



Vienna, February 1, 2018

Belvedere 21

Arsenalstrasse 1
1030 Vienna
Austria

Opening times:
Wed to Sun and all public
holidays: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.,
Wed and Fri until 9 p.m.

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belvedere21.at/presse21

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Günter Brus, *Portfolio Ana IV*, 1964/2004, with Anna Brus, photo: Khasaq (Siegfried Klein)
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GÜNTER BRUS UNREST AFTER THE STORM

February 2 to August 12, 2018

To mark the artist's 80th birthday, Belvedere 21 is dedicating a comprehensive retrospective to the oeuvre of Günter Brus.

'In keeping with this year's motto "Spirit of '68," which underpins the overall activities of Belvedere 21 during 2018, this exhibition honors Günter Brus as the great art rebel of the 1960s. Fifty years after the radical "Kunst und Revolution" event, we will show that Brus has never stopped developing and reinventing his artistic material time and again,' according to Stella Rollig, Director General of the Belvedere and Belvedere 21.

Günter Brus is now considered one of Austria's most important international artists. As a representative of Viennese Action Art, during the 1960s he shone a light on the powerful presence of the physical and psychological constitution of man and the oppression of the individual to social rules. With his radical, body-based and performative work, he succeeded in detaching himself from the 'brand' of Viennese Action Art and has since gone down in history as the fundamental pioneer of international action and performance art. In 1970, Günter Brus turned his back on Action Art and focused increasingly on the medium of drawing, with 'image poems' and theater works.

A particular highlight of the retrospective is the comprehensive presentation of selected series of works. Alongside the familiar action photos, supplemented by material that has rarely been exhibited until now, Brus's serial drawings and 'image poems,' including the 160-part cycle *Leuchtstoffpoesie und Zeichenchirurgie* (Luminescence Poetry and Drawing Surgery), will be shown in their entirety. A total of around 120 different work cycles and works that altogether total more than 700 individual objects can be seen in the exhibition, including films and previously unknown series of works.

'The exhibition on the upper floor of Belvedere 21 offers an overview of the artist's entire oeuvre and makes correlations visible. Hence the theater projects, the cycles of drawings and the artist's books, along with the early gestural painting and the familiar actions, are evidence of Brus's radical idea of art as a constant destruction of the artwork, or more precisely its traditional form as panel painting,' explains curator Harald Krejci.

The major Günter Brus retrospective at Belvedere 21 closely addresses six themes: painting in an extended field, Günter and Anna Brus, image and narrative, collaborations, theater and psyche, and the Berlin period.

PAINTING IN AN EXTENDED FIELD

In 1960, Günter Brus began working with a radical, gestural form of painting. In his efforts to break away from classic panel painting, he created 'spatial images' in which the formal boundaries of the canvas no longer played a role. His later performances and actions can be seen as further developments of informal painting. In his first performance, *Ana*, in 1964, his own body was at the center of the artistic confrontation. Brus consistently expanded the work process and imbued his actions and performances with further levels of meaning. If the body is initially still a medium for the painting process, then later it becomes a membrane and a metaphor of social processes, and thus too a surface for the projection of his social critique. With his final action *Zerreiβprobe* (Ordeal) in 1970, which clarified the artist's radically expanded concept of painting with and on his body, Günter Brus played a major part in shaping the history of performance art.

THE BERLIN PERIOD

As a result of his participation in the collective action *Kunst und Revolution* at the University of Vienna, which went down in the history of Viennese Action Art as a so-called 'Uniferkelei,' or "dirty university prank," Günter Brus was taken to court and, facing a severe sentence, fled to Berlin. In the exhibition, Berlin is considered the starting point for his new approach to art and his preoccupation with theater and literature. He developed 'image poems,' which resulted in entire pictorial cycles. One example is the cycle *Franz Schreker. Die Gezeichneten*, (Franz Schreker. The Branded), which is shown in its entirety. Collaborating with other Austrian artists like H.C. Artmann, Oswald Wiener and Gerhard Rühm, Günter Brus worked on various art projects while in exile in Berlin. He published works by his artist friends in the artists' magazine *Die Schastrommel*. During those years, he also attempted to gain a financial foothold through theater projects. It was also in Berlin that *Selten gehörte Musik* (Rarely Heard Music) developed, which visitors will be able to listen to at Belvedere 21.

IMAGE AND NARRATIVE

With his last action, entitled *Zerreiβprobe*, in 1970 Günter Brus turned his back on Action Art in favor of literary-creative works. In 1971, he published his first novel *Irrwisch* (Flibbertigibet), which he underpinned with drawings. From this, new combinations of literature and pictorial art were to develop. The genre of 'image poems' that Brus created lies somewhere between the twin poles of concept and image. Pictorial and linguistic symbols transition smoothly into and complement one another. The texts – from aphorisms to narratives and language games – come primarily from Brus himself. In 1998, Günter Brus created *Leuchtstoffpoesie und Zeichenchirurgie*, which brings together closed narratives, slivers of text, drawings and image poems in one eclectic web of relationships.

THEATER AND PSYCHE

Since the 1970s the artist has taken on theater as a representative art form, developing plays for the stage that go beyond his image-poem cycles. In the tradition of ancient theater, he designs stage sets, costumes and the play's content and brings these to life with grotesque, humorous and playful-fantastical elements. Hence, having concentrated on his own body in space, Günter Brus now develops a powerfully pictorial and complete composition for the stage. As in his image poems and texts, for his stage plays too, the expressive, symbolic-allegorical language and the abstract, free means of representation are definitive. His first complete work is the tragedy *Der Frackzwang* (Tailcoats Only). In his staging of the play *Erinnerungen an die Menschheit* (Memories of Humanity), based on a text by Gerhard Roth, he strings together loose scenes and thus breaks apart the classic form of dramatization. Brus also designed the costumes for *The Cunning Little Vixen*, an opera by Czech composer Leoš Janáček.

GÜNTER AND ANNA BRUS

The exhibition places a particular focus on Günter Brus's collaboration with his wife Anna, from whom his first performance takes its name. Anna Brus's part in the development of the actions is highlighted here. Unlike his fellow campaigners Mühl or Nitsch, who were constrained by machismo in their works and their dealings with their models, Günter Brus has always collaborated with his wife. Anna Brus earned a living for her family and in her spare time helped out with the actions – a family situation that was very unusual in the early 1970s. The extent to which this form of partnership was a conscious decision underpinned by an emancipatory attitude remains unclear. The fact is that Günter Brus deals with the subject of gender roles time and again, and in doing so questions stereotypes and roles.

COLLABORATIONS

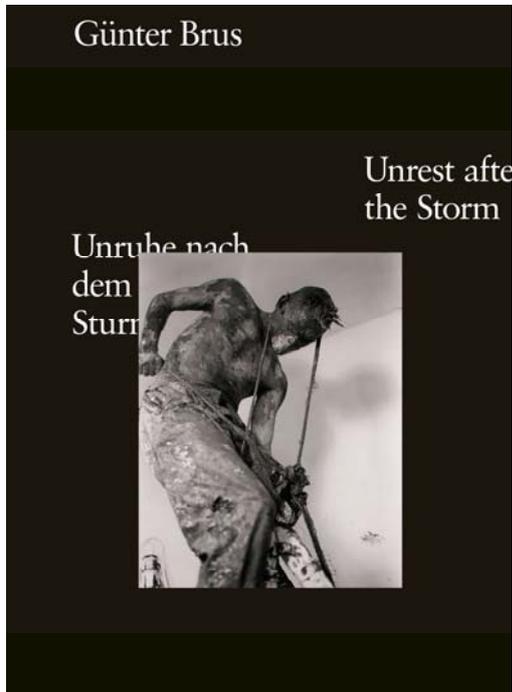
Günter Brus continually seeks to involve and include fellow artists as well as his audience. The works that developed as collaborations with other artists are presented in a particular form in the exhibition. A room within the retrospective is to hold changing exhibits throughout the duration of the exhibition. It will show collaborations with artist colleagues such as Arnulf Rainer, Jörg Schlick and Dominik Steiger, as well as a spatial installation by the young artist Sophia Süßmilch created especially for the exhibition.

SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF THE ARTIST

Günter Brus was born on September 27, 1938 in Ardning in Styria. He lives and works in Ardning and Graz.

- 1954-1957 Took a commercial art class at the School of Applied Arts in Graz
- 1957 Moves to Vienna
- 1958-1960 Studied at the Academy of Applied Arts in Vienna, but without completing his studies
- 1960 Traveled to Mallorca with Alfons Schilling; intensive confrontation with Informalist painting through acquaintanceship with Joan Merrit
- 1961 Exhibition with Alfons Schilling, Hermann Nitsch, and Adolf Frohner; action painting exhibition with Alfons Schilling at Galerie Junge Generation; met future wife Anna, who participated in some actions, and Rudolf Schwarzkogler
- 1964 Met experimental film maker Kurt Kren; first *Ana* action and first use of the body as an artistic medium; further actions in subsequent years, including *Vienna Walk*
- 1966 Founded Institut für Direkte Kunst (IDA) with Otto Muehl; participated at the invitation of Gustav Metzger in the Destruction in Art Symposium in London; radicalization of action art, first Action Scores; transition from *Self-Paintings* to *Body Analyses*, interventions using his own body
- 1968 *Der helle Wahnsinn* action in Aachen; *Art and Revolution* action with Otto Muehl, Oswald Wiener, Peter Weibel, and Franz Kaltenbäck at the University of Vienna; sentencing to six months' imprisonment
- 1969 Escape to Berlin
- 1970 Last Body Analysis, *The Stress Test* in Aktionsraum 1, Schackstrasse, Munich
- 1970-1977 Return to drawing, publication of *Organ der österreichischen Exilregierung* and *Schastrommel*, later *Drossel*, reflecting on his Actionist works; first illustrated literary works in Berlin, inspired by the intensive interaction with Oswald Wiener, Gerhard Rühm, and Dieter Roth; joint musical performances of *Seldom Heard Music* with Oswald Wiener, Gerhard Rühm, Dieter Roth, Hermann Nitsch, and Christian Ludwig Attersee; first theatrical works in Berlin
- 1972 Met Armin Hundertmark, publisher of works by Fluxus artists and Viennese Actionists; numerous *Bilddichtungen*; participated in documenta 5 in Kassel
- 1976 Conversion of prison sentence into a fine after an audience by Anna Brus with Federal President Rudolf Kirchschläger
- Since 1976 Publication of poems; numerous picture-text cycles, including *Franz Schreker—Die Gezeichneten*; *Günter Brus—Bild-Dichtungen* exhibition in Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Kunstmuseum, Luzern, and Kulturhaus der Stadt Graz during the steirischer herbst; stage set and costume design for *Erinnerungen an die Menschheit* by Gerhard Roth (steirischer herbst 1985) and other productions
- 1980 Participated in the Biennale in Venice
- 1982 Participated in documenta 7 in Kassel
- 1997 Awarded the Grand Austrian State Prize for his work
- 1999 Admitted to hospital; production of *Kleine Narbenlehre*
- 2004 Awarded the *Oskar Kokoschka Prize*, worked on the third part of the autobiographical novel *Das gute alte Westberlin*
- 2011 Opening of the *BRUSEUM* – a museum dedicated to Günter Brus in Graz, part of Universal Museum Joanneum

CATALOGUE



Günter Brus. Unrest after the Storm

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Exhibition title	<i>Günter Brus. Unrest After the Storm</i>
Curator	Harald Krejci
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Exhibits	Approx. 120 works / work cycles, consisting of around 700 individual objects
Location	Belvedere 21 Arsenalstraße 1, 1030 Vienna
Opening times	Wednesday to Sunday and on all public holidays 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Wednesday and Friday until 9 p.m.
Tickets	Regular 8 Euro Belvedere 21 Annual Ticket 21 Euro Concessions 6 Euro Children and teenagers up to 18 years old free
Web	belvedere21.at #GunterBrus21

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