

## **VIENNA ACTIONISM MUSEUM (WAM): WORLD'S FIRST MUSEUM FOR VIENNA ACTIONISM OPENS IN VIENNA**

**THE MOST IMPORTANT AUSTRIAN ART MOVEMENT AFTER 1945 NOW HAS ITS OWN MUSEUM: THE VIENNA ACTIONISM MUSEUM WILL OPEN ITS EXHIBITION SPACE ON MARCH 15, 2024. WORKS FROM 1957 TO 1973 WILL BE ON DISPLAY - ALSO IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY ART**

The first Museum of Vienna Actionism (WAM) is the result of an initiative by several private collectors who want to give Vienna Actionism (© Peter Weibel) the attention it deserves in terms of cultural studies and art history. The private collectors' collective secured and preserved the largest collection of Vienna Actionism by acquiring the Friedrichshof Collection. It was during this time that the idea for a Vienna Actionism Museum was born, with the aim of addressing both the specialist public and a broad audience interested in art.

Vienna Actionism thematized the human body and its psyche in a taboo-free manner, addressing not least the tragic and fearful aspects of life. The representatives of this movement are thus in the same tradition as the great masters of art, from Matthias Grünewald, Rembrandt van Rijn to Francisco de Goya and Jackson Pollock, as well as the representatives of Viennese Modernism Gustav Klimt, Oskar Kokoschka, Richard Gerstl and Egon Schiele.

The WAM benefits from the world's largest collection of Vienna Actionism, which includes works by Adolf Frohner and Alfons Schilling in addition to the four protagonists Günter Brus, Rudolf Schwarzkogler, Otto Muehl and Hermann Nitsch. The extensive collection impresses with action photographs and films, sketches, graphics and documentation material as well as visual works by the artists.

In contrast to art groups such as the "Blaue Reiter", the four representatives of Vienna Actionism pursued common ideological goals, but developed completely different artistic approaches. For this reason, it is not easy to place them in a precise chronological order - in the end, the WAM decided to focus on the period from 1957 to 1973, as the artists were already developing in very different directions from the 1970s onwards:

- Rudolf Schwarzkogler died in 1969
- Hermann Nitsch acquired Prinzenhof Castle in 1971 and concentrated on his Orgien Mysterien Theater
- Günter Brus' last action took place in Munich in 1970 - after that he only devoted himself to drawings
- Otto Muehl founded the Commune (AAO)

Internationally, Vienna Actionism made a highly significant contribution to the avant-garde developments of the 1960s that expanded the concept of art. The WAM aims to make Viennese Actionism accessible to the public in all its complexity.

"It is important to us to show the enormous art-historical and socio-political explosive force that Vienna Actionism had and still has," says museum director Julia Moebus-Puck. "As director, it is very important to me that Vienna Actionism (WA) is examined scientifically. This should make new ways of looking at it possible so that the diversity of WA can be revealed." Leaving the panel painting behind in favor of performative art, which above all illuminates the human body in all its facets, is a key characteristic of Vienna Actionism.

This is why art education is also a major concern for the WAM representatives: "We want to develop innovative methods for communication between visitors and works of art. The museum as a place where art can be experienced in a new way," explains Moebus-Puck.

The WAM was able to recruit the experienced Vienna Actionism expert Eva Badura-Triska as chief curator for the opening exhibition.

For Eva Badura-Triska, who was responsible for Vienna Actionism at the Museum of Modern Art (MUMOK) for many years, the founding of Vienna Actionism is a logical and necessary step: "The work of Günter Brus, Otto Muehl, Hermann Nitsch and Rudolf Schwarzkogler, as the four main representatives of this movement, should undoubtedly be accorded the same status as the Viennese art of early modernism, so rich in personalities, with its now world-famous painters Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele and Oskar Kokoschka, to whom the Vienna Actionists explicitly refer. Today, the latter attract a large audience and it has long been forgotten that they were long ostracized due to their radical content. After the Second World War, the Vienna Actionists were among the first to recognize and appreciate their qualities." Viennese Actionism was an extremely complex and multifaceted movement that dealt with fundamental existential human issues.

Director Julia Moebus-Puck and Badura-Triska want to highlight the many aspects of this art in the opening exhibition and illuminate them from ever new perspectives. The exhibition, which opens on March 15, is dedicated to Vienna Actionism in its art-historical and socio-political development.

## **THE VIENNA ACTIONISM COLLECTION IS THE LARGEST OF ITS KIND IN THE WORLD**

Head of the collection Andrea Santoyo emphasizes the special nature of the Vienna Actionism Collection: "With the WAM Collection, we want to enable a serious, scientific and interdisciplinary examination of Vienna Actionism. I see it as my task to prepare and process the collection in such a way that it can be used and made accessible for research."

The collection comprises around 17,000 exhibits and will be continuously expanded. The collection is not for sale. Cooperation with other museums is planned in order to cover and exhibit the entire oeuvre of Vienna Actionism.

Jürgen Boden, one of the two managing directors and founding members of the collection initiative: "The WAM will bring the high international status of Vienna Actionism as an art movement to Vienna. Namely to the city that the term "Vienna Actionism" refers to. To its place of origin. With the Vienna Actionism Museum, we want to put Vienna at the center of attention as a museum city".

Philipp Konzett, second managing director and museum initiator, adds: "In cooperation with other institutions, we want to achieve a continuous overall view of Vienna Actionism. In this way, Vienna Actionism is to be brought out of its shadowy existence and given the stage it deserves. The WAM should become indispensable."

## **WAM GOES INTERNATIONAL**

In future, the WAM also wants to act as an international cooperation partner and lender. Marcello Farabegoli, who worked as a curator at the Friedrichshof Collection from 2020 to 2022 and is therefore very familiar with the WAM's collection, has been hired for this purpose.

He is currently in negotiations with several museums abroad to realise new exhibitions on Vienna Actionism.

He is curating a project by Guadalupe Aldrete for the LONG NIGHT OF MUSEUMS in 2024 and a section of the next major exhibition dedicated to Rudolf Schwarzkogler in 2025.

# WAM

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## **VIENNA ACTIONISM MUSEUM (WAM)**

**WEIHBURGGASSE 26, 1010 VIENNA**

### OPENING HOURS

TUE-SUN 11 AM TO 6 PM

OPEN ON SUNDAYS AND PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

[WWW.WIENERAKTIONISMUS.AT](http://WWW.WIENERAKTIONISMUS.AT)

### QUERY NOTE

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## SHORT BIOGRAPHIES OF THE VIENNA ACTIONISTS

### **GUNTER BRUS**

Günter Brus was born on September 27, 1938 in Ardning, Styria.

He graduated from the Graz School of Applied Arts. After beginnings in informal painting he realized his first action Ana in 1964. Here human bodies and the surrounding space became the painting ground. This marked the transition from the informal to the „Selbstbemalungen“ (Self-Paintings). These were followed in 1965 by the „Selbstverstümmelungen“ (Self-Mutilations), in which Brus placed his own body in relation to fearful objects. His spectacular „Wiener Spaziergang“ (Vienna walk) took place on July 5, 1965. In 1966, he took part in the Destruction in Art Symposium in London. After Brus was sentenced to six months in prison for his actions at the „Kunst und Revolution“ (Art and Revolution) event in 1968, he fled to Berlin at the beginning of 1969. His last and most radical action „Zerreissprobe“ (Stress Test) took place in Munich in 1970. He then returned to drawing and his lyrical work.

Brus died in Graz on February 10, 2024.

### **OTTO MUEHL**

Otto Muehl was born on June 16, 1925 in Grodnau in Burgenland.

Muehl was sent to the front in the summer of 1944. The traumatic experiences during the war left a lasting impression on him. In 1952, he passed the teacher's examination for German and history and went on to study art education at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna.

In 1960, his first solo exhibition took place at the Galerie Junge Generation in Vienna. His first action in September 1963 marked the beginning of his actionist work, in which Muehl sought to remove taboos from socially repressed aspects of human nature by using human bodies and staging elementary life processes such as sexuality, birth and death. Muehl was one of the participants in the „Kunst und Revolution“ (Art and Revolution) event on June 7, 1968 at the University of Vienna and was sentenced to two months in prison as a result.

In 1972, he founded the Aktions Analytische Organisation (Action Analytical Organization) (AAO Commune), which subsequently had its seat at Friedrichshof in Burgenland. 1990/91 the commune disbanded. In 1991, he was sentenced to seven years in prison „for sexual offenses, fornication with minors up to and including rape, violations of the Narcotics Act and witness tampering“. While in prison, he produced an extensive body of paintings and literary works.

Muehl died on May 26, 2013 in Moncarapacho, Portugal.

## **HERMANN NITSCH**

Hermann Nitsch was born in Vienna on August 29, 1938.

From 1953 to 1958 he studied at the Graphische Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt in Vienna. Not yet twenty years old, he developed the concept for his Gesamtkunstwerk, the Orgien Mysterien Theater (Theater of Orgies and Mysteries), which was to define his life's work. In it, he wanted to address and unite all aspects of life, including the painful and violent ones, and bring them into an artistic form.

Nitsch's first painting actions took place at the Technical Museum in Vienna in 1960. From 1960 to 1979, Nitsch exclusively used the color red for his paintings. In 1962, animal blood was used as an artistic material for the first time. At the end of the 1960s, he developed the color theory of the Orgien Mysterien Theater.

In 1971, Prinzendorf Castle became the central venue for his Orgien Mysterien Theater. The first 24-hour play took place in Prinzendorf in 1975, followed by a three-day play in 1984 and the six-day play in 1998. In total, Nitsch realized 160 actions and 96 painting actions. In 2005, Nitsch realized his 122nd action at the Burgtheater in Vienna.

In his late work, Nitsch concentrated increasingly on painting again, in addition to further developing his music and action theater. In 2021, he staged a large-scale painting action for the Bayreuth Festival's „Walküre“ (Valkyrie).

Nitsch died in Mistelbach on April 18, 2022.

## **RUDOLF SCHWARZKOGLER**

Rudolf Schwarzkogler was born in Vienna on November 13, 1940.

From 1957, he studied at the Graphische Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt in Vienna, which he left in 1961 without graduating. He did his military service in 1963. In 1964, he took part in Otto Muehl's Material Action „Luftballonkonzert“ (Balloon Concert) in the latter's basement studio in Perinetgasse. Schwarzkogler subsequently took part in several actions by his fellow artists.

On February 6, 1965, he carried out his first solo action „Hochzeit“ (Wedding). Five further actions followed until spring 1966, each of which he realized without an audience, exclusively for the eye of the photo-camera.

After that, Schwarzkogler only worked on the conceptual level. In drawings and texts, he created experiential situations that the recipients could experience first-hand. Between 1968 and 1969, the artist became increasingly involved with the spiritual teachings and practices of the East. In this context, he undertook excessive fasting cures without medical supervision, which put him under great physical and psychological strain. Schwarzkogler became increasingly preoccupied with the relativity of the perceptible.

On June 20, 1969, Schwarzkogler fell from the window of his Vienna apartment and succumbed to his injuries.