, however, consumer culture, which was essential for the emergence of Pop Art, met with reservations. Artists like Attersee, Kogelnik, Kolig, Klemmer, Pluhar, and Zadrazil deal with the sensory overload in big cities and the consumerist world of things.

Austria's pop artists—in contrast to all other countries—never formed a group, nor were they presented together. Formally, they shunned the step of radical flatness as traced out by Abstract Expressionism and color field painting in New York.

The comics' flood of images, glamour, and the sexualized world of goods was the foremost prerequisite for Austrian Pop Art. Robert Klemmer responded to the new colorfulness of fashion, Robert Lettner to the rebellion of youth culture, the Vietnam War, and the Black Power movement. While Peter Pongratz disparaged the devotional pictures of his childhood by enlarging them to monumental history paintings, Kiki Kogelnik processed the present from consumer and mass culture to the atomic bomb and the moon landing. Like Pongratz, Christian Ludwig Attersee crossed the boundaries between high art and low art by transforming the colorful kitsch of the commodity world's new hedonism into completely independent paintings in the decade of economic prosperity.

Ingeborg G. Pluhar's collages are only motifically anchored in Pop Art. Her criticism of the temptations also makes her an exponent of the feminist avant-garde and its concern to fight against women's dependence and for their self-determination.

A cheerful colorfulness as well as new materials of sculpture such as plastic and plexiglass characterize this decade of Pop. It is only when looking back at Viennese Actionism that the pop artists' renunciation of the new motley world of things catches the eye.

Op Art, Geometric and Concrete Art

Although twentieth-century art, in its recourse to modernism, repeatedly produced an abstract-geometric language of forms, which has a rich cultural tradition in Austria, its artists interested in a constructivist, concrete or kinetic mode of expression found relatively little resonance in the 1960s and 1970s.

Principles of composition such as seriality, reduction, repetition, visual rhythms, aesthetic research, as well as geometric abstraction are typical forms of expression that these artists relied on. Marc Adrian, Roland Goeschl, Richard Kriesche, Dóra Maurer, Hermann J. Painitz, and Helga Philipp are the most important exponents of an art that does entirely without heroic gestures and visual subjectivisms. The fact that these artists have, apart from a few initiatives, received little recognition for a long time is probably mainly grounded in the Austrian preference for a Baroque culture with a penchant for abstract-expressive and gestural-theatrical expression and the exploration of identity issues. Today's experimental and conceptual artistic practices, the viewers' involvement in artworks, and art-and-science projects are inconceivable without the achievements of Geometric and Concrete Art.

Art Brut

While psychiatrist Leo Navratil supported the creativity of patients in the Maria Gugging Psychiatric Clinic from 1950 to 1965—a measure originally intended as therapy—professional artists came to be interested in an original way of thinking and composing freed from the cultural burden and the formal-aesthetic conventions of European art history. “The illusions of consciousness must be corrected by the stronger truth of the unconscious,” advised the ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss in 1968. Already in the first half of the twentieth century, new attention had been paid to drawings of prehistory as well as of children and the mentally disordered. An important inspiration was Hans Prinzhorn's book *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* published in 1922. The French collector and artist Jean Dubuffet coined the term *Art Brut* for this anti-academic movement with an exhibition in Paris in 1947. The show was probably visited by Susanne Wenger and other members of Vienna's Art Club. Adolf Frohner even turned his back to Actionism under the influence of Dubuffet.

Johann Hauser, Oswald Tschirtner, and August Walla were the first stars in Navratil's Gugging *House of Artists*. They were frequently visited by Alfred Hrdlicka, Arnulf Rainer, Peter Pongratz, and Franz Ringel. Pongratz even describes Hauser as his true teacher. The role model triggered a conscious kind of Art Brut in Austria like the one pursued in Europe by the CoBrA group of painters around Karl Appel in the Netherlands and Asger Jorn in Denmark from 1948 to 1951. The Gugging artists' achievements were presented for the first time in Otto Mauer's avant-garde Galerie nächst St. Stephan in Vienna in 1970, which would soon make some of them known internationally. The works of the artists of Gugging represent an important Austrian contribution to the replacement of elitist high art by the inclusion of previously marginalized groups as equals.

Maria Lassnig (1919–2014)

Maria Lassnig is one of the most important artists of the twentieth century. She is best known for her “body awareness” pictures, in which the perception, the feeling of her own body provides the starting point for exploring the world. Lassnig’s special handling of color is as essential an aspect of her fascinating art as are the variety of subjects and the hitherto completely unknown contents of her pictorial worlds. Her paintings translate inner body feelings and sensations into pictures and fathom the relationship between body and environment.

The artist began to discover this path for herself in the late 1940s. This makes her an early pioneer of the body art of the 1970s. Aware that any perception of reality can only be subjective, Lassnig drew on her own body sensations to explore major themes such as love, death, art, technology, violence, and the threat to nature.

Maria Lassnig moved from Vienna to Paris in 1960, but the student riots of 1968 bothered the artist, who was still traumatized by the war. In the same year she went to New York, as the city was supposed to offer more opportunities for women artists. Lassnig returned to Vienna in 1980 and took over the master class for Theory of Design: Experimental Design at the University of Applied Arts. In the same year, she, together with VALIE EXPORT, represented Austria at the Venice Biennale, where both artists attracted great attention. Twenty-five years later, Lassnig was awarded the Golden Lion, the greatest distinction in the field of fine arts.

Sickbays of the Later-Born

Bruno Gironcoli and Walter Pichler, who found their way to sculpture through metal jewelry and graphics respectively, decisively expanded the former understanding of the genre, which had already changed from stone to metal, polyester, and other plastics as well as textiles and soft materials in the Wotrubas School. This far-reaching transformation also freed the contents from traditional ideas of classical modernism. Technique, dynamics, interactivity with the viewer, color, and a new archaic and fetishistic tenor characterize the sculpture changing into an object. With the understanding of sculpture as part of an expanded concept of art transcending national and genre boundaries, public space is used as much as a stage as are museums and galleries. This was the path taken that made object art the defining art discipline of the 1970s on an international level.

Sculptural drawings are important companions, since they, as concepts or designs for larger installations, unfold an aesthetic value of their own. The reappraisal of National Socialism in the works of Pichler and Gironcoli constitutes one of Austria's most significant contributions in this field. Like the environments, their individual figures and objects include the use of forbidden symbols such as the swastika to make their intentions understood. Following the designs for the installation *Columns with Skulls* for the São Paulo Biennial in 1971, Gironcoli devoted himself to a composition entitled *Gas* for later variations of the subject in 1974. Formed of rings and reminiscent of Egyptian mummies, the figures in it are furnished with skulls and a central swastika emblem.

From Sculpture to Object

Austrian sculpture underwent a profound change in the period from 1945 until the emergence of the “Neue Wilde” (The New Wild Ones) group of artists toward the end of the 1970s. This transformation entailed liberation from local and traditional notions of form, subject, and material and was accompanied by a general change of the understanding of sculptural design, both formally and in terms of content. The long-lost contact to the international currents of sculpture after 1945 could also be restored. New materials—from synthetic substances to “soft” textiles—conquer the scene. Sculptural creation in the broader sense from installations to sound sculptures and social sculptures began to attract increasing interest from the 1960s on.

It all began with the then widely known and influential Fritz Wotruba, who, from 1946, led a sculpture class at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts with great success. Almost all later prominent artists in this field were his students. The “Neocubism” taught in his class aimed at simplifying form, sticking to stone, bronze, and occasionally also to wood as materials and the human figure as its subject.

Curt Stenvert, who also studied with Wotruba for a short time, was of particular importance for the further development of sculpture. In the late 1960s, some artists such as Helga Phillip and Linda Christanell adopted Stenvert’s understanding of material from a constructive-geometric or sensual-architectural perspective.

It was Roland Goeschl who brought the idea of colored sculpture in combination with geometric forms to Austria. His work caused a fundamental repositioning of sculpture. Bruno Gironcoli and Walter Pichler, who both came to sculpture from other professions, expanded this traditional art genre even further. Technique, dynamics, interactivity, color, and a newly honored penchant for the archaic and fetishistic characterize this phase. Sculpture turns object, which, as environment, may offer walk-in experiences, and thus, in this new understanding, takes on a leading role among the art genres for some time.

The more comprehensive understanding of sculpture transcending the boundaries of individual disciplines and using public space as a stage just as naturally as museums and galleries also defines the path that sculpture took in the 1960s and 1970s internationally. Sculpture became the decisive field of art in the process.

Eduard Angeli * 1942

Having studied Ottoman history and the 1915 Battle of Gallipoli at Çanakkale during his time as professor in Istanbul from 1967 to 1971, Eduard Angeli returned to Vienna with the colonial dreams of European conquerors in Africa as a topic to explore. He had collected a series of old postcards and photographs in Turkey for this purpose—material he freely translated into acrylic paintings from 1972 on. Dating from 1973, *In Dire Need* and *For a Big Goal* highlight the many victims and the senselessness of the wars waged at that time at sea and in the air. In *Tsingtau* from 1974, the presentation of the wreckage in the desert already hints at its disappearance through sand and twilight. In retrospect, even the two wandering pioneers in *Noon* from 1976 appear as mere shadows. Angeli's entire melancholy series of pictures from the 1970s foreshadows current postcolonial subjects.

The Children's Traumata

In 1971, the painter Gottfried Helnwein began publishing a series of drastic depictions of child victims in the Austrian political magazine *Profil*. His *Beautiful Victims* shed light on the cruel "therapy methods" that were routine in the psychiatric clinic *Am Steinhof* in the 14th district of Vienna until the 1970s. *Life Unworthy of Life*, which dates from 1974, recalls the killing of "disabled" children through poisoned food in the "euthanasia clinic" *Am Spiegelgrund* during National Socialism, which was carried out by Heinrich Gross, who later worked as a court psychiatrist until 1984. Gross, who had built up a collection of brain specimens of child victims that were allegedly indispensable for research, was appointed chief physician of the Second Psychiatric Department of the clinic *Am Steinhof* in 1975. He received high honors and headed the "Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Research into Deformities of the Nervous System" until the 1980s. From the age of eight, Reimo Wukounig grew up in Carinthian borstals following the early death of his father and the hospitalization of his sick mother. The artist's works reflect his borstal years determined by abuse and beatings.

VALIE EXPORT

Today, the action artist VALIE EXPORT commands as much international attention within the phenomenon initially called Direct Art as the four male exponents of Viennese Actionism. She had to fight hard for this position in the art scene. She does not consider art a counter-project to reality, but rather calls for a new view of reality revealed by subversive means. In 1970, she foregrounded women artists' lack of recognition by confidently adopting the name of a well-known cigarette brand and combining it with her nickname in capital letters.

Her actions are always accompanied by photography and video, which supports the expansion of art toward new media. With her forays into the field of Expanded Cinema and her action *TAP and TOUCH CINEMA* in 1968/69, EXPORT transcended the illusion of cinema. She instructed passersby in Munich and Vienna to touch her breasts behind the curtains of the portable box of the "dark cinema hall" in order to make the ubiquitous availability of the female body in film, television, and advertising shockingly tangible. *Action Pants: Genital Panic* takes up the theme in the form of an even greater provocation.

In 1970, VALIE EXPORT's *BODY SIGN ACTION* focused on the construction of femininity in society defined by male wishful thinking: She had the clip of a garter as part of the fetish of male obsessions tattooed on her left thigh. At that time, tattoos were only popular with seamen and prisoners and not a fashionable accessory at all. With such codes, which she painfully inscribed on her body, she revealed the real power relations between the sexes.

The Feminist Avant-Garde

In the wake of "feminist actionism" (VALIE EXPORT), women artists began to take a critical stance against patriarchal society focusing on new contents and turning to new media such as photography, video film, and performance. Between 1970 and 1980, Viennese women artists succeeded in making themselves heard in Germany, Italy, and the USA. Their performances, photo series, and objects consistently went against the grain of traditional social patterns with a great deal of irony. Like their male colleagues, they also worked with drawings and prints. Ironing board, wedding dress, veil, pacifier, condoms, pillows, and stockings as well as needles, thimbles, and scalpels became stage props of emancipatory instructions full of creativity and humor.

In 1977, some of the artists joined forces by founding the International Action Group of Women Visual Artists (IntAkt). They cultivated teamwork, also with innovative female politicians, and dared to give free rein to their creativity by refusing to get married, become housewives content with a place at the stove, and start a family. In their search for a new visual and gestural language that rebelled against old-fashioned laws and a church-imposed ban on speaking, they anticipated many later achievements such as the genre of the "seconds sculpture" and performative photography with their cross-media discourses. Gabriele Schor coined the term "feminist avant-garde" for the internationally well-connected group.

Franz West 1947-2012

Franz West is one of the most famous Austrian artists of today's international contemporary scene and an inspiration for many. His beginnings lie in the 1960s when he came to be interested in Vienna's coffee house and literary scene, especially in Konrad Bayer, the Vienna Group, and Oswald Wiener. Key figures for West's development were his older half-brother Otto Kobalek, a poet and artist associated with Helmut Qualtinger, and Fred Jelinek, who at the time worked at a gallery, which specialized in the works of the Vienna School of Fantastic Realism. West began to work autodidactically and devoted himself intensively to the achievements of Ernst Fuchs and Fantastic Realism. His first exhibition was shown in the Galerie nächst St. Stephan in 1977. In the same year he joined the class of Bruno Gironcoli at Vienna's Academy of Fine Arts. He remained at the Academy until 1982.

In the 1960s Franz West experienced Viennese Actionism at first hand. He met the writer and essayist Reinhard Priessnitz, an insider of the Actionist scene, who familiarized him with the essence of Direct Art, with working directly with bodies and objects.

Franz West delved into the "isms" of modernity, explored Concept Art, Minimal Art, and the works of Marcel Duchamp and Cy Twombly. In the early 1970s, he began to turn their approaches into works of his own. His entire work abounds with actionist elements. He created his first *Adaptives*: objects that the viewers are meant to pick up and try to make fit their bodies, thus turning themselves into works of art.