WAM

WIENER AKTIONISMUS MUSEUM

VIENNA ACTIONISM MUSEUM (WAM) OPENS WITH "WHAT IS VIENNA ACTIONISM?"

THE FIRST EXHIBITION OF THE NEW VIENNA ACTIONISM MUSEUM PRESENTS AN OVERVIEW OF THE 1960S AS THE CORE PERIOD OF THIS IMPORTANT ART MOVEMENT IN POST-WAR AUSTRIA OVER AN AREA OF AROUND 900 SQUARE METRES.

"We have deliberately divided our first exhibition into seven sections in order to allow visitors to experience Vienna Actionism both chronologically and in their own way. This makes it interesting and understandable for laypeople and experts alike," says WAM Director Julia Moebus Puck, explaining the idea behind "WHAT IS VIENNA ACTIONISM?".

The WAM has brought Vienna Actionism expert and long-standing mumok curator Eva Badura-Triska on board for the opening exhibition. It is important to both cultural scientists to show the diversity and complexity of this movement.

1 FROM PANEL PAINTING TO ACTION

Early works by Günter Brus, Otto Muehl, Hermann Nitsch and Rudolf Schwarzkogler are on display on the ground floor. The individual artists are presented in sections - the focus is on their individual development from painting to action. Eva Badura-Triska: "Here we want to show that all four actionists started out as painters and abandoned the panel painting in favour of actions in very different ways."

Hermann Nitsch had already written his orgien mysterien theater in 1957 at the age of 19, which he continued to develop throughout his life. In 1960, he expanded the work process into a performative theatrical act with his painting actions (Rinn- und Schüttbilder).

For Otto Muehl, material in the sense of matter was always at the centre of his work. This is already evident in his early informal paintings, which are characterised by an increasingly exuberant use of colour matter. The picture plane, which Muehl felt was too narrow a field of action, was literally blown up by tearing, smashing and lacing, transforming it into a material object.

Günther Brus' artistic beginnings lay in the field of drawing, the medium that was closest to him throughout his life. Even his early figurative works are characterised by an energetic, very physically accentuated line. In his first action, Brus transferred this form of painting to the human body as a medium and the surrounding space. He did this together with his wife Anna in his first action Ana.

Compared to the Informal Positions, Schwarzkogler's painting is calmer and more reduced. His preferred colours are blue and yellow (referencing gold). And his 1st Action Wedding is also dominated by these colours.

2 STAGED PHOTOGRAPHY

In the basement, the exhibition continues with the thematic area of staged photography. "With regard to the role of photography in Actionism, the term documentation medium quickly comes to mind, which is true but also too short-sighted. "Because many actions were created exclusively for the medium of photography and have a very pictorial character," explains Badura-Triska. The first action of staged photography was carried out by Günter Brus in 1964 with his action Selbstbemalung 1.

Rudolf Schwarzkogler, who began his actionist work in 1965, only ever staged his actions for photographic reproduction, with the exception of his first action Wedding - to which a small, select audience was admitted. Nitsch and Muehl also utilised the medium of photography in a variety of ways.

3 PICTURES

"The most exciting thing about Vienna Actionism, and sometimes also the most difficult, is that the four Actionists never abandoned their pictorial thinking, even in their performative art," explains Moebus Puck. "They understood their actions as an extended form of painting." At all times, it was the pictorial works that were created in preparation for, in the wake of and alongside the actions. For example, the action relics by Hermann Nitsch, the collages by Otto Muehl and the action sketches by Günter Brus.

Moebus-Puck refers in particular to the scores and action sketches by Günter Brus, which were never intended for realisation due to their radical nature and therefore deliberately always remained fiction.

4 SOLO ACTIONS

This "action room" is dedicated to the period from 1965 to 1967, the most creative and radical phase of Vienna Actionism.

Exhibits include Günter Brus' Vienna Walk, but also more intimate actions such as the Egon Schiele-inspired Transfusion or the Diana action (action with his own daughter as a baby). The action in Aachen, in which Brus inflicted his first self-harm, is also on display.

Hermann Nitsch's 9th action, in which he extended his orgien mysterien theater outside for the first time (on fields outside Vienna) and in which all the actionists took part, is also on display. Also on display is his 25th action, which took place for the first time outside Europe in the USA and involved a noise orchestra and a string choir.

Actions by Otto Muehl are presented in which he explored themes such as homosexuality and the relationship between femininity and masculinity. His biting social criticism is also recognisable, for example on the subject of body mania (Bodybuilding) or the incipient affluent society (Food Test).

Rudolf Schwarzkogler is represented with his 6th action.

5 POLITICISATION

The second half of the 1960s is characterised by the fact that artists increasingly realised collective actions. Furthermore, the actions of Otto Muehl and Günter Brus in particular became politicised. Works from the Vietnam Party, from Art & Revolution, and Otto Muehl's portraits of politicians are shown.

Flyers/posters from the Direct Art Festival will also be presented.

6 RUDOLF SCHWARZKOGLER'S LATE CONCEPTUAL WORK

In the adjoining room of the WAM, which can be entered from Weihburggasse, you can see Rudolf Schwarzkogler's late conceptual work. These are designs that no longer viewers as spectators, but are intended to trigger strong sensory impressions that can be experienced on the viewer's own body. These include food sequences and even requests for cures.

7 FILM TEARING TEST AS A FINALE

The exhibition concludes with a decidedly body-analytical examination of Vienna Actionism. The challenging film of Günter Brus' radical Zerreissprobe from 1970 is shown life-size. The realisation of this work pushed the artist himself to his limits, which is why he subsequently ended his career as an actionist.

Due to the complexity and radical nature of Vienna Actionism, art education is a particular concern of Director Moebus-Puck. For this reason, an extensive education programme will be developed over the next few months. "We want to involve everyone. We want to develop special programmes for young people and even children in particular, so that they can experience Actionism in all its complexity."

"WHAT IS VIENNA ACTIONISM?" runs until 31 January 2025, and Moebus-Puck is planning to take the exhibition to museums internationally in order to present it as a travelling exhibition in important international centres of the art and culture scene.

On the occasion of the opening of the Vienna Actionism Museum, a new basic work on the museum's collection will also be published in May.

The comprehensive catalogue "WHAT IS VIENNA ACTIONISM?" will be published by DCV Verlag and is also intended to accompany the exhibition.

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