

RICHARD SALTOUN

Viennese Season: Actionism

Exhibition dates:

6 March – 4 April 2014 (Austin / Desmond Fine Art): PV 5th March 6-8pm

7 March – 4 April 2014 (Richard Saltoun Gallery): PV 6th March 6-8pm

Austin / Desmond Fine Art and Richard Saltoun Gallery announce a two-part series of Viennese art: Actionism and Feminism.

The season begins with Actionism, examining this sensational movement borne out of expressive action painting in Vienna in the late 1950s. The second, Feminism, will present the work of Valie EXPORT and Friedl Kubelka, two artists using their body and the action of documentary photograph to subvert the traditional notion of the “great male artist”. As Actionists chose to challenge the mythology of traditional art mediums such as painting and sculpture so did these two Feminist artists choose to challenge the hierarchy of the art establishment.

This is the first major survey of Viennese Actionism in the UK. The exhibition will present the work of Günter Brus, Otto Mühl, Hermann Nitsch, and Rudolf Schwarzkogler. Virtually over by 1970, the radical movement was short-lived but rich and dense in each artist’s output. Performance works, *aktionen*, were at the heart of their work, extending the use and meaning of painting. Blood, animal carcasses, razor blades, and ropes were all used as implements to create these *aktionen*.

The exhibition will include vintage photographs of performances by all four artists as well as one of the original surviving stretchers used by Nitsch, rare in its survival and that he only ever performed six *aktionen*.

This exhibition follows a recent major survey exhibition, *Viennese Actionism: Art and Upheaval in 1960s Vienna* at Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Wien.

Günter BRUS (b. 1938, Ardning, Austria)

Inspired by German and Austrian Expressionism at the turn of the century, Brus began his career as a commercial graphic artist. Experiments with the traditional notion of “painting” are best embodied in 6th *Action: Vienna Walk* (1965), in which he walked through the city of Vienna as a ‘living picture’, fully painted in white, with a black line dividing his body in two halves. A collection of his works can be found in the Bruneum, Graz’ Neue Galerie; Tate, London; and the Sammlung Friedrichshof, Austria.

Otto MÜHL (b. 1925. Grodnau, Austria – d. 2013, Moncarapacho, Portugal) Painter, performer and filmmaker infamous for founding both Actionism and the Friedrichshof commune outside of Vienna. Controversial for his Material Aktionen, in which the naked body served as the canvas. These performances involved the use of blood, faeces, and were of a sexual, often violent, nature. His work is included in collections of The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Pomeranz Collection, Vienna; and Centre Pompidou, Paris.

Hermann NITSCH (b. 1938, Vienna, Austria) Viennese Actionist painter and performer, Nitsch began his career as a student at the Pedagogical and Experimental Institute for Graphics in Vienna. His performances

involve crucifixions, dance, music and other visually violent actions, together with the use of animal carcasses and entrails, in the attempt to create a tragic and sacred-like *Gesamtkunstwerk* 'total artwork': the *Orgien Mysterien Theater* (or *Aktion*). First conceived in 1957 but not first realized until 1963 he has performed more than 100 of these. Recent solo exhibitions include the Station Museum of Contemporary Art, Houston (2005) and Museum Moderner Kunst Karnten, Klagenfurt (2012).

Rudolf SCHWARZKOGLER (b 1940 – d 1969, Vienna, Austria) dubbed the “Vincent Van Gogh of Body Art” in reference to the use of cutting and bodily mutilation in his performances. These staged private performances (*aktionen*) in which he showed the amputated or self-harmed body covered in nets and bandages, were always closely documented by the camera and carefully staged. He died falling / flying from his window in a state of extreme agitation. His work is included in the Tate, London; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City; and Sammlung Friedrichshof, Austria.

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Visitor Information

Austin Desmond Fine Art
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Gallery Hours: Monday to Friday 10:30 am – 5:30pm; Saturday 11:00 am – 2:30pm

Nearest tube: Russell Square or Holborn

Richard Saltoun
111 Great Titchfield Street
London W1W 6RY
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7637 1225

Gallery Hours: Monday to Friday 10:00 am - 6:00 pm or by appointment

Nearest tube: Oxford Circus and Great Portland Street.