

Information sheet

BEST OF AUSTRIA

An Art Collection

2 January until 10 May 2009

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Exhibition facts

Exhibition title: **BEST OF AUSTRIA. An Art Collection**

Exhibition period 2 January until 10 May 2009

Press conference 30 December 2008, 10 am

Opening 1 January 2009, 7 pm (with invitation), 9 pm (open house)

Exhibition locality Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz, first floor

Exhibits almost 100 pieces of art

Catalogue „BEST OF AUSTRIA. An Art Collection“, edited by Lentos Artmuseum Linz at *publication PN°* Bibliothek der Provinz, Weitra 2008. With articles by Martin Heller, Rainer Metzger, Stella Rollig and Franz Schuh. Numerous colour pictures, 189 p. The catalogue is published in german and english. Price: 29,- €

Contact Ernst-Koref-Promenade 1, 4020 Linz, Tel. +43(0)732/7070-3600;
info@lentos.at, www.lentos.at

Opening hours daily 10 am-6 pm; Thur 10am-9 pm

Admission € 6,50, reduced € 4,50

Guided tours Thursdays 7 pm and Sundays 4 pm

Period: 1 hours, Meeting point: Lentos Cash, Costs: € 3,-

Guided tour with director Stella Rollig:

Thur. 5 February, 7 pm and Thur. 19 March, 7 pm

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Available for discussion at press conference:

Stella Rollig, Director Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz

Martin Heller, Artistic Director Linz09

Dr. Gerhard Roiss, Deputy General Director OMV AG

Dipl.-Ing. Golmar Kempinger-Khatibi, Architect of exhibition design



Sponsor of the exhibition

BEST OF AUSTRIA

An Art Collection

A project for Linz 2009 European Capital of Culture

2 January until 10 May 2009

Opening: Thursday, 1 January 2009, 7 pm (with invitation), 9 pm (open house)

How does the Cultural Capital of Europe end up with an art collection commensurate with that title? That's easy: it gathers a collection.

A capital city - even if it is only for one year - needs an art collection that corresponds to this status and the concomitant responsibility to represent the country. Yet how should this collection be acquired, if not by theft? Since that is not an option, the Lentos Art Museum and Linz 09 have gathered together a collection by requesting generous assistance to enable the Capital of Culture to fulfill its role appropriately.

The result is that nearly a hundred masterpieces from Austrian collections will be gathered together in the Capital of Culture Linz. Over thirty Austrian museums, foundations and prestigious collections from Vienna to Lake Constance are providing three works each. Almost one hundred exhibits ranging through every style and several centuries are focus the view of the manifold artworks in the holding of this country.

What are the criteria for the selection? Which standards are used to determine the quality of art?

Over a period of four months Lentos will present what an ideal art collection could look like as a temporary, playful experimental arrangement. As with most collections, this assemblage is also influenced by chance, by personal preferences, and by financial and spatial possibilities.

BEST OF AUSTRIA bears witness to how diverse and contingent the conjunctions are that result in an ensemble of art works, and to the role played by the harmonizing power of the institution museum. What all the exhibited works have in common is the high quality of what is, in the broadest sense, national property.

BEST OF AUSTRIA tells a story of the pleasure of looking, while at the same time instigating a debate about the standards and criteria of "Best of." Is it representatives of the most expensive, the most famous, the most publicized pictures and objects that are shown in Linz? Are these the favorites of the directors and heads of collections, who seek to spotlight unknown treasures? If this charged field accommodates a relevant debate about selection, quality, the representation of "national property" and what so-called "cultural heritage" means, then all the better.

Participating institutions

The Albertina, BA Art Collection, Bawag Foundation, Gallery of the Federal Province of Burgenland, Essl Museum, EVN Collection Erste Bank - Group, Painting Gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Kunsthaus Bregenz, State Museum Joanneum / New Gallery, Liechtenstein Museum, Leopold Museum, MAK - Austrian Museum for Applied Art / Contemporary Art, MUMOK Museum of Modern Art, MUSA Museum on Demand, Museum of Modernism Salzburg, Museum of Modern Art Carantia, Museum of the Federal Province of Lower-Austria, Museum of the Federal Province of Upper Austria, Austrian Gallery Belvedere, Austrian Film Museum, Art History Museum Vienna, Salzburg Museum - New Residence, Verbund Collection, STRABAG Bauholding, Museum of the Federal Province of Tyrol Ferdinandeum, T-Mobile Austria GmbH, Museum of the Federal Province of Vorarlberg, Vienna Museum.

Idea / Concept

Linz 09, Lentos Art Museum Linz.

Catalogue

A catalogue will be published with essays by Martin Heller, Rainer Metzger, Franz Schuh and Stella Rollig along with pictures of all the exhibits by the publishing company Verlag Bibliothek der Provinz.

A cooperation between the Lentos Art Museum and Linz 09, with support from the OMV AG.

Collection – A Game?

Catalogue article by Stella Rollig and Martin Heller

Collecting is a passion and also an attempt to construct a more or less self-contained world that braves reality, a distillation that responds to the contradictions and contingencies of life, a point of view.

But collection is also experimentation, trial and error. Meanings occur by chance. Welcome coincidence repeatedly creates new opportunities to question one's own existence while collecting. Collection is the construction of an identity and self-assertion. The result is a paradise of uncertainties and exploration.

The ideal collection would thus be no less than the sum of these different potentials. But is there such a thing? And what would such a collection look like?

A temporary collection

The exhibition BEST OF AUSTRIA is a shortterm attempt to produce some kind of order. Thirty Austrian art collections – museums, foundations and corporate collections – have been invited to loan three works to Lentos as the “display window” for Linz as Capital of Culture 2009. The idea is to construct a condensed compilation of national collections as a meaningful and expressive aperçu to start off the year.

This exhibition is directly in keeping with the special situation of a city that will be host to Europe for a year. It symbolises the prestigious status that cultural institutions and their programmes are expected to have. In planning the programme the organisers and heads of the institutions have had continuously to consider questions of a political nature that are inevitably tied up with the artistic and social considerations: What will be shown? Who is it aimed at? What do the exhibits stand for?

Linz – Capital of Culture 2009

In the last 30 years Linz has worked hard to change itself from the dirty industrial city, where it is said that on some days even in the 1980s the inhabitants couldn't open their windows because of the smog, into a cultural mecca. The results are impressive: industry has cleaned up and considerable investments have been made in culture. Brucknerhaus, Bruckner Festival, Ars Electronica Festival, Klangwolke, Ars Electronica Centrum, OK – Offenes Kulturhaus Oberösterreich and Lentos are highlights of this development, and establishments like the Stadtwerkstatt have revived the jaded aura of the “Free Scene”. Time to understand and communicate what has happened as a prerequisite for any real change in image.

Linz is still an industrial and service city but it has become a city of culture as well. Like many other small cities, but more successful and in a breathtakingly short space of time. A distinctive feature of Linz is the presence and presentation of contemporary and media art, even if it still fails to enthuse the inhabitants, who tend to have more traditional artistic tastes centring around the trusted genres of painting and sculpture and the corresponding understanding of the artistic processes.

And yet it doesn't have a particularly rich artistic tradition. Those who wish to see traditional art have to seek it elsewhere. The Linz collections themselves, those of the city and province of

Upper Austria, contain but a handful of comfortably average works enriched by a few highlights. It is thus hardly surprising that the people of Linz are indifferent to the postwar avant-garde or contemporary production. New art is only significant in terms of older art and the work of historical pioneers.

Although there is a lot of contemporary art in the city, Linz lacks a basis for illustrating genealogies and a set of obsessive collectors and galleries that would infect a city with an enthusiasm for art. Moreover, apart from the Kubin Cabinet in the Landesgalerie Linz der Oberösterreichischen Landesmuseen, Lentos is the only museum in the city that has its inventory permanently on show.

Of course, the Lentos collection has strengths and weaknesses. It focuses on painting; it has major works particularly from the first half of the last century. But it is short on conceptual items. The Lentos collection relates the history of 20th century art after Schiele, Kokoschka, German Expressionism and the Informal, but has nothing following on from Marcel Duchamp. This is a clear shortcoming, but obviously every collection has points of focus and omissions, and perhaps it's a good thing that not every museum shows and relates the same thing, particularly at a time when the availability and communication of art by the media opens up hitherto unimagined possibilities for access to a global museum.

This brings us to the questions at the heart of the BEST OF AUSTRIA exhibition: What does a collection actually show and communicate? And to what extent can a collection within a national ensemble provide new insights and enjoyment?

Best of the best?

An idea that evolved half-jokingly – we wanted a collection for Linz worthy of a Capital of Culture – has developed into a fascinating discourse on prestige. To this end, we needed rules that would define our approach. We didn't "help ourselves" to works from Austrian collections – which would in any case have been impossible, since an outsider can never know a collection as well as its director – but rather deliberately asked the directors to choose the works.

Our initial invitation was deliberately provocative: give us your three best artworks.

In asking this, we ran up against a taboo that Rainer Metzger discusses in detail in his essay. In serious academic consideration of art, a popular best-of format is disdained. Although everyone of importance who is involved in art takes part in the yearly best-of lists that Austrian magazines put out, they distance themselves when it comes to their own collections. The three best works? Directors are not willing to reduce their own collections to such a simplistic formula.

Then there is the fact that there are good reasons for collections not to loan their best works – some are too fragile to move and others are reserved for intercontinental exhibitions, which rely on masterpieces and severely restrict their availability.

These reservations are worth considering. What criteria are to be used to select the top three? The insured value? What the public or the director likes best? Or the pride or gentle pressure exerted by individual patrons of the arts?

We asked the directors to lend us three works that typify their collection profile and identity, its aims and strategies. Three excellent and representative works that reflect the status of the collection in a national context. This was the basis that, we hoped, would be acceptable and interesting.

Altogether, the items selected after intensive consideration and in some cases internal discussion and accompanied by statements by those responsible produce a collection of

extremely diverse items to be taken individually and as a whole, a Babylonian mix of artistic languages and systems that defies categorisation.

The project as gamble

This project is a gamble because it invites contradictions. It aims to produce a collection of artworks without a specific concept, no thesis that can be argued with the aid of exhibits, no theme to be illustrated. It is based on an act of qualitative and symbolic appraisal – BEST OF – and the concept of a nation – AUSTRIA. Both categories have been thoroughly deconstructed today. Theoreticians like Michel Foucault, to name but one, have analysed their functioning in detail and come to the conclusion that their primary aim is one of power and that they produce hierarchy and exclusion.

The invention of the public museum was based on the idea of creating aware citizens, who would see themselves as members of a nation. The artworks – whose origins were often enough the illegitimate result of various forms of misappropriation – were declared to be owned by the nation, but they were not even accessible to all members of the nation or people living in the country. Above all, as an analysis of the museum visitors shows, they were for the educated elite. So far so good – or not. The situation with corporate art collections is just as critical, since they can be motivated as much by the mechanisms of capitalist market logic as by philanthropic aims.

Some people might suspect that the originators of BEST OF AUSTRIA were not fully aware of these considerations. They will complain that the exhibition itself cannot be separated from its function as the opening event in Linz's year as Capital of Culture and as such cannot but have a whiff of corruption about it.

This argument fails to take into account that it is this very function that enables us to play the game at such a high level – which means that both the risk and the potential benefits are that much greater. For the general public, which can discover a plethora of ideas and experiences relating to central aspects of art past and present in a stimulating and almost irreproducible atmosphere. And for all of the experts – not only those directly involved – BEST OF AUSTRIA offers a laboratory in which the validity of favourite cultural and art theorems can be tested.

From the outset it was clear that an exhibition like BEST OF AUSTRIA would inevitably have something of a random character. Transversing all styles and several centuries, the exhibits – not even 100 of them – offer a shortcut to the varied art collections available and publicly accessible in Austria. The concept is something of a game, and like every game it produces competition. Not far removed from the lightness, joy and amusement are competitiveness and the will/need to profile and market oneself.

An art collection

So here is the BEST OF AUSTRIA collection, a “temporary Austrian museum”, the distillation of 30 collections, random to a large extent, driven by the personal preferences of those in charge, the donors and directors, the financial and spatial considerations, estates and other factors besides. BEST OF AUSTRIA shows the diversity and contingency of artworks when they are gathered together and the harmonising force of the exhibition venue and the museum as an institution.

The result is a consistent show in terms of content and arrangement which makes a virtue out of the heterogeneity of the works. Behind this diversity there are also two unifying ideas: the concept that these works belong to the nation and that they are of the highest possible quality.

Obviously, subjective criteria played a role in the compilation – whether the selection was made by one person or by a group within the institution concerned. They will have to have asked themselves what they wanted to show the people of Linz and visitors to the Capital of Culture and how they wanted to portray themselves.

Looking at the contributions and statements, we can infer three approaches. A collection can be represented by taking a cross-section of the works contained in it with very different items spanning the epochs or genres covered by the collection. Or it can be represented by a concept, for example by concentrating on contemporary art or a particular style or genre. Or it can be represented by an attempt to make a thematic statement in miniature.

In view of the significance and forcefulness of the sets of works, we have decided to group them together. The result is a brief digest of the collections of thirty museums placed tête-à-tête in the large exhibition room of Lentos.

A word about the choice of invited collections. The criteria were the public accessibility or commitment to art in the public interest. Thus the federal, provincial and main municipal museums were obvious choices. We also invited corporate collections that were regularly made accessible to the public.

We are very happy and grateful at the response to this invitation, which has helped to shape this large, challenging and exciting joint venture resulting in the BEST OF AUSTRIA.

There is one question that remains to be answered. What would happen if the artworks got mixed up and were sent back to the “wrong” collection? What impact would these cuckoo’s eggs have in their new surroundings?

Another exhibition, another story.

Press Release

OMV Sponsors “Best of Austria” Show at the Lentos Art Museum

“Best of Austria” opens at the Lentos Art Museum in Linz, Upper Austria, on January 2, 2009. OMV is the lead sponsor of the exhibition, which brings together leading works of art from Austrian museums and private collections. Additional funding is provided by the European Union, the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture, the Federal Province of Upper Austria and the city of Linz.

OMV has been a major sponsor and partner of the Lentos since the construction of the museum. At the start of 2009, when Linz kicks off its year as a European Capital of Culture, the Lentos will present an OMV sponsored exhibition of artworks on loan from 30 museums, private foundations and private collections all over Austria. Each lender is providing three important works for the show, which runs from January 2 through May 10, 2009.

Linz is a key industrial site for the Austrian-based OMV group. In recent years OMV has worked closely both with the city and with the provincial government to further economic development. Ensuring that profitable growth goes hand and hand with environmental and social responsibility is an integral part of the corporate culture of OMV.

“The Linz2009 year as European Capital of Culture will make Linz an even more attractive location,” OMV Deputy Chairman Dr. Gerhard Roiss said. “OMV wants to play its part in promoting an open atmosphere that is visionary and international.”

One of the works included in the “Best of Austria” exhibition is an oil painting by Hubert Scheibl entitled “Wir wissen nicht, wer den Krieg begonnen hat. Wir oder Sie” (We Don’t Know Who Started the War. We or You). The painting was donated to the Lentos by OMV when the museum opened in 2003.

Background Information:

OMV Aktiengesellschaft

With Group sales of EUR 20.04 bn and a workforce of 33,665 employees in 2007, OMV Aktiengesellschaft is one of Austria's largest listed industrial companies. As the leading oil and gas group in Central Europe, OMV is active in Refining and Marketing (R&M) in 13 countries. In Exploration and Production (E&P) OMV is active in 20 countries on five continents. In Gas & Power (G&P) OMV sells more than 13 bcm gas per year. Via Baumgarten, one of the most important turntables for gas in Europe, approximately 64 bcm gas is transported annually.

OMV's Central European Gas Hub is amongst the three largest hubs in Continental Europe. OMV is the largest oil and gas group in Central Europe, with oil and gas reserves of approx. 1.22 bn boe, daily production of around 316,000 boe and an annual refining capacity of approx. 26 mn t. OMV now has 2,524 filling stations in 13 countries. The market share of the group in the R&M business segment in the Danube Region is now 20%.

OMV further strengthened its leading position in the European growth belt through the acquisition of 41.58% of Petrol Ofisi, Turkey's leading company in the retail and commercial business.

In June 2006, OMV has established the OMV Future Energy Fund, a wholly owned subsidiary to support projects in renewable energy with more than EUR 100 mn to initiate the change from a pure oil and gas group to an energy group with renewable energy in its portfolio.

OMV: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

OMV is a member of the U.N. Global Compact and actively committed to the values enshrined in its Code of Conduct. These include a strong sense of responsibility towards the social and natural environment in economically weak regions. OMV works hard to address economic, environmental and social issues related to its operations. Its CSR activities are fully documented in biannual performance reports compiled according to Global Reporting Initiative guidelines. The "Global 100 Ranking" presented at this year's World Economic Forum in Davos ranks OMV as one of the six most sustainable energy companies worldwide.

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Exhibition Design

Golmar Kempinger-Khatibi, Arch. Dipl. Ing.

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Curriculum Vitae

1954 born in Tehran, Iran

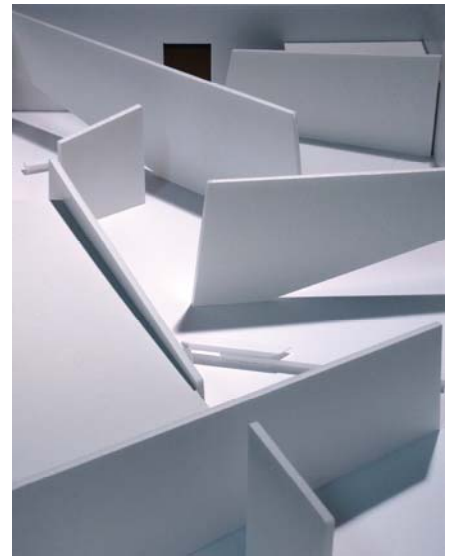
1972 - 79 studying architecture and urban planning at the National University of Iran, Tehran

Lives and works in Vienna since 1980

1985- 98 working with Richter-Gerngross and Wilhelm Holzbauer

Since 1995 teaching at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna

Since 2001 teaching at the Technical University of Vienna



The architect Golmar Kempinger-Khatibi developed the exhibition architecture for *BEST OF AUSTRIA. An Art Collection*.

Wall elements seem to organize the 800 m² large exhibition hall as though by chance. However, the special positioning of the walls results in niches and spaces that create the needed screening for the heterogeneous exhibits and for video installations and light objects. The principle is to create clear viewing units without blocking the view of the whole.

Another design element is the elongated pedestals which serve as showcases on the one hand and on the other as seating with cushions on them, formulating a kind of guiding structure.

This unusual exhibition architecture leads visitors through the exhibition while still leaving them enough room to choose their own paths.

Press images



1. Anonymous
Stained glass window from the choir of St. Stephan's,
 about 1380/90
 Wien Museum, Vienna
 Photo: © Wien Museum



2. Carl Moll
Salon in the house on the Hohe Warte, 1903
 Wien Museum, Vienna
 Photo: © Wien Museum



3. Christopher Williams
Untitled, from the series: For Example: Dix-Huit Leçons Sur La Société Industrielle, 2007
 Verbund Collection, Vienna
 © Christopher Williams, Courtesy Sammlung Verbund, Wien und Galerie Gisela Capitain, Köln



4. Franz Xaver Messerschmidt
Second Beaked Head, after 1770
 Belvedere, Vienna



5. Deborah Sengl
The lioness – as a predator – captures the desired prey through camouflage, 2004
 Essl Museum, Klosterneuburg/Vienna
 © Sammlung Essl Privatstiftung
 Photo: Mischa Nawrata, Vienna



6. Egon Schiele
Double Portrait of Heinrich and Otto Benesch, 1913
 Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz



7. Gaston Velle
La Peine Du Talion, 1906
 Austrian Film Museum, Vienna
 Fotosammlung Österreichisches Filmmuseum, G. Wasner



8. Gottfried Bechtold
Eleven/Eleven, 2006
 Kunsthaus Bregenz
 Permanent loan from the artist



9. Martin van Meytens
Portrait of Empress Maria Theresia, 1759
 Picture Gallery of the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna



10. VALIE EXPORT
Body Sign Action, 1970
 Kontakt. The Art Collection of Erste Bank Group, Vienna