



IT'S A
MATTER OF
BODY

FROM VIENNA
MODERNISM
TO VIENNA
ACTIONISM

W&K
EDITION

THE BODY

GUSTAV KLIMT, EGON SCHIELE,
OSKAR KOKOSCHKA, OTTO MUEHL,
FRANZ WEST, GÜNTER BRUS,
ELKE SILVIA KRYSTUFEK

“THE FUNCTION OF THE MODERN ARTIST
WAS NOT TO CONVEY BEAUTY,
BUT TO CONVEY NEW TRUTHS.¹”

ERIC KANDEL

THE IMPACT OF EARLY VIENNA MODERNISM (VIENNA 1900) ON VIENNA POSTWAR AVANT-GARDE ESPECIALLY ON VIENNA ACTIONISM

Early Vienna Modernism (Vienna 1900) clearly influenced the avant-garde artists in Vienna from the postwar era till this day.

The pioneering achievements of the artists of fin de siècle Vienna (especially Klimt, Schiele, Kokoschka and Gerstl) were the intense scrutiny of the human body and the manifold dimensions of physical as well as psychological experience, which they probe with fearless curiosity and place at the center of their creative endeavors. Vienna 1900 had an ardent desire to look below the surface in all kinds of disciplines. Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalysis was omnipresent.

Undaunted by convention, the artists examine the elementary functions of life, illuminating the wide spectrum of sexual desire as well as experiences such as pregnancy, birth, death and the physical manifestations of mental illness.

Another crucial peculiarity in Vienna around 1900 is the prominent role repression played in the nation's psychological and social life. Without regards for taboos, they uncover what is repressed, believing that this would enlighten and bring healing to the society. Their unflinching scrutiny of issues covered by social taboos brought them into conflict with bourgeois society and law.

Conceptions of the artist as a shaman, priest, or messiah come to deliver this society – whose incomprehension forces him into the role of sacrificial victim – from its guilt, bring spiritual healing, and teach an exalted sensual experience.

Cathartic ideas of redemption circulate in Vienna 1900 and find expression in visions of art as a non-denominational substitute for religion. The push toward a ‚Gesamtkunstwerk‘ that would address all senses and fuse the different art forms, is another central trait of classical Viennese modernism.

The unvarnished depiction of the ‚naked truth‘ – be it the reality of the body, be it physical and psychological needs (many of them socially taboo) – makes the artist an outcast in the society he strives to heal and redeem. Not coincidentally, Schiele, Kokoschka and Gerstl presented themselves as martyrs or Christ-like figures.

These pioneering achievements of Early Vienna Modernism are in fact without contemporary parallels in other countries. Austrian art not only developed its very specific form of abstraction („Formkunst“) – even within representational works –, but definitely also the first brand of a psychoanalytic bodycentered art internationally. This in the following pervades the art of this country, finding an extreme and most specific manifestation in Vienna Actionism of the 1960ties.

Exhibitions such as "Body, Psyche and Taboo" at mumok Vienna have already taken up the context of early Viennese Modernism and Viennese Actionism. W&K develops this concept further and presents the contemporary context with positions by artists such as Elke Silvia Krystufek.

GUSTAV KLIMT



Gustav Klimt, Reclining Semi-Nude to the Right, 1914/15,
Pencil on paper, 356 x 556 mm

“EVEN MANET’S OLYMPIA, WHICH DEPICTS A REAL, MODERN WOMAN IN PLACE OF THE VIRGINAL VENUS, LACKS THE UNABASHED SEXUALITY OF KLIMT’S DRAWINGS. UNLIKE MANY EARLIER WESTERN ARTISTS, KLIMT WAS NOT PLAGUED BY A SENSE OF SIN AND THEREFORE FELT NO NEED TO DISGUISE THE SEXUALITY OF HIS MODELS.”

ERIC KANDEL



Gustav Klimt, Reclining Semi-Nude, Study for "The Virgin", 1911-12
Blue crayon on paper, 560 x 370 mm

GUSTAV KLIMT



Gustav Klimt, Half-Nude Reclining to the Right, c. 1914-1915, pencil on paper, 371 x 546 mm



Gustav Klimt, Study for "Bewegte Wasser", 1897-98, Black chalk on paper, 406 x 537 mm



Gustav Klimt, Reclining semi-nude with raised left leg, 1912/13, Pencil, blue and red crayon on paper, 369 x 560 mm

"KLIMT DEPICTED WOMEN IN ONANISTIC RAPTURES, ILLUSTRATED THE EROTIC POTENTIALS OF SELF-CONTEMPLATION, AND TOOK ON THE VOLUPTUOUS THEME OF LESBIANISM. WITH THESE WORKS KLIMT DEFINED, OR HELPED TO CREATE, A MODERN FEMALE TYPE. SUCH AUDACITY WOULD NOT BE SEEN AGAIN IN THE REALM OF ART IN EUROPE OR THE UNITED STATES UNTIL THE 1920S.³"

TOBIAS G. NATTER

GUSTAV KLIMT



Gustav Klimt, Crouching Semi-Nude, 1917-18,
Pencil on Japan paper, 557 x 372 mm

EGON SCHIELE

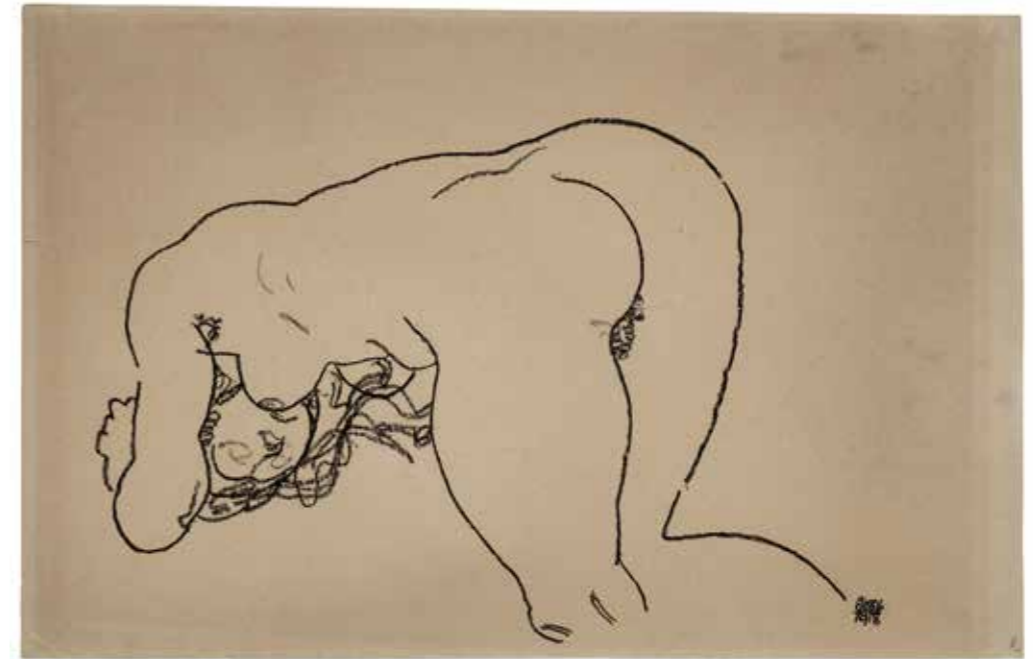


Egon Schiele, Two Girls, 1911,
Watercolour and pencil on paper, 370 x 250 mm

EGON SCHIELE



Egon Schiele, Reclining Female Nude with Raised Legs, 1918, Black crayon on paper, 295 x 455 mm



Egon Schiele, Female Nude Bending Down on Knees and Elbows, 1918, black Conté crayon on cream wove paper, 295 x 448 mm



Egon Schiele, Nude with Raised Knee, 1918, Black crayon on paper, 295 x 430 mm

"SCHIELE'S NAKED FULL-BODY PORTRAITS ARE LARGELY WITHOUT PRECEDENT IN WESTERN ART. SCHIELE CARRIED THE NUDE TO ANOTHER LEVEL: HE CREATED A NEW, AUTOEROTIC ART TO REVEAL HIS UNCONSCIOUS SEXUAL STRIVING."⁴

ERIC KANDEL

EGON SCHIELE



Egon Schiele, Reclining Nude, Masturbating, 1914,
Pencil on paper, 305 x 483 mm

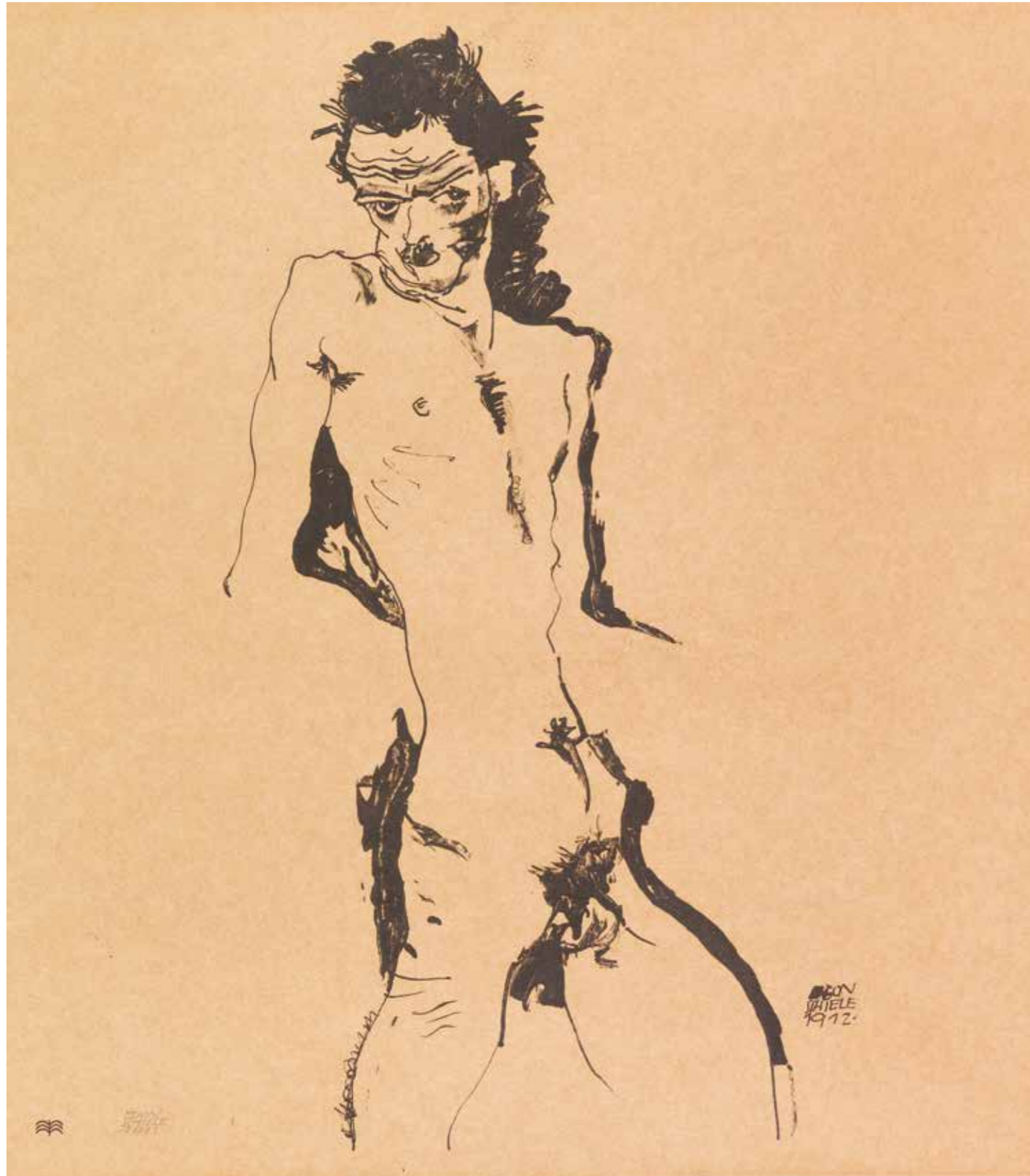


Egon Schiele, Study of the Artist's Sister, 1910,
Crayon on paper; the gouache and watercolour, by another hand, 445 x 305 mm



Egon Schiele, Standing female semi-nude (Wally Neuzil), 1912,
Pencil on paper, 482 x 316 mm

EGON SCHIELE



Egon Schiele, Male Nude (Self-Portrait) I, 1912, Brush and ink lithograph in one colour on yellowish Velin paper, 449 x 400 mm, Edition of 200



Egon Schiele, Reclining Male Nude, 1911, Gouache, watercolour, and pencil on paper, 358 x 540 mm

"AS A TRUE CONTEMPORARY OF FREUD AND SCHNITZLER, SCHIELE STUDIED THE PSYCHE AND BELIEVED IMPLICITLY THAT TO UNDERSTAND ANOTHER PERSON'S UNCONSCIOUS PROCESSES, HE HAD FIRST TO UNDERSTAND HIS OWN. SCHIELE EXHIBITED HIMSELF COMPULSIVELY IN HIS DRAWINGS AND PAINTINGS, SOMETIMES WITH MISSING GENITALIA. HE REVEALS HIS WHOLE BODY, OFTEN NAKED AND USUALLY LOOKING STARVED, AWKWARD, DISTORTED, AND TROUBLED.⁵"

ERIC KANDEL

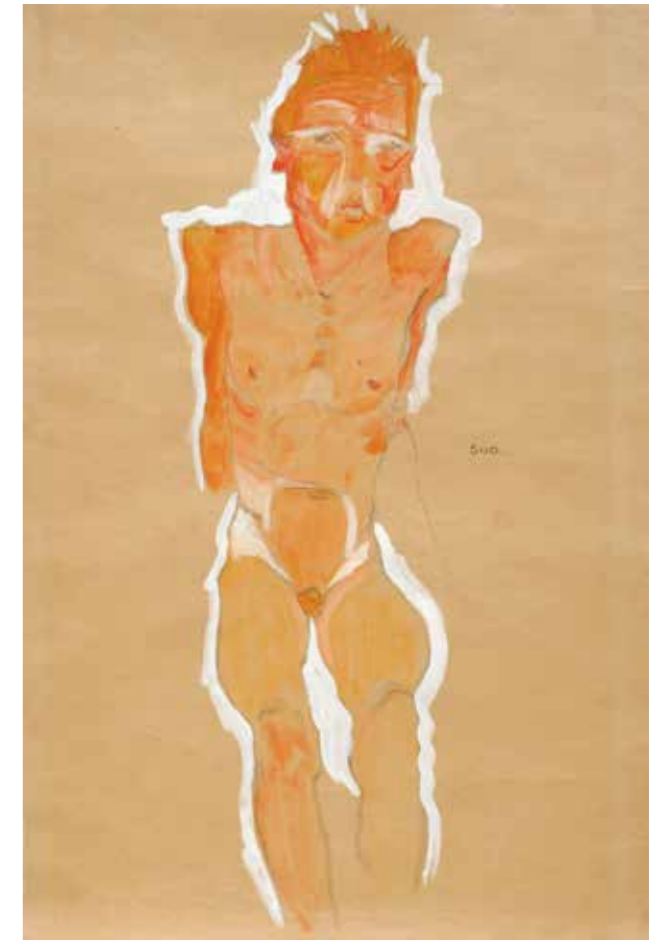
EGON SCHIELE



Egon Schiele, Reclining Male Nude, 1910, Watercolour and pencil on paper, 310 x 430 mm



Egon Schiele, Self-portrait, 1912, Pencil on paper, 475 x 313 mm



Egon Schiele, Male Nude, 1910, Gouache and watercolour on paper, 442 x 290 mm

"THE SELF-PORTRAITS ARE NOT SIMPLY AN EXHIBITION OF NUDITY; THEY ARE AN ATTEMPT AT FULL DISCLOSURE OF THE SELF, A SELF-ANALYSIS, A PICTORIAL VERSION OF FREUD'S THE INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS.⁶"

ERIC KANDEL

OSKAR KOKOSCHKA

"IN THE FEMALE FIGURES OF KOKOSCHKA, SCHIELE AND KLIMT WE FIND A REFLECTION OF THE EMANCIPATED WOMAN WHO ENJOYS HER SEXUALITY LIKE A MAN AND SUFFERS LIKE A MAN WHEN HER LOVE IS SPURNED."⁷

ERIC KANDEL



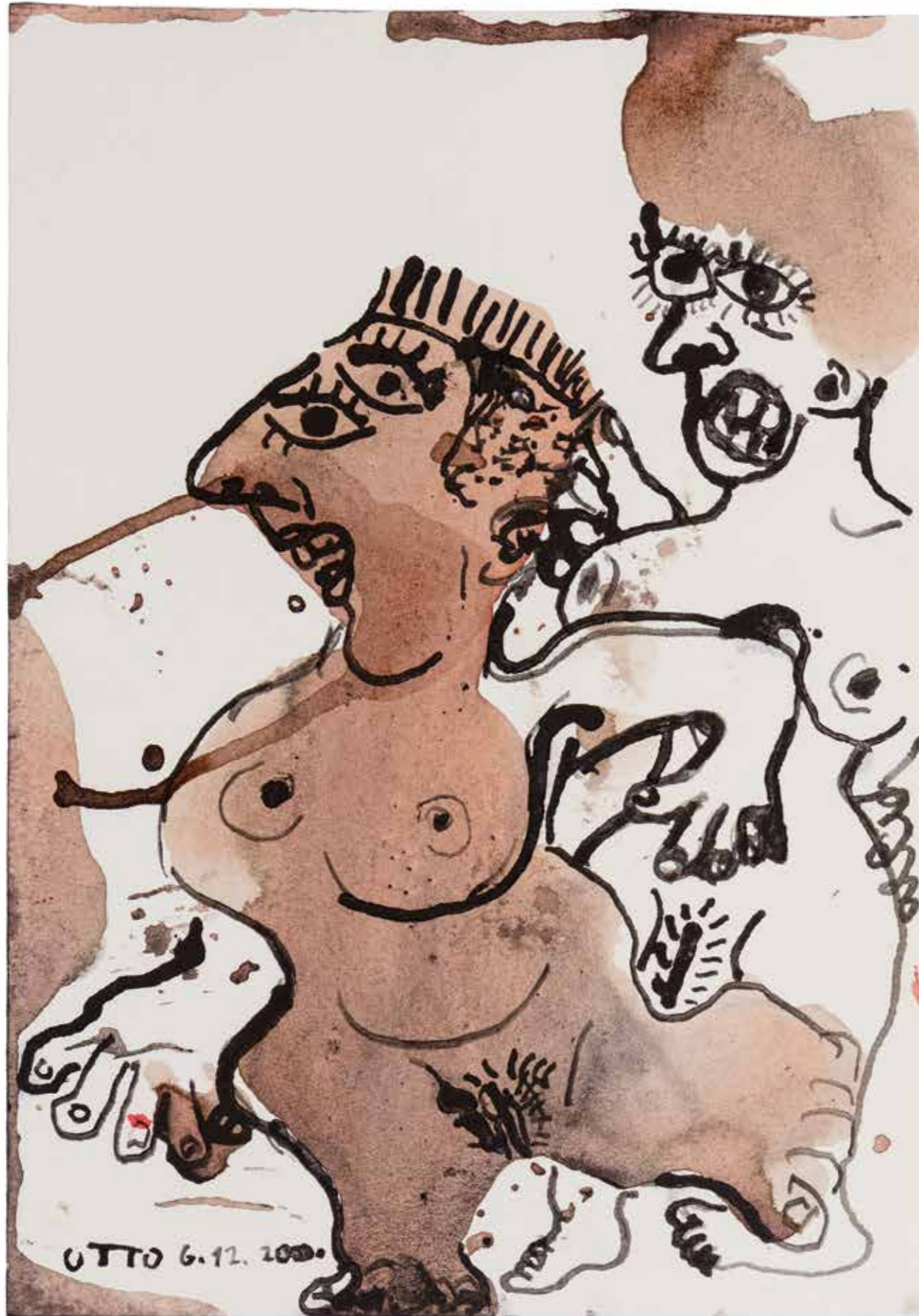
Oskar Kokoschka, Study of a Woman, 1907, Watercolour and pencil on paper, 449 x 313 mm



Oskar Kokoschka, Reclining Female Nude, c. 1911/12, Charcoal on paper, 317 x 424 mm



Oskar Kokoschka, Semi-Nude, Elderly Woman from the Back, 1907, pencil on browned paper, 450 x 315 mm



Otto Muehl, Untitled, 6.12.2000,
Watercolour on paper, 245 x 171 mm

VIENNA ACTIONISM

The genealogy of Vienna Actionism reveals direct lineages to groundbreaking achievements of the twentieth century: the work of Egon Schiele, Gustav Klimt, Richard Gerstl, Oskar Kokoschka, Arnold Schönberg, Sigmund Freud, and Wilhelm Reich, among other important artists and thinkers in Austria.

Vienna Actionism refers primarily to the works of Günter Brus, Hermann Nitsch, Otto Muehl, and Rudolf Schwarzkogler who placed the body itself as a material and medium at the center of their work and developed new creative possibilities in photography and film. Beginning in 1960, these artists developed strongly body-centric performances that originated from criticism of the picture. Between 1963 and 1966, they systematically analysed and implemented their 'Aktionen' (actions) in various media, with a photographic mirroring that was usually staged in studios rather than for public performances.

The Actionists worked with the conception of a relentlessly real, critical art that aimed to spark a sociopolitical debate. The central idea that shaped the works of the Vienna Actionists from the beginning was a search for radical possibilities of expression, through which the artist's reality could be sensorially perceived in a direct and intense manner, and which offered genuine, open, and potentially cleansing experiences. This art was expected to provide free

analysis, emancipatory knowledge, and therapeutic mastery of the subjectively and collectively repressed, traumatic experiences that the political and intellectual condemnations of the first half of the twentieth century had triggered both in Austria and around the world.

The Vienna Actionists were not afraid of placing the body, naked in its raw materiality, either as a model or as a self-experiencing subject of the artist, at the center of this new kind of art that tended toward the event as a logical and taboo-breaking consequence of this development; indeed, in this regard, they followed in the Austrian psychodramatic tradition of the early Expressionism of Schiele, Kokoschka and Gerstl.

The work of the Actionists not only triggered changes in the deeply conservative Austrian and Viennese art world of the postwar era, but also exerted influence on an international scale, through their indication of the powerful and radically novel possibilities of expression. Nowhere was this paradigmatic change formulated more radically than in Vienna.

Text quoted from: Klocker, Hubert: Vienna: Mirroring and Transgression pp. 7 – 11. in Klocker, Hubert (Ed.): (Exh. Cat.) Rite of Passage: The Early Years of Vienna Actionism, 1960-66, 9. September – 25. October 2014, Hauser & Wirth New York, 2014. SNOECK, Hauser & Wirth.



Otto Muehl, Untitled, 1985,
Watercolour on paper, 890 x 620 mm



Otto Muehl, Claudia, 1985,
Oil on canvas, 140 x 170 cm



Otto Muehl, Untitled, 22.03.1985,
Watercolour on paper, 310 x 440 mm

"I HAVE USED THE MEDIUM OF PAINTING
TO TRY TO CAPTURE ANY ELEMENTS
OF HUMAN CRUELTY AND PERVERSION
WHICH CANNOT BE DISPLAYED IN THE FORM OF AN ACTION."

OTTO MUEHL

FRANZ WEST



Franz West, Urinello, 2008,
Paper mache, Acrylic laquer, metall, 128 x 13 x 11 cm

"FRANZ WEST CLASSIFIED HIMSELF IN A SPECIFIC AUSTRIAN TRADITION IN HIS ART'S BODY ORIENTATION AND HIS INTEREST IN SOUNDING PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCES.⁸"



Franz West, Das allzu Kreatürliche, 1990,
Collage and mixed media on cardboard in original frame of the artist, 52 x 30 cm

GÜNTER BRUS



Günter Brus, Zerreißprobe, 1970/2001,
12 colour photographs, photographer: Klaus Eschen, cardboard: 60 x 50 cm, photo á 49 x 39 cm



Günter Brus, Aktionszeichnung, 1966,
Ink on paper, 297 x 210 mm

"MY BODY IS THE INTENT,
MY BODY IS THE INCIDENCE,
MY BODY IS THE CONCLUSION."
GÜNTER BRUS



Günter Brus, Aktionszeichnung, 1966,
Ink on paper, 210 x 297 mm



Elke Silvia Krystufek, Drawn, 1998, Acrylic on canvas, 125 x 170 cm

ELKE SILVIA KRSTUFEK

"THE ARTIST ATTAINED LASTING RENOWN WITH HER PERFORMANCES AND NUDE SELF-PORTRAITS. FOR SEVERAL YEARS, HER BODY WAS THE STARTING POINT FOR CREATIVE ACTIVITY. THE FEMALE BODY IS AT THE CENTER OF ACTION."

BARBARA STEFFEN



One should turn away from what one dislikes seeing and thus does not wish to see and should not open one's eyes to it. Women are thus so keen to watch lovers, and thus most like to surprise them while they kiss and engage in further sexual relations since what they desire is coitus in general (not just for themselves).

Elke Silvia Krystufek, Elke Silvia Krystufek reads Otto Weininger (Featuring Charles Ray), 1995, colour photograph mounted on Aluminium, 70 x 100 cm



Elke Silvia Krystufek, hescape, 2009, Acrylic on canvas, 200 x 300 cm



Elke Silvia Krystufek, It's Time for a Daydream, 1996, Original collage, c-prints, postcards, photocopies, magazine cutouts, tape 61 x 35,6 cm

IMPRINT

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Responsible for the content

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Quotations:

1–7 Eric R. Kandel, *The Age of Insight. The Quest to Understand the unconscious in art, mind and brain*, New York 2012, p. 16, 98, 95, 167, 166, 166, 28

8 <https://www.art-directory.de/malerei/franz-west-1947/index.shtml> (23.8.2019)



OTTO 6.12. 2000.

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