

mumok Museum moderner Kunst  
Stiftung Ludwig Wien  
Museumsplatz 1, 1070 Wien

Exhibition dates  
March 6 to August 23, 2015



Peter Schwarzkogler  
*3. Aktion „mit einem menschlichen Körper“, Sommer 1965, 1965*  
S/W-Fotografie, 40 x 30 cm  
Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig  
Wien, Leihgabe der Österreichischen  
Ludwig-Stiftung, seit 1984  
© Österreichische Ludwig-Stiftung  
Photo: mumok

#### Press contact

Karin Bellmann  
T +43 1 52500-1400  
karin.bellmann@mumok.at  
Katja Kulidzhanova  
T +43 1 52500-1450  
katja.kulidzhanova@mumok.at

Fax +43 1 52500-1300  
press@mumok.at  
www.mumok.at

## My Body is the Event Vienna Actionism and International Performance

From March 6, 2015, mumok is presenting its collection focus Vienna Actionism in the context of international developments in performance-based art. Whereas previous mumok shows always focused on the pictorial artifacts of Vienna Actionism, this exhibition will look closely at the performative aspects of their work. Actions by Günter Brus, Hermann Nitsch, Otto Muehl, and Rudolf Schwarzkogler will be contrasted with works by significant international practitioners of performance art, such as Marina Abramovic, Chris Burden, Tomislav Gotovac, Ion Grigorescu, Paul McCarthy, Ana Mendieta, Bruce Nauman, Yoko Ono, Gina Pane, Neša Paripovic, Ewa Partum, Carolee Schneemann, and VALIE EXPORT. The exhibition will be divided into several thematic sections that look at questions that generally shaped a broad range of action art in the 1960s and 1970s. A comparison with parallel international movements will show that the Viennese artists were not only right up with the times but in many ways developed pioneering positions.

### Performative Events Transgressing the Borders of Literature and Music

The Vienna exhibition begins with the *Literary Cabarets* (1958 and 1959) staged by the Vienna Group, a loose circle of friends and experimental poets. The two evenings they held were among the earliest events in Vienna that transcended traditional artistic genres in favor of expanded spatial and temporal forms. These artists distanced themselves from what they saw as staid notions of literature, and rather than aim to evoke any kind of reality through description or depiction, they wished to present real events. Music played an important role in these evenings too. A piano was destroyed live, an act that the artists understood as a form of sound creation within the scope of an expanded concept of music. Sound and noise production with unconventional means is also part of the repertoire of the Vienna Activists—such as in Otto Muehl's *Luftballonkonzert* (Balloon Concert, 1964). At the *Destruction in Art* symposium in London (1966) Muehl and Günther Brus also used their voices and breathing sounds as “music.”

*Aktive Poesie* (Active Poetry, 1971/1973), by the Polish artist Ewa Partum, and *Sehtext “Fingergedicht”* (Visual Text: Finger Poem, 1968–1973) by VALIE EXPORT, are both concerned with a critical and reflective investigation of language as a sign system and medium of communication. Ewa Partum casts away single letters from texts by famous writers onto the floor. EXPORT used sign language to create the text: “ich sage die zeige mit zeichen im zeigen der sage (FREI NACH HEIDEGGER).” (I say the sign with the signs in the sign of that which is spoken (FREELY ADAPTED FROM HEIDEGGER).

## **Expanding Painting and Sculpture**

An important section of the exhibition is dedicated to the expansion of painting, abandoning the flat picture surface in favor of direct work with “concrete” bodies and materials and frequently using other substances and objects in place of paint. In 1964, Günter Brus carried out his *Ana* action in which he not only covered his own body and all surrounding objects but also all the surfaces of the room with his painting. In *Face Painting - Floor* (1972) Paul Mc Carthy drew a line through a room by pushing a bucket of paint with his body. Sculptural work was also expanded into performative events. Especially Otto Muehl and Günter Brus “shaped” bodies by tying and piling them up in his actions. Carolee Schneeman did similar things in her performances like *Meat Joy* (1964).

## **Body Analysis**

Especially from the mid-1960s onward, many artists began thematizing physiological processes, ranging from elementary actions like breathing or walking to addressing taboo subjects such as urination, defecation, and sexuality. Yoko Ono’s Fluxfilm *Eye Blink* (1966) concentrated on the simple movement of the eye in extreme close-up. Videos by Bruce Nauman and Paul McCarthy show simple acts like walking, turning, and swinging. Günter Brus and Otto Muehl, and Romanian artist Ion Grigoriescu addressed the subject of giving birth in their actions.

## **Self-Mutilation**

Self-mutilation can be seen as a radical form of body analysis. While in early actions by Brus, Nitsch, and Schwarzkogler, injury and mutilation are presented in symbolic form only, in 1968 Brus began to experiment with real self-mutilation. His last action *Zerreißprobe* (Stress Test 1970) is a radical climax. He urinated and drank his urine, went into a state of physical frenzy, and then cut across his shaven skull. Gina Pane also mutilated her body with various objects. In 1973 VALIE EXPORT walked naked through a corridor of electrified wires (*Hyperbulie*), and Marina Abramovic aggressively combed her hair until it hurt.

## **Ritual Practices**

One section of this exhibition looks at the connections between ritual practices and performance. It includes a comparison of Nitsch’s *Orgien Mysterien Theater* or Rudolf Schwarzkoglers shaman-like acting in his 6<sup>th</sup> *action* with Cuban-born artist Ana Mendieta’s use of materials like blood, fire, earth, and water to create “body pictures” and “earth-body” sculptures.

Curated by Eva Badura-Triska with Marie-Therese Hochwartner

**Symposium**

**My Body Is the Event. Vienna Actionism and International Performance**

Friday April 24 and Saturday April 25

Renowned experts in the field of performative arts will address questions raised by this exhibition, looking at events in Vienna in the 1960s and simultaneous and later international developments.

Participants include: Eva Badura-Triska, mumok; Rosemarie Brucher, Kunstuniversität Graz; Adam Czirak, Freie Universität Berlin; Barbara Gronau, Universität der Künste Berlin; Hubert Klocker, Sammlung Friedrichshof; Hans-Thies Lehmann, Prof. (emerit) Goethe Universität, Frankfurt am Main; Sandra Umathum, Hochschule für Schauspielkunst Ernst Busch, Berlin; Eike Wittrock, Freie Universität Berlin