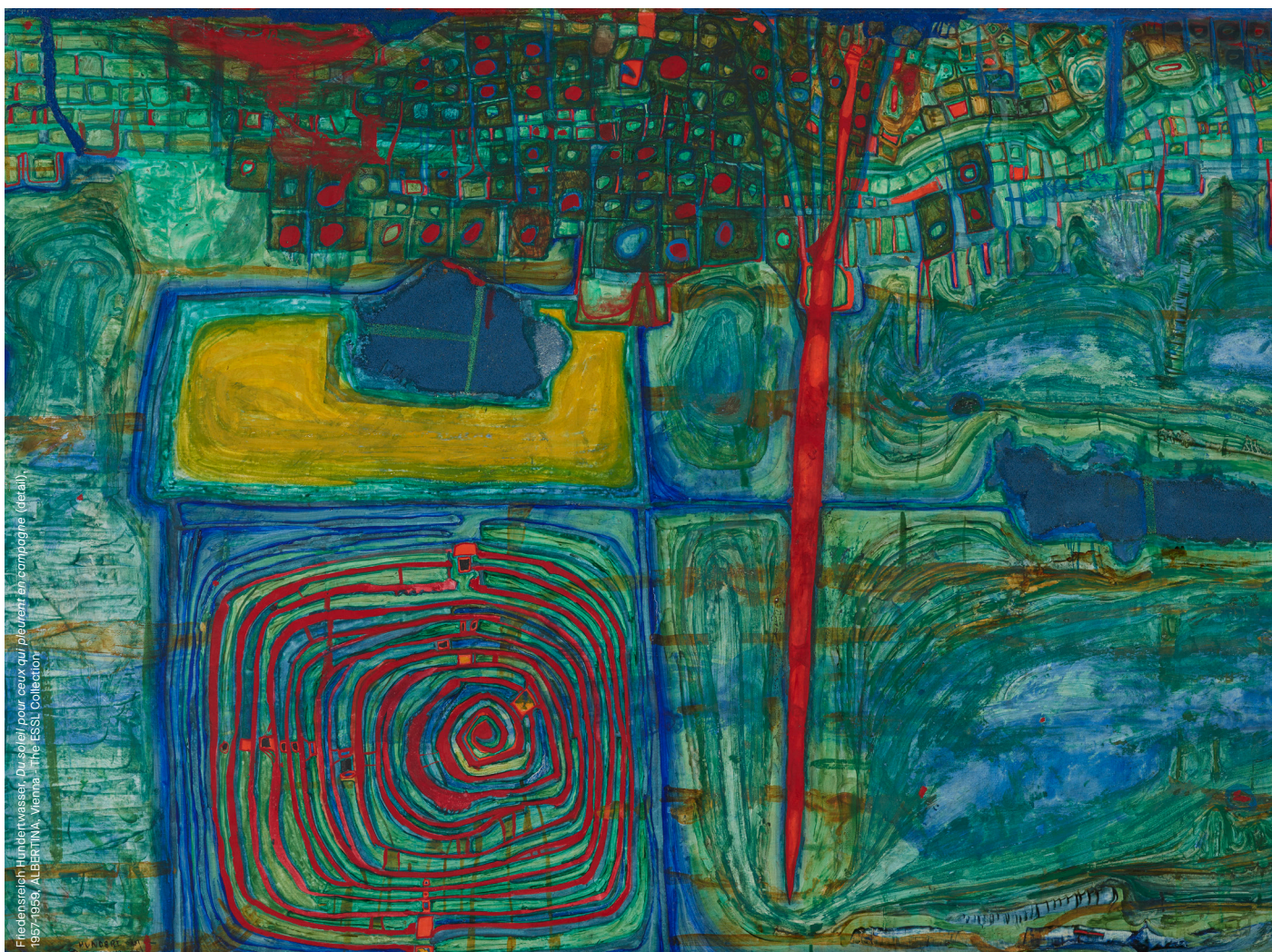


ALBERTINA klosterneuburg

SPOTLIGHTS



Friedensreich Hundertwasser, *Duisel*, pour ceux qui pleurent en campagne (detail), 1957-1958, ALBERTINA, Vienna - The ESSLI Collection

Exhibition Facts

Opening	22 August 2024 6.30 pm
Venue	ALBERTINA KLOSTERNEUBURG – The Essl Museum
Curator	Constanze Malissa Klaus Albrecht Schröder
Works	Pop Art - The Bright Side of Life 65 From Prachensky to VALIE EXPORT 55 Hundertwasser / Lafontaine / Okun 20
Catalogue	Available for EUR 29,90 (English & German) onsite at the Museum Shops as well as via https://shop.albertina.at/en/ and in book stores
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SPOTLIGHT

Modern exhibition concepts pay particular attention to the communication of art. In order to present art to a broad public in a way that is both exciting and easily accessible, a new tool is being added to the exhibition: the new concept *SPOTLIGHT* makes it possible to show the diversity of the constantly growing collection by means of individual, self-contained themes. The centuries-long dialogue between different artists can be explored in greater depth through cross-referencing. This results in new perspectives and references in a wider art historical and social context.

Pop Art – The Bright Side of Life

SPOTLIGHT – Roy Lichtenstein

Together with Andy Warhol and Jackson Pollock, Roy Lichtenstein numbers among the 20th century's most influential and important American artists. This founding father of pop art is known for his stereotypical blondes, war heroes, and comic book figures, whom he often drew in combination with speech balloons. His cartoon-like aesthetic, featuring brashly luminous colors, clear lines, and characteristic Ben Day dots in imitation of cheap comic book printing techniques, had a strong impact on the American art scene of the 1960s.

Even as abstract expressionism still reigned supreme internationally, numerous artists in Great Britain and the USA began returning to an art that was figurative and self-reflective, in the process tearing down the traditional boundaries between high art and everyday culture with ironic abandon. With sights set on a democratic ideal, their interest was in everyday images of industrialized, urban, and commercialized society as it existed during the post-war economic boom. It was through his pioneering innovation of appropriating the new and aggressive pictorial language of popular culture, advertising, and cartoons that Lichtenstein helped pop art achieve its breakthrough in 1961.

He rejected the pathos of subjective expressivity in art with his meticulous manner of painting that aimed to mimic trivial comic book motifs. To his mind, the flood of images subject to purely commercial considerations, oriented toward mass-market tastes, and optimized by graphic designers, advertising professionals, company executives, and perceptual psychologists conveyed the essence of his times. In an always lovingly ironic way that took on an increasingly critical tone as time went by, he dedicated his life as an artist to the investigation of the aesthetic values and established clichés of contemporary consumer culture's imagery as shaped by commercialization and industrialization. The ambivalence between high and low art, between artist and machine, between original and copy, and between artwork and reproduction is the overarching theme of his oeuvre.

SPOTLIGHT – Ben Willikens

Carceri – Archaeology of Silence

The depopulated oeuvre of Ben Willikens, the legendary rector of Munich's Academy of Fine Arts and a master of the aesthetics of empty spaces, captivates us with its astonishing coldness. The artist's large-format paintings, which for the most part depict strictly composed spaces devoid of human beings, netted him equal measures of fame and unmistakability during the second half of the 1970s.

Willikens, born in Leipzig in 1939, was beset in 1969 by a deep emotional crisis that resulted in a one-year stay at a psychiatric institution. The artist subsequently went on to process this drastic experience in acrylic paintings done mostly in large formats. Created between 1970 and 1981, they show various indoor spaces: bedrooms, hallways, washrooms.

Even though these institutional paintings do without human beings, it is indeed the individual that stands at the center—reflected by precisely those objects that serve to confine him. His recently created series Carceri – Archäologie des Schweigens [Prisons – Archaeology of Silence] was inspired by the writings of Michel Foucault. In a total of 16 paintings, Willikens takes up his pictorial subjects of the 1970s and develops them further: the rooms of the institution are now entered, with their furnishings rendered near-unrecognizable by the consistent enlargement of objects such as beds, lamps, and washing facilities. It is once again oppressive spaces that the artist has created, here—a prison of the soul, inhabited by a meditative silence that allows for existential statements about the darkest human abysses.

Camera Silens

In Camera Silens, Ben Willikens addresses the inhumanity of certain misguided treatment methods as well as other actions taken in psychiatric institutions: the portrayed room insulates its occupant from all sound; not even a single echo can be heard. Its absolute silence and the suppression of all outside influences that might help the brain to regenerate cannot be withstood for prolonged periods of time. With his choice of motifs, Willikens reflects the coldness, oppressiveness, and cruelty that emanate from facilities of confinement.

Obersalzberg

There can be no doubt that Ben Willikens' selection of motifs and their modes of depiction relates closely to events in his life: in December of 1943, when he was just four years old, Willikens was traumatized by the bombardment of his home town of Leipzig. He then lost both his father and his sister just a few years later. But even so, his works' relevance extends far beyond his own biography. The icy cold of the institutional paintings that made Willikens famous can also be found in his late oeuvre—such as in the shuddering glance cast through a window of Hitler's "Berghof" vacation residence on the Obersalzberg. Such paintings show the aesthetics of evil in its banality, and the cruelty of emptiness is what lends these works, as well, their special power. It is particularly spaces

associated with power that interest the artist. Power, however, is nothing that he would worship or admire. Quite the contrary: in his works, power appears as the expression of a defeat of humanity, as a manifestation of oppression. His spaces of power represent metaphors for that bestiality that he so despises in the “Third Reich.”

SPOTLIGHT – Erwin Thorn

The works of Viennese artist Erwin Thorn inhabit the interface between painting and sculpture. His output can be understood in terms of concrete, geometric, and abstract art traditions in general while also exhibiting pop art elements.

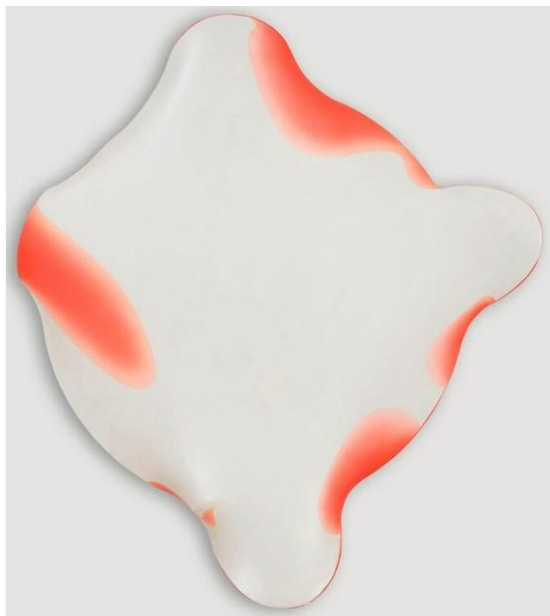
In biomorphic sculptural paintings and painting-like sculptures as well as in large-scale installations, Thorn dealt above all with the relationship between language and visual communication. Rhythm and waves that also call to mind sound waves, pointing clearly to the audible aspect of language, provide important anchor points for understanding his conceptual works. Thorn’s pictorial bodies, his organically flowing shapes snuggle up in corners or protrude bulkily from the wall, thereby overcoming the classic picture format. His objects remind one of solidified magma, and subtly employed colors—frequently orange—accent his white works, which are modulated by the play of light and shadows.

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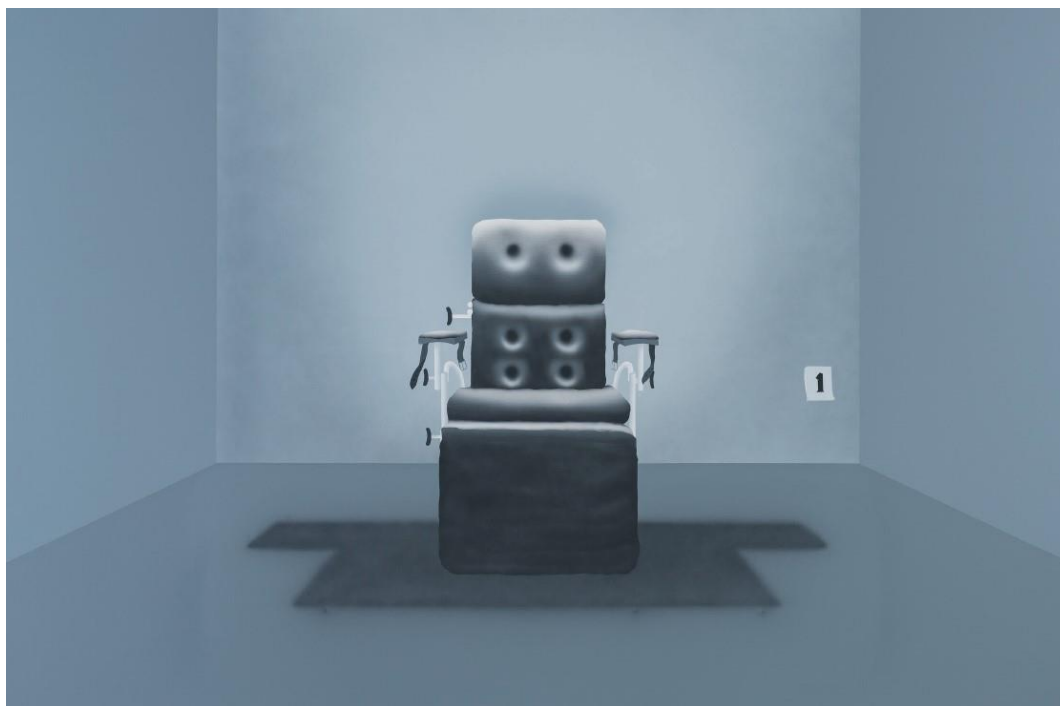
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Roy Lichtenstein
Wallpaper with blue Floor Interior, 1992
Screen print on paper
276 × 105 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna
© Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/Bildrecht, Vienna 2023



Erwin Thorn
Thursday Morning at 6 o'clock, 1968/69
Acrylic and dispersion on canvas
170 × 150 × 50 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna
© Estate of Erwin Thorn



Ben Willikens
Raum 1777, Camera Silens, 2024
Acrylic on canvas
200 × 300 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna
On loan from the artist

From Prachensky to VALIE EXPORT

The mid-20th century saw abstraction become a symbol of freedom in both Europe and the United States. As a new worldwide language of art, this final style of art history was viewed as painting's climax and conclusion. It came to epitomize the artistic temperament, expressive subjectivity, and the heroization of the individual.

After being violently interrupted by the totalitarian system that was National Socialism, the unfinished project of modernism was taken up once more after 1950.

The assertion of individuality and the notion of freedom, both of which stood opposed to National Socialism and its unofficial survival in postwar Austria's petite bourgeois understanding of art, were of central concern to the artists Günter Brus, Otto Muehl, and Alfons Schilling. In aesthetic radicality and with the psychophysical involvement characteristic of performative painting, art and life were brought together. The gestural also plays a prominent role in the oeuvre of Markus Prachensky: working mostly in red, his dominant color, he gave rise to diverse, autonomous variations in a gestural and abstract calligraphic painting style.

The current hanging, presented under the *Spotlight* subtitle, brings together several highlights from the ALBERTINA Museum's collection of contemporary art. Founded in 2014, the collection now comprise over 65,000 works. This new presentation concept makes it possible to draw attention to the diversity of this steadily growing collection in light of specific self-contained themes. *Spotlight: The Todo in Contemporary Art*, for instance, brings together eight circular works from the 21st century and offers insights into the rediscovery of this pictorial format, which had spent over 300 years in obscurity. VALIE EXPORT, who numbers alongside Maria Lassnig as one of the 20th century's most important female Austrian artists, is likewise given special attention in a presentation entitled *Spotlight: VALIE EXPORT*.

SPOTLIGHT – The *Tondo* in Contemporary Art

The circle has always been possessed of a special, even mystical significance. In the dictionary of the Brothers Grimm, one reads: "That which is round, particularly the circle and the sphere, awakens the impression of something self-contained, finished, complete." And even in ancient Egypt, the ouroboros—the snake eating its own tail—symbolized the cycle of life, the forever returning. In this light, the circular *tondo*—whether done as a painting or as a relief—embodies far more than a formal gimmick.

Trends are phenomena that tend to recur, be it in design, in fashion, in music, or in art. And in contemporary art, too, the shape of the circular disc is not at all that rare. This form initially spread from Florence, achieving broader prominence during the late 1400s as an expression of divine

harmony: every point on a circle relates its center, a fact that can likewise be understood as a return to the beginning.

Tondi are important especially in Renaissance painting, as part of which they played an increasingly large role between 1450 and 1510. The earliest such classic circular image is *La grande Pietà ronde* by the Netherlandish artist Johan Maelwael from ca. 1400. Around a century later, during the first decade of the 1500s, Michelangelo created his *Doni Tondo*—which was to go down in art history as one of his most famous works. Raphael, with his *Madonna della Seggiola* (also known as the *Madonna della Sedia*) of 1514, likewise created an important *tondo*.

The phenomenon of the circular image then disappeared entirely for the next 400 years. It was only during the 1960s, when American artists such as Frank Stella, Sol LeWitt, and Jackson Pollock developed “shaped canvases” with which they sought to overcome the ever-same rectangular panel painting format, that the *tondo* once again began receiving attention. Today, *tondi* are experiencing a renewed comeback. Artists in Austria and abroad are now repeatedly choosing this round form, as one can see in numerous examples from the ALBERTINA Museum’s contemporary art holdings.

Rondinone

Beginning in the 1990s, Ugo Rondinone developed a group of works consisting of a multitude of circular paintings, of which this work is one. On a round canvas 270 centimeters in diameter, he used acrylic paint to create seven concentric circles of varying widths and colors. This round shape shines at the viewer as brightly as an illuminated advertisement, with the absence of a narrative or plot reinforcing the colors’ luminous clarity to a massive extent. Rondinone describes his works of this type prosaically as “large-format sprayed paintings of multicolored concentric circles.” The artist derives the title for each one from a number and the date of its creation, painstakingly written out as the day, month, and year.

Philip Taaffe, *Unit of Direction*

The spiral form of Philip Taaffe’s work *Unit of Direction*, which combines painting with elaborate printing processes, is the product of lengthy intellectual endeavor and an exhaustive search through the treasures of his large library. Alongside recalling the most varied forms of ornamentation ranging from the geometric floor mosaics of Ancient Rome and Hellenism to Islamic arabesques and Indian mandalas and on to the Japonisme of the period around 1900, *Unit of Direction* also features the natural forms of various snail and muscle species concealed behind the spiral’s inexorable pull.

Robert Schaberl, *ZF aubergine dance with warm rose 4-6 2019 (290x)*

Robert Schaberl’s concentric abstractions, which he executes in various chromatic gradients and with surfaces ranging from matte to glossy, arise from the overlapping of up to 70 layers of paint on a horizontally rotating support. They trace their roots back to his early photographic experiments with everyday objects such as glasses and biomorphic circular shapes such as those of mushrooms, at first glance suggesting formal comparisons with works of concrete art as well as with the cryptic circular works of Hermann J. Painitz and the *Targets* by Jasper Johns. Schaberl’s aesthetic of the round,

however, consists above all in sensory overwhelm, in a schooling of sensitivity, in an attempt to have light appear in its scintillating quality.

SPOTLIGHT – VALIE EXPORT

VALIE EXPORT numbers among the most important media and performance artists internationally. Born in 1940 in Linz, she attended the arts and crafts school there before moving to Vienna in 1960. Following graduation from the Higher Federal Technical Institute for Education and Experimentation for the Textile Industry, she began realizing her initial performative works in 1967. The context in which these arose was that of Viennese Actionism, which broke down painting's classical genre-boundaries and questioned bourgeois norms with radical actions during the 1960s.

The artist formulates her media criticism as explicitly feminist criticism that is inseparably linked with scrutiny of the female body's representation and of women's role in a patriarchal society. In doing so, she distances herself in a clear way from the former movement's expressive pathos. Making reference to her own body, EXPORT uses a multitude of media—such as photography, video, and drawings—to investigate sociopolitical structures that inscribe themselves on the body in a painful way. EXPORT has had to fight hard for her position in the art scene. Art, to her, is not a counterdraft to reality but subversively calls for a new perspective on reality. 1970 saw her point out the absent recognition of female artists by self-confidently taking her artist's name from the label of the best-known Austrian cigarette brand.

Smart EXPORT

When she was 27, the artist—whose real name is Waltraud Höllinger (née Lehner)—decided to call herself VALIE EXPORT. Written in upper-case letters and protected by copyright, this brand name serves to liberate her from the last names of her father and of her former husband—an act with which she self-confidently positioned herself as a female artist in an art scene that was dominated by men. The self-representation VALIE EXPORT – SMART EXPORT, immortalized by the freelance amateur photographer Gertraud Wolfschwenger, playfully heightens this theme of self-assertion. With a smoldering cigarette in her mouth and standing in a male-connoted pose, EXPORT holds a Smart Export cigarette pack redesigned as her own brand into the camera—with her own nickname as the brand name and a photo of her face as the logo.

TAP and TOUCH CINEMA

TAP and TOUCH CINEMA, performed in Vienna in 1968, numbers among the earliest actions by Valie EXPORT that were influenced by the notion of expanded cinema. For this attention-grabbing action, EXPORT strapped a box with a curtain—serving here as a “cinema hall”—to her naked upper body. Her artist colleague Peter Weibel then encouraged passersby to reach into the box and touch EXPORT's breasts for a precisely specified length of time. Her body hence became a screen that one could experience as a tactile event. While doing so, the *TAP and TOUCH CINEMA* attendees

maintained direct eye contact with the artist—thus revealing the voyeuristic gaze upon the woman's body that a real cinema hall's darkness would normally conceal.

For this staged photograph, a colleague of EXPORT's reached into the box on behalf of later viewers. The after-the-fact video recording of the *TAP and TOUCH CINEMA* was produced specifically for Austrian television.

I beat it

Valie EXPORT's 1980 installation *I beat it* had its roots in one of her actions. This action adhered to a precise score:

Floating in a basin filled with a dark fluid is a life-sized photograph of the artist. Her arms and legs are immobilized by lead shackles. Beside the basin is a cannister, the original container of the fluid.

The barking of German shepherds, which emanates from three monitors, is followed by cries of "More! More!"—coming once from a woman and once from a man—indicating yet another intensification of suffering. The triangle formed by the monitors with the woman floating on its centerline alludes to trinity and nature but also to male ideology. The fact that the artist was immobilized during the original action in 1978 underscores the role of women "as dependent marionettes of the social machinery," and the ambivalence between calm motionlessness and debasement does indeed remain intact in the installation. In EXPORT's view, to be immobilized and debased is also to serve as the lubricant of a communication that should be frictionless.

Action Pants

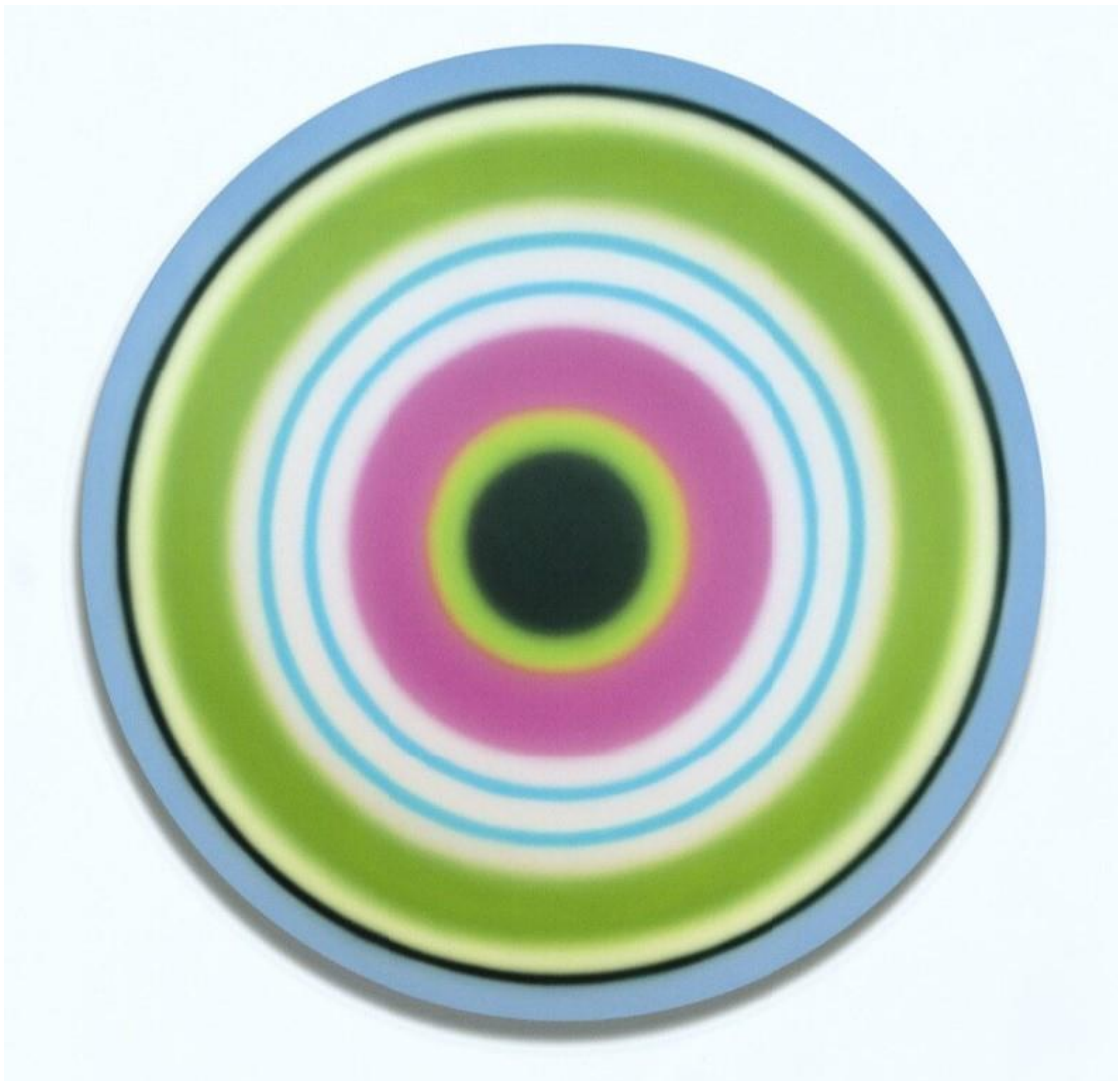
Action Pants: Genital Panic arose from a scandalous expanded cinema action: during an avant-garde film festival, VALIE EXPORT had stridden through a cinema hall's rows of seats wearing a pair of crotchless pants. For this later photographic work, the basic idea was to reflect the voyeurism of the audience. It hence shows EXPORT once again wearing a revealing pair of pants but heightens the confrontation via a male-connoted pose and props: with her legs spread wide, a leather jacket, and a machine gun, the artist undermines feminine stereotypes. She then chose one shot that is particularly provocative due to its frontal perspective and the artist's direct gaze into the camera, had it printed on posters, and fly-posted these in public locations. It is thus that EXPORT, in an actionistic as well as media-reflexive gesture, expands her audience from that of the closed cinema hall to encompass all potential viewers in the public realm.

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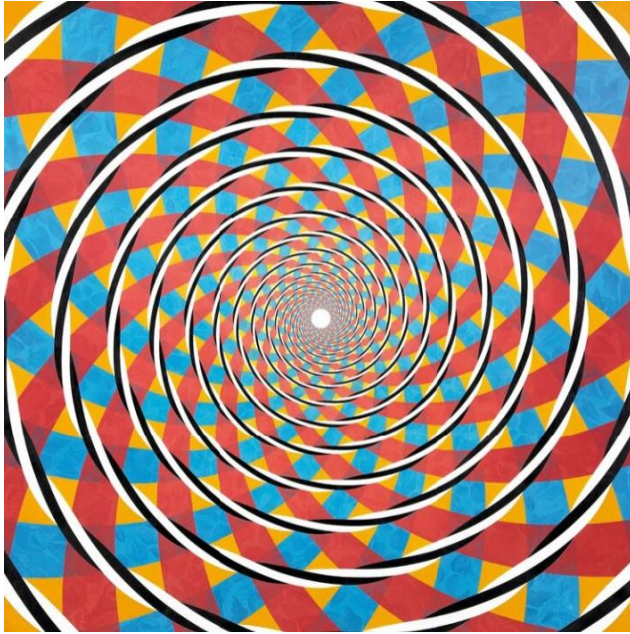
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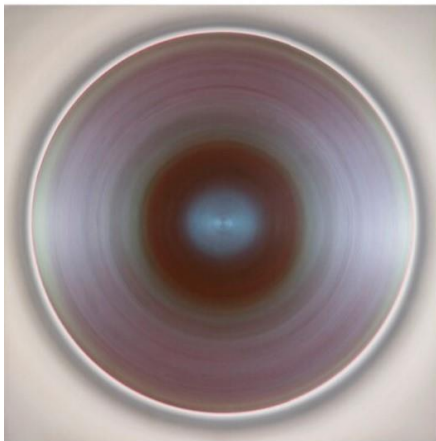
Markus Prachensky
Rouge sur gris - Karlsruhe II, 1962
Varnish on canvas
260 × 140 cm
ALBERTINA, Vienna - The ESSL Collection
© Brigitte Prachensky



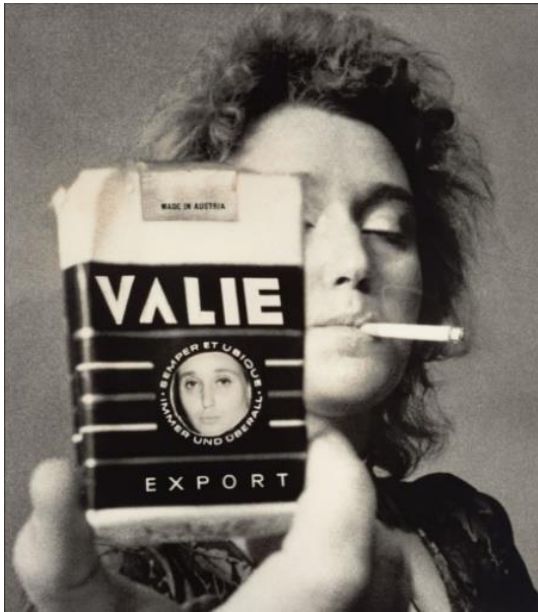
Ugo Rondinone
No.174 Twenty-second February one thousand and zero, 2000
Acrylic on canvas
Diameter 270 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – The ESSL Collection
© Ugo Rondinone
© Photo source: Essl Collection



Philip Taaffe
Unit of Direction, 2003
Mixed media on canvas
300 × 300 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – The ESSL Collection
© Philip Taaffe
Photo: Mischa Nawrata



Robert Schaberl
ZF aubergine dance with warm rose 4-6 2019 (290x), 2019
Acrylic on cotton
300 × 300 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna
© Robert Schaberl
© Photo source: Robert Schaberl



VALIE EXPORT
VALIE EXPORT - SMART EXPORT Self-portrait,
1970
Photo: Gertraud Wolfschwenger
Gelatin silver print
70 x 60 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – The ESSL
Collection
VALIE EXPORT, Bildrecht, Vienna 2023
Gertraud Wolfschwenger, Bildrecht, Vienna 2023



VALIE EXPORT
TAP and TOUCH CINEMA, 1968
Photo: Werner Schulz
Gelatin silver print
80 x 85 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – The ESSL
Collection
VALIE EXPORT, Bildrecht, Vienna 2023

Hundertwasser / Lafontaine / Okun

SPOTLIGHT – Friedensreich Hundertwasser

In the 1950s, Friedensreich Hundertwasser—which was what Fritz Stowasser had chosen to call himself in 1949—became part of a nascent avant-garde in Paris but simultaneously remained an outsider, independent and unique in his pictorial inventions and choices of colors. On account of his pronouncedly personal style, it is impossible to place Hundertwasser's oeuvre in any particular stylistic category.

Inspired by the ornaments and decorative elements of Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, and Paul Klee, he created for himself his very own world of motifs that were frequently invested with hidden meanings. He took up the tradition of the Austrian Art Nouveau movement, whose stylized wave-patterns he viewed as metaphors for the idea of natural growth. Engaging with nature and with all that is organic, he arrived at a form of painting that reduces landscape formations to abstract lines, spirals, and drop-like shapes.

The central symbol of his intensely colored visual world is the spiral, which made its initial appearance in 1953. That year, Hundertwasser had watched a short film about the art created by psychiatric patients. The picture of a rotating "spiral—I think it was in blue and red—provided my work with the decisive impulse. It made me dizzy, realizing how the irregular spiral is the main equation of life and death." As a meaningful element of life, a symbol of becoming and ceasing to be, it claimed a permanent place in his artistic repertoire from that point onward.

His entire life long, Hundertwasser was distrustful of sober, objective functionality, which he felt to be misanthropic. His paintings and watercolors as well as his architectural works are dominated by colorful surfaces, slanting plains, bulgy columns, and rooftop terraces planted with greenery. Nature's diversity of irregular forms served him as a model on the way towards a better world.

SPOTLIGHT – Marie Jo Lafontaine

Tears of Steel

27 monitors in a pyramidal arrangement form the projection surface for this filmic enactment of a cult of the body. In close-up shots, the camera's lens glides across handsome, athletic male bodies. Central to this installation is the idealization of the trained and training body that, as a muscle-machine, makes a hard and aggressive impression.

It was at a New York fitness studio during the mid-1980s that the Belgian artist Marie-Jo Lafontaine became acquainted with "power training," a form of high-intensity muscular training that takes its practitioners to the edge of their pain tolerance. Repeatedly overcoming this limit both mentally and physically is said to increase strength and muscle circumference. During the mid-1980s, Lafontaine took a strong interest in sustained physical and psychological self-conquest and the attendant highly erotically charged aesthetics. Having discovered a power training club in Marseille, the artist cast several individuals who trained there for her video *Les larmes d'acier*, which she conceived in light of her impressions from New York. In contrast to the asexuality of classic bodybuilding, the power training scene at that time tended to feature a hint of the homoerotic and sadomasochistic. On her 27 monitors, Lafontaine puts a hyper-masculine stereotype on display that was particularly en vogue during the era in which this work was created: men are warriors, hard and unforgiving—including towards themselves.

In addition to being a contradiction in terms, the title *Les larmes d'acier* [Tears of Steel] is also a historical reference: during World War II, Belgians used this term to refer to the bombs rained down on them by Germany's Luftwaffe. And the entire installation—its film sequences and music—juxtaposes contradictory things: body and machine, lust and suffering, sensuality and death.

SPOTLIGHT – Sasha Okun: Gates of Justice

Open the gates of justice!
I will enter...
Psalm 118:19

These words from the Old Testament's Book of Psalms provided the title for Sasha Okun's possibly final and certainly most monumental work. Its creation was spurred by his own unrelenting illness and his wife's recent death following an extended period of suffering.

At the center of this modern dance macabre stands the last physician, tantamount to a powerless god. His hands are as good as tied. With his knowledge and skills exhausted, even he is no longer able to help—no matter how desperately the pregnant woman at his side begs him to spare the future life in her body from suffering and death. With every new life that arrives, death likewise claims its place.

The pregnant woman's opposite no longer pleads with the helpless doctor: fury-like, this figure heaps him with curses and gesticulates wildly, pointing to its own illness of the mind and the heart—

just like all of the other figures here, lined up to the left and right across that final narrow strip of stage that is still left to the frail and failing, point to their own respective terminal illnesses.

In a way that seems downright ridiculous, the goalkeepers positioned at the margins of this drastic human parade underline the medical arts' ultimate futility, with their infusion bags nothing more than odd attributes of a will to survive that is doomed to failure.

In this world, there is no above. Above these people is nothing but deep-black night. No light, no lifeguards, no transcendence. Nor any heaven. Only night.

There is no "beyond" protruding into this blackness. It is a picture of futility, of hopelessness—one of the deepest and most jarring artworks of our era.

Press Images

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Friedensreich Hundertwasser
313 Du soleil pour ceux qui pleurent en campagne, 1957 / 1959
Egg tempera, watercolour, oil and sand in oil on
'Japanese preparation' (pieces of paper glued together)
100 × 150 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – The ESSL Collection



Marie-Jo Lafontaine
Video installation with 27 monitors, 7'41" loop, b/w, sound, 1987400 x 700 x 180 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – The ESSL Collection
Bildrecht Vienna, 2024



Sasha Okun
Gates of Justice, 2024
Oil on canvas
4 x 13 m
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna
Michael Marx – ARTS LIMITED