

## Arnulf Rainer - Retrospective

3 September 2014 - 6 January 2015

To mark his 85<sup>th</sup> birthday, the Albertina is dedicating a comprehensive retrospective to Arnulf Rainer, one of the most important and influential artists of the present day. The presentation allows insight into the impressively broad oeuvre with works from public and private collections, most of which have never – or not for a long time – been exhibited in Austria. Encompassing some 150 exhibits, the exhibition will also be shown in the Frieder Burda Museum in Baden-Baden in Germany.

The focus of the selection is on revealing key points and seminal intersections that form coordinates within Rainer's artistic evolution to date. Hierarchically they are located over a chronological sequence, connecting the fascinatingly, richly meshed facets and kaleidoscopically shifting artistic expressions of Arnulf Rainer. As central positions, they illustrate the artist's primarily dialectical approach. In as well as between his pictures, an intensive dialogue arises on themes of pictorial qualities and graphic linear structures, opening up artistic dialogues concerning a fathoming of surface and space, colour and reduced black-and-white, between abundance and emptiness, calmness and motion, stillness and agitation, between abstraction and figuration; ideas are exchanged between one's own and another's contribution.

In line with this dialectical constant in Arnulf Rainer's work, the start of the exhibition contrasts the verticalisation and centralisation found in the early 1950s with the studies of proportion created at the same time. The impulsive, abstract drawings encounter works experimenting with colours and surfaces. At this time following the end of World War Two, the young Arnulf Rainer grapples intensely with various impulses of European art, albeit often for short periods only. In Austria the need to catch up with expressionism, surrealism, automatism and constructivism was very great.

One encounters the same dialectical tension in the contrast of coloured finger, hand and foot paintings with broad-format, figurative drawings in black-and-white from the late 1960s.

In 1968/69 Rainer places his facial expression at the centre of his artistic interest. In the publicly accessible photo booths he distorts his face into grimaces. These photos are then taken as the starting-point, and subsequently enlarged, reworked and arranged.

The "Face Farces" and "Body Poses" staged in the studio using a photographer represent Rainer's performative contribution to actionist art and show his completely independent approach to the medium of photography.

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Like scarcely any other, Arnulf Rainer has developed radically new procedures in his uncompromising search for means of expression. Since the 1960s Rainer has been among the most influential artists of the post-war period globally, along with Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke and Georg Baselitz, Maria Lassnig and Bruce Nauman or Yves Klein. They are all loners, none of them the leader of a movement like Pop and Minimal Art or Conceptual Art.

## OVER-PAINTINGS

Another area of focus is formed by the over-paintings or extended paintings, which the artist has created since the mid-1950s and with which he is identified internationally. In this way the artist wanted initially to fill a deeply felt emptiness. The shape of the cross, which unifies the vertical and the horizontal, becomes the painting surface that is typical and characteristic for him. This form conveys numerous content-related meanings such as death, mystery and transitoriness. And death has preoccupied Arnulf Rainer as a major theme since the very outset of his artist work. In an early drawing and in his self-staging as a corpse, he reflects death through his own person initially. But he also begins to collect death masks, which he later over-paints directly or reworks the paintings thereof.

As a dialectical response to the extended paintings, the coloured, transparently iridescent veil pictures are created at the end of the 1990s. Freely applied to each empty painting surface, complex light and colour spaces develop. With the re-workings too, Arnulf Rainer focuses on new models from art and cultural history: women's heads and bodies, angels, animals, plants and landscapes. The latest works are striking for their differentiated colouring, in which mixed and local colours construct magnetically attractive pictorial spaces breathed through with air. With this presentation in the Albertina, the outstanding importance of Arnulf Rainer for art history post-1945 is once again highlighted, far beyond the borders of Austria. Although these are apparently so opposing – such as photography versus painting, meditative over-paintings and the sacralisation of the cross versus practically autistic “Face Farces” and “Body Poses”, blind, unconscious automatism versus meticulously balanced “studies of proportion” – Rainer's overall work represents a homogenous block that deals with what art still has to say after its own demise.

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## ARNULF RAINER: BIOGRAPHY

**1929** Arnulf Rainer is born in Baden near Vienna on December 8<sup>th</sup>.

**1944** Realistic landscape watercolours are created in Carinthia.

**1947** First contact with international contemporary art through magazines in the British Council in Klagenfurt, through exhibitions of the French Cultural Institute in Villach and in the Klagenfurt Künstlerhaus. Meets Maria Lassnig.

**1949** Having passed the entrance exams, one day at the University for Applied Art and three days at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna.

**1950** Founds the *Hundsgruppe* (Group of Dogs) with Maria Lassnig, Ernst Fuchs, Arik Brauer, Anton Lehmden among others. A series of intensely condensed surreal drawings are created.

**1951** Trip to Paris, meets André Breton. Sees the exhibition *Véhémences Confrontées* with works by Hans Hartung and Wols. Impressed by this, he finds his way to the abstract pictorial forms of the *Mikrostrukturen* (Microstructures) and *Atomisationen* (Atomisations). Exhibition of the *Hundsgruppe* in the rooms of the Vienna Society for Science and Art. Arnulf Rainer calls himself "TRR".

**1953-1959** *Reduktionen* (Reductions) are created in Gainfarn (monochrome black pictures with delimited white remnants), which develop step by step into the *Übermalungen* (Overpaintings). He begins the work on *Proportionsstudien* (Studies of Proportion) – colour collages with dyed papers which are created "by means of parallel shifts". Meets Monsignore Otto Mauer, founder and head of the Galerie St. Stephan, where Rainer has his first solo exhibition in 1955.

**1959** Move to Vienna. Together with Ernst Fuchs and Friedensreich Hundertwasser, Rainer founds the *Pintorarium*, which exists until 1968.

**1961** Takes part in the exhibition *Young City Sees Young Art* in Wolfsburg. Rainer overpaints the award-winning etching of a young female artist and is sued for this. He begins to over-draw and over-paint his etchings

**Mid-1960s** Experiments while intoxicated by drugs and alcohol; a series of figurative-hallucinatory drawings are created. He moves into studios in West Berlin, Munich and Cologne.

**1966** Arnulf Rainer receives the Austrian State Prize for Graphics.

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**1968** Experiments in drawing in the Max Planck Institute in Munich under the influence of LSD. First self-paintings (face and hands), appears in public in Vienna's city centre painted in this way. At the same time, numerous passport photos with the artist grimacing taken in photo booths are created, inspired by the facial distortions of the mentally ill. First major retrospective in the Museum of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in Vienna.

**1969** Enlarged photos from booth and photos made by photographers are over-drawn and over-painted.

**1970** Photos are created of expressive postures such as hand and arm gestures, posing on one's knees, lying down and sitting, *Face Farces* and *Body Language* series. Photos are reworked in black and in colour.

**1971** The Hamburg Art Society dedicates the first retrospective to Rainer in Germany. He represents Austria at the 11<sup>th</sup> Biennale of San Paolo.

**1972** *Kreuzübermalungen* and *Face Farces* are shown at documenta 5.

**1973** Beginnings of *Gestische Handmalerei* (Gestural Hand Painting). The Graphische Sammlung Albertina shows etchings in a single exhibition.

**1974** Rainer receives the Art Prize of the City of Vienna, which however is then denied him on account of his refusal to take part in the award ceremony.

**1977** Takes part in documenta 6. Beginning of his work on death masks and on the major cycles *Schlangenfrauen*, *Frauensprache* und *Frauenrausch* (Snake Women, Women's Language and Women's Rapture).

**1978** Represents Austria at the Biennale in Venice. He receives the Great Austrian State Prize. With the prize money, Rainer acquires a collection of original death masks, which he over-paints repeatedly over a period of years.

**1980** Purchases a farm in Upper Austria which is converted into a studio. Works on the series *Schwarze Mumien* (Black Mummies). Takes part in the Biennale in Venice.

**1981** Professorship at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna; Rainer becomes a member of the Academy of Arts in Berlin. Receives the Max-Beckmann Prize of the City of Frank.

**From 1982** Rainer receives a pile of photos from a gallery owner, which were made in Hiroshima and Nagasaki after the bombs were dropped. The series Hiroshima is created. This cycle is exhibited in more than 17 European locations.

Takes part in documenta 7 with a selection of newly created hand and finger paintings.

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**1985** Rainer uses the illustrations for the series *Animalia und Botanika* (*Animalia and Botanika*), drawing on illustrated books from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century that he has been collecting for years. The scientific illustrations are reproduced on photo linen and are mounted on wooden plates before being reworked. Thus, the series *Aus der Schlangengrube und Orchideen* (*From the Pit of Snakes and Orchid Ideas*) are created, among others. Collaboration with Günter Brus.

**1989** Rainer acquires a part of the former monastery near Passau. Prize of International Center of Photography in New York. Retrospective in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, it then moves to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago and to the Historisches Museum der Stadt Wien. Takes part in the exhibition *Sechzig - Zeichnungen einer Generation* (*Sixty - Drawings of a Generation*) in the Graphische Sammlung Albertina.

**1990** At a flea market in Paris Rainer acquires a pile of old newspapers. The *Katastrophen-Serie* (*Series of Catastrophes*) is created from the re-workings of the partially coloured cover pages.

**1995** Arnulf Rainer is given emeritus status at his own request. Inspired by illustrations of microscopic structures in old books, Rainer develops the series *Mikrokosmosbilder* (*Microcosmos Pictures*), in which new techniques and materials are used. The involvement with pictures of angels leads him to the *Makrokosmosbilder* (*Star and Sky Structures*). The Graphische Sammlung Albertina in Vienna presents the show *Glaube - Hoffnung - Liebe - Tod. Von der Entwicklung religiöser Bildkonzepte*. (*Faith - Hope - Love - Death. From the Development of Religious Pictorial Concepts*).

**1998** A bible illustrated by Rainer appears in a limited edition in Pattloch Verlag.

**2000** On the occasion of his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, major retrospectives in the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and the Kunstforum der Bank Austria, Vienna.

**2003** Rhenus Art Prize. Exhibition in the Museo Correr in Venice.

**2004** Awarded an honorary doctorate from the Catholic Theological Faculty of the Westphalian Wilhelms-Universität Münster.

**2006** The Catholic Theological Private University Linz awards Rainer an honorary doctorate in theology. Rainer is the first non-Spanish artist to receive the Aragón Goya Prize for his life's work. Exhibition of Goya re-workings in the Museo de Zaragoza from the 1980s and from 2005/2006.

**2008** The Österreichische Galerie im Belvedere, Vienna shows a major selection of works of *Misch- und Trennkunst* (*Mixed and Separated Art*) by Arnulf Rainer und Dieter Roth in the Orangerie.

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**2009** Opening of the Arnulf Rainer Museum in Baden near Vienna with the exhibition *Aller Anfang ist schwer* (Every Beginning Is Hard). Renewed collaboration with Günter Brus. The small-format drawings *Am Horizont der Sinne - Am Horizont der Dinge* (On the Horizon of the Senses – On the Horizon of Things) is presented in the Albertina, Vienna.

**2010** Exhibition *Arnulf Rainer. Der Übermaler* (Arnulf Rainer. The Over-Painter) in the Pinakothek der Moderne in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich; exhibition *Kreuz – Es ist das Kreuz, das den Sinn ergeben könnte* (Cross – It is the Cross that Could Give Meaning) in the Arnulf Rainer Museum, Baden near Vienna. Exhibition *Visages* in the Arnulf Rainer Museum, Baden near Vienna.

**2011** Exhibition in the Arnulf Rainer Museum: *Lustspiel-Neues aus dem Atelier, Georg Baselitz/Arnulf Rainer* (Comedy-New from the Studio, Georg Baselitz/Arnulf Rainer), in which the very latest works by both artists are juxtaposed.

**2012** Exhibition in the Kunsthalle Rostock; exhibition *Rainer-Kosmos* (Rainer Cosmos) in the Arnulf Rainer Museum, Baden.

**2013** The TEA, Santa Cruz, Teneriffa shows works created there in the exhibition; Rudi Fuchs curates *Mario Merz/Arnulf Rainer Tiefe/Weite*, (Mario Merz/Arnulf Rainer Depth/Width) in the Arnulf Rainer Museum, sculptures and pictures by Mario Merz are contrasted with as yet unshown crosses and pictures by Rainer. Likewise in the Frauenbad in Baden, *Arnulf Rainer und die alte Kunst* (Arnulf Rainer and the Old Art). The Gallery Elisabeth and Klaus Thoman, Innsbruck shows *Rainer und die Frauen* (Rainer and the Women).

**2014** The exhibition *Damien Hirst – Arnulf Rainer – Durcheinander/Commotion* (Damien Hirst – Arnulf Rainer – Confusion/Commotion) is on show in the Arnulf Rainer Museum, Baden. In the Gallery Michael Haas, Berlin, *Werke der 60er Jahre* (Works of the 1960s) are shown. The Albertina dedicates a major retrospective to Arnulf Rainer to mark his 85<sup>th</sup> birthday, which is shown afterwards in the Frieder Burda Museum, Baden-Baden. Parallel to this *Radierungen* (Etchings) (1956-2014) are exhibited in the Arnulf Rainer Museum, Baden.

Arnulf Rainer lives and works in Austria, Germany and on Tenerife.