

Universalmuseum Joanneum Press

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Show! Highlights from the Collection

Neue Galerie Graz, Joanneumsviertel, 8010 Graz

Opening: 11.04.2024, 7 pm

Duration: 12.04.–18.08.2024

Curated by Günther Holler-Schuster

Some 350 works from the Neue Galerie Graz Collection can be seen in the exhibition *Show!* These include both new acquisitions of recent years as well as highly prominent artworks that range narratively from 1800 to the present day. This time span, in which our habitat and humans themselves have changed so often and so fundamentally, has produced important and stirring pictures; it has thus held up a mirror multiple times, establishing ideals which are then destroyed in the next moment. The exhibition's goal is not to create a new canon, and certainly not to rearrange a hierarchy. Rather, the Neue Galerie shows a gallery tour of high quality, one it is proud of. Not least of all, this accords with what the public wants.

In recent years, the Neue Galerie Graz collection, comprising more than 70,000 works, has been shown partially, through variously themed exhibitions – for example, concerning the landscape, the portrait, feminist art. This time, not least in response to the strong desire of the public, an overview of the collection's 'highlights' is on offer: an experimental gathering of works from the 19th century up to the present day.

From 'masterpiece to highlight'

But what are 'highlights', who determines this status and how do works of this kind differ from others? Assuming the most obvious, these are widely known works by mostly renowned artists. However, it can also be assumed that a general consensus exists which suggests such designations. Museums founded in the 19th century were confronted with the question of the 'masterpiece'. Suddenly, it was no longer for extravagant patrons to build collections in line with their personal inclinations, but for state-employed art guardians. They had to decide what should be shown in the museum, above any personal taste – in the name of history, as it were. As art is difficult to evaluate, the term 'masterpiece' was employed. This quickly developed into a vague attribution, but was intimidating enough to stifle superfluous discussions. Today the term 'highlight' is applied in a similar way. We know what we are talking about, but we do not usually do it at the same time.

On the history of the Neue Galerie Graz Collection

Apparently, 'highlights' are still created in a variety of ways. They follow the art-historical definition, market reality and subjective individual views, and thus fulfil a broad consensus. Waldmüller, Egner, Blau, Wisinger-Florian, Klimt, Schiele, Boeckl, Warhol, Lassnig, Brus, Jungwirth – all these artists represent 'highlights'. They enjoy a special status within the Neue Galerie's collection, they carry the prominence of the collection, so to speak. The public knows them. In the early 1990s, Wilfried Skreiner noted that 'such a collection lacks highlights for the most part and that a conceptual acquisition policy is impossible'. Since then, repeated attempts have been made to change the latter.

Enormous progress was made both with the BRUSEUM and through targeted new acquisitions of international art under Christa Steinle, Peter Weibel and Werner Fenz. Driven not least by the exhibition programme since the 1960s (Trigon), the Neue Galerie has stood out as the only state museum in Austria to collect and exhibit international contemporary art. The collection stretches back to 1800, to the time of the Enlightenment and the dawn of modernity – an ideal time span for understanding our present day.

From the beginning the collection has been accumulated through acquisitions, foundations and a wide variety of gifts. With generous donations from private individuals, such as those from Helmut Suschnigg or Regina Ploner, as well as from numerous artists, and through many permanent loans, such as the collection of paintings by Wilhelm Thöny from the Steiermärkische Sparkasse or most recently from Sissy and Günter Geiger, the Neue Galerie collection has been greatly enriched, its quality deepened, especially in recent years. The republican, civic consciousness of those who see the museum as 'theirs' and the property there as a collective treasure is revealed in this moment. Contained within this idea lies both the strength of society and that of its institutions – in our case the museum as a place of common endeavour. Significant works of international and local art have come to Graz as a result. This exhibition sets out to show a selection of these works.

A wide-ranging narrative from idealised landscape to self-reflective art

The *Show!* exhibition displays works from 1800 to the present day. The early works follow art-historical categorisations – landscape painting, city views, portraits, nudes. This form of allocation barely matters for contemporary art, however. It would be inadequate to capture the art of today. Too many aspects of the current social development with which the art of recent decades has engaged with increasing intensity have remained unnoticed. This exhibition attempts to maintain the classic categories of content on a historical level in the tour through the show. At the same time, these works are accompanied and commented on by later, and even contemporary, exhibits.

The spectrum within which this show operates is already outlined at the outset. Here we see the ideal landscape of the 19th century as a seemingly eternally valid construct. The extent to which this has been broken to this day is shown by works of contemporary art in which the ideals have been upended. War, ecological disasters in tourism and industrial agriculture, as well as the image-making of nature, which is responsible for new forms of idealisation and commercialisation of our environment, become apparent in this time spectrum.

Thus, what emerges here is not a linear process from art history, rather an overarching, connected narrative. At the same time, we are experiencing the various developments in theme specific to the time. What became of the nude? Once the idealised form of the human body – again, from the spirit of antiquity – it has turned into the location of mental effects in the 20th century. The body itself has become the material, the canvas – the art event.

Distance and proximity now also have completely different connotations to the 19th century, the era of oriental fashion, unbridled colonialism and cultural imperialism. Flight, migration and xenophobia now stand for this pair of concepts. Nowadays, post-colonial upheavals are our main problem areas. The recently-changing overall geopolitical situation clearly underlines this state of affairs.

At the end of the exhibition, narrative structures are dissolved. Art increasingly reacts to itself, becomes self-reflective, adopting different critical stances towards itself. Abstraction, expansion of the panel painting, dissolution of classical categories, engagement with the system of art itself or mediatisation – all of this is dealt with vigorously and in the sub-stories concerned. *Show!* is not intended to create a new canon nor to re-order any hierarchy.

The plan of a permanent presentation

This exhibition is – so to say – the overture to the new permanent presentation of the collection, which will be adapted this autumn. This will be condensed to fewer works and rearranged slightly every year – to bring it up to date, to present special themes and to unveil new acquisitions.

The exhibition is accompanied by an educational programme that offers comprehensive descriptions of works by means of an audio guide and a densely packed teaching booklet. Moreover, there will be numerous tours through the exhibition that will treat the show's themes, both in the form of an overview and with distinct topics.

With works by Marc Adrian, Friedrich Aduatz, Rudolf Alt, Friedrich Amerling, Siegfried Anzinger, Donald Baechler, John Baldessari, Marie Baselli, Hans Bischoffshausen, Carl Blaas, Tina Blau, Herbert Boeckl, Erwin Bohatsch, Agostino Bonalumi, Herbert Brandl, Norbertine Bresslern-Roth, Günter Brus, Werner Büttner, André Cadere, Sophie Calle, Elfriede Coltelli, Constantin Damianos, Hugo Darnaut, Adel Dauood, Mario Decleva, Karl Wilhelm Diefenbach, Anny Dollschein, Marie Egner, Georg Eisler, Thomas Ender Erró, Valie Export, Gottfried Fabian, Marianne Fiegelhuber-Gutscher, Robert Filliou, Hans Fronius, Hamish Fulton, Jakob Gasteiger, Friedrich Gauermann, Bruno Gironcoli, Franz Grabmayr, Olga Granner-Milles, Franz Gruber-Gleichenberg, Herbert Hamak, Keith Haring, Felix Harta, Fred Hartig, Romuald Hazoume, Caroline Heider, Peter Gerwin Hoffmann, Wolfgang Hollegha, Erich Höning-Hönigsberg, Theodor Hörmann, Alwine Hotter, Alfred Hrdlicka, Allen Jones, Martha Jungwirth, Birgit Jürgenssen, Johanna Kandl, Franz Kapfer, Alex Katz, Soli Kiani, Ernestine Kirchsberg, Yves Klein, Igo Klemencic, Gustav Klimt, Alfred Klinkan, Fred Bervoets, Johann Knapp, Milan Knizak, Friederike Koch-Langentreu, Kiki Kogelnik, Anton Kolig, Broncia Koller-Pinell, Johann Peter Krafft, Renate Krammer, Conrad Kreutzer, Vinzenz Kreuzer, Richard Kriesche, Elke Krystufek, Hans Kupelwieser, August Maria Kurtz-Gallenstein, Walter Langhammer, Richard Larsen, Maria Lassnig, Johann Lederwasch, Eugène Leroy, Axl Leskoschek, Roy Lichtenstein, Friedrich Loos, Vera Lutter, Anna Lynker, Kateryna Lysovenko, Karl Mader, Franziska Maderthaner, Hans Makart, Ferdinand Mallitsch, Ida Maly, Elga Maly, Fritz Martinz, Gabriel Cornelius Max, Josef Mikl, Carl Moll, Alois Mosbacher, Ernst Christian Moser, Franz Motschnig, Otto Muehl, Leopold Carl Müller, Viktor Mytteis, Bruce Nauman, Shirin Neshat, Walter Niedermayer, Hermann Nitsch, Franz Novinc, Oswald Oberhuber, Peter Richard Oberhuber, Albert Oehlen, Carl O'Lynch of Town, Julian Opie, Tony Oursler, Mimmo Paladino, Ferdinand Pamberger, Friedrich Panzer, Daniel Pauluzzi, Emmy Paungarten, Max Peintner, Ferdinand Penker, Georg Pevetz, Friederike Pezold, Helga Philipp, Josef Pillhofer, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Katrin Plavcak, Rudolf Pointer, Sigmar Polke, Heinrich Johann Pölzl, Markus Prachensky, Leo Putz, Ignaz Raffalt, Johann Gualbert Raffalt, Arnulf Rainer, Bernard Rancillac, Franz Rogler, Anton Romako, Martin Roth, Leo Ruben, Gerhard Rühm, Robert Russ, Wolfgang Schaukal, Hubert Scheibl, Roman Scheidl, Egon Schiele, Adrian Schiess, Emil Jakob Schindler, Emilie Schmäck, Hubert Schmalix, Paul Schmidtbauer, Johann Nepomuk Schödlberger, Alois Schönn, Hannes Schwarz, Rudolf Schwarzkogler, Gustav Seyffferth, Fritz Silberbauer, Bridget Smith, Franz Steinfeld, Wilhelm Steinfeld, Thomas Stimm, Marianne Stokes-Preindlsberger, Oskar Stössel, Rudolf Szyszkowitz, Wilhelm Thöny, Otto Thoren, Erwin Thorn, Gustav Troger, Günther Uecker, Timm Ulrichs, Carl Unger, Victor Vasarely, Paul Virilio, Alfons Walde, Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller, Günter Waldorf, Andy Warhol, Kurt Weber, Peter Weibel, Max Weiler, James Welling, Susanne Wenger, Tom Wesselmann, Franz West, Alfred Wickenburg, Robert Wilson, Olga Wisinger-Florian, Johannes Wohlfart, Erwin Wurm, Liu Xiaodong, Johannes Zechner, Giancarlo Zen, Robert Zeppel-Sperl, Otto Zitko, Alfred Zoff.