

steirischer herbst 2017

Where Are We Now?

Retrospective views, presentiments & departures into the unknown

steirischer herbst is taking place for the fiftieth time in 2017. The festival is grateful for this opportunity to ask some fundamental questions about the way art and society see their position: Where exactly do we stand? What led to this present? And what instruments will we use to define our place in the world and the roads we follow in future? Or: "Where Are We Now?"

The "We" of today's Western world is usually defined with the aid of such parameters as progress and added value, ones which we have meanwhile internalised to the extent that we see them as natural instincts. This has played into the hands of populist hate-talkers who rally people behind them with the promise of securing lasting victory in a relentless competitive environment. But where are the alternative visions of the world that could enthuse and unite people?

What could a different system of reference look like? What are its core values? What languages are needed, what senses, what kind of thinking, what spaces and conditions? In its fiftieth instalment, steirischer herbst does not put forward this other world as a vision but instead aims to test a variety of different posits in which this world might be conceived. With a spirit of adventure, we expose ourselves to a variety of projections and as yet unformulated drafts. After all, we yearn for the future – albeit for a future that is truly different.

Opening this year's steirischer herbst, acclaimed choreographer **Mette Ingvarsen** experiments with sensual, erotic and social body languages. In "to come (extended)" she shrouds fifteen dancers in blue full-body suits, contrasting the current deluge of images of naked skin and explicit eroticism with an abstract image. Sensual, joyful situations are extended, culminating in a joint celebration. A choreography that both captivates and stimulates.

Numerous are the forms of exploring the history of steirischer herbst: a special exhibition at the **GrazMuseum** recounts how the festival has evolved into a platform for contemporary art of international reach since being founded in 1968. The exhibition looks at the socio-political role of steirischer herbst and its programme with regard to the particular historical background, tracing the marks left by the festival – that has always operated freely in the city and the region – in public space and appraising its influence on art, culture, and the local population.

A **series of discussions** will also focus on the history of the festival. Directors, programme-makers and contemporaries recall sensational projects, silent provocations, and pioneering decisions. The **audiowalk** "50 Years, 5 Nodes" lets you re-experience the city of avant-garde art, while various people talk about their festival in the "herbst fragments" **festival app**. We also invite you to browse through our history yourself: on a guided tour of the **festival archive**, online in a comprehensive **database** or in two **publications**. The "herbstbuch 1968-2017" reviews the history of steirischer herbst – in excerpts, subjectively and without any nostalgic embellishments. Given that in this anniversary year we are more than ever interested in looking at where we stand, "Where Are We Now?" brings together contributions from fifty artists and theorists whose works have influenced the festival over the past decade.

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The first themed edition of the three-nation biennial "trigon '67" entitled "ambiente / environment" was the initial spark for founding steirischer herbst in 1968. The focus will be on this show and its times in several projects, bringing it into the present day. At **Künstlerhaus – Halle für Kunst & Medien**, 15 artists respond to the historical project, presenting site-specific installations and space-embracing explorations of the original venue: "trigon 67/17 – ambiente nuovo / post environment". **Haus der Architektur** is recalling trigon '67 by investigating the role of architecture as a catalyst in the relationship between human beings and the environment. With "Into the Unknown" and "Graz Architecture", **Kunsthau Graz** also takes a look back in time to comment from today's vantage point – it recapitulates its own history and the history of Graz's architecture scene since the 1960s.

Looking back, reading the tracks of the past, however, is only fascinating if this re-flection – in the literal sense of bending back – leads to a choreography that presses ahead, dancing artistically into the future, the unknown. And so steirischer herbst, in its fiftieth year, remains one thing above all else, forward-looking. In a wide range of artistic enterprises the question asked is how we could rethink and redefine this world – for example by the young Austrian performers **Simon Mayer** and **Florentina Holzinger**. Both are presenting new works at the festival: human beings and robots, light, sound and costume are the actors in Mayer's powerful and poetic evening "Oh Magic", while Florentina Holzinger takes a fresh look at the genres of circus variety and neoclassical ballet in "Apollon Musagète" with masterful physicality.

Graz-based **Theater im Bahnhof** meets Swedish director **Gunilla Heilborn** – together they set out in search of the little details of everyday life: "The Wonderful and the Ordinary". Another project comes from Cape Verdean choreographer **Marlene Monteiro Freitas**, "Bacchae – Prelude to a Purge", the Belgian **Berlin** company reports back from the environs of Chernobyl with the film installation "Zvizdal", and we look forward to a première of Chinese multitalent **Tianzhuo Chen**, who invites us to a global scrutiny of current times between kitsch and apocalypse in "An Atypical Brain Damage". The Slovenian **EnKnapGroup** sets out on a death-defying quest for happiness together with the **Nature Theater of Oklahoma** that takes them to an American dream somewhere between Baghdad and the Wild West: "Pursuit of Happiness".

And speaking of Nature Theater of Oklahoma: literature Nobel laureate **Elfriede Jelinek** has released her most important work, as she herself says, for a film/performance production by the American company. "Die Kinder der Toten" – a ghost novel, a 666-page uncanny, in places highly comical and then disturbing challenge both in terms of language and criticism of history. After two years of preparation, the examination of this giant of language now culminates in one of the festival's biggest ever projects: with a host of different voices and media, we take "Die Kinder der Toten" back to its roots – Neuberg an der Mürz between Mürzzuschlag and Mariazell.

Nature Theater of Oklahoma's **Kelly Copper** and **Pavol Liska** are set to stage public film shoots for a free film adaptation of the novel at original locations. In addition, the Veranstaltungszentrum Mürzer Oberland event centre is being turned into a base camp with numerous side events. Participants can prepare for shoots here; there will be information about Elfriede Jelinek and the project; we will be throwing ourselves into a 144-hour non-stop reading of "Die Kinder der Toten"; guided tours the scenes of the novel start from here; and "Cinema 666" will inspire the audience. Organist and composer **Wolfgang Mitterer** invites visitors to two exclusive film screenings with live music at kunsthau muerz –

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he will be accompanying one of Elfriede Jelinek's favourite movies, "Carnival of Souls", with a musical improvisation. This major production will also be accompanied by two visual arts projects: **Institut für Kunst im öffentlichen Raum** has invited **Marko Lulić** to create a symbolic landmark at the base camp, while Georgian artist **Vajiko Chachkhiani** has been commissioned by steirischer herbst to devise a stage for silent dramas in an abandoned house in Krampen near Neuberg: "Guests arrived, none of us could see them".

Palais Attems is the home of the steirischer herbst offices, from where the festival has been conceived, planned and run since 1985. In 2017 we are inviting the public to "our home", opening the doors of the baroque palais as the **festival centre**. Between the palais and the Mursteg footbridge, the Graz-based architect group **Studio Magic** are setting up their expansive "Transegrity" installation. With temporary roofing created by architect **Thomas Herzig**, the courtyard becomes a central venue. Join us here to experience performances and installations – a "Biodesign Lab" by **Yoko Shimizu**, the sensual salon "An Occasion" by choreographer **Isabel Lewis** or "The Grain Show" by **Augustin Rebetez & Louis Jucker**. "roboexotica" will celebrate the merry coexistence of man and machine for one afternoon, while the **Tortuga** and **Risograd** collectives teach us how to print dreams.

There will also be performances by **J&J (Jessica Huber and James Leadbitter)** ("Tender Provocations of Hope and Fear"), choreographer **Begüm Erciyas** ("Voicing Pieces"), and South Korean artist **Jaha Koo** ("Cuckoo") at the festival centre. **Laia Fabre** and **Thomas Kasebacher** invite visitors to the performative swap-shop "Social Muscle Club", and a great poet of little things is also set to return – **Benjamin Verdonck** presents three table-top theatres that tackle the big issues with touching simplicity: "One more thing / Gille learns to read / Song for Gigi". On the third weekend of the festival, a **philosophical canteen** will be opening, serving performances and talks that open up the leitmotif for discussion in a friendly setting: from Oceanic thinking and alternative logics of being-in-the-world to a decolonial view of a Eurocentric "we". Beirut-born artist **Walid Raad** will be moving into the stately rooms of Palais Attems. In an exhibition, and in person in several walkthroughs, he is presenting his globe-spanning cycle of works on Islamic art, World War I, and the development of new infrastructures for art in the Arab world: "Kicking the Dead".

This year's **herbst exhibition** "Prometheus Unbound" is being held at Neue Galerie Graz. Prometheus has been regarded since ancient times as the creator of civilisation with its constant search for scientific, political and intellectual innovations. In the show curated by **Luigi Fassi** the artists reflect on both the figure of this "bringer of culture" and our Eurocentric way of thinking. "Where Are We Now?" – this question prompts **Camera Austria** and **<rotor>** to take stock. They are opening up their archives – the former for an interpretation by artist **Özlem Altin** ("Processing") and the latter for an analysis of the status quo – the aim being to look back and bring things into focus after eighteen years of art and culture work. With the exhibition "Spiro. Spero" and an international literature symposium, **KULTUM Graz** looks for ways to harness the resistant potential of hope, while at **esc medien kunst labor** Concha Jerez sets out in search of paradises. Emily Mast's "The Seed Eaters" at **Grazer Kunstverein** is a performance in a set that is also an exhibition. **The smallest gallery – collaboration space** becomes a social media screen where Alicia Pawelczak transfers her Instagram posts into the display window and thus public space, and Graz-based artist Niki Passath creates open-ended social situations between human beings and machines with his "Workshop" at **Kunsthalle Graz**.

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Back to the festival centre again where **Soundtracks** concert series and DJ-line is set to take place this year. The live acts range from South African cult rapper **Dope Saint Jude**, pianist **Hauschka**, the **Paradise Bangkok Molam International Band**, and Scottish composer **Anna Meredith** to the **Cologne Tape** supergroup and the beguiling **Karma She** from Israel. Musician **Dorit Chrysler** is not only featuring with a solo concert but, following a series of Theremin workshops, will also be premièring her composition "Invisible Flames" with young people from Graz.

musikprotokoll turns fifty this year too. To celebrate this birthday, it is risking a tongue-in-cheek step back in time: the **Vienna RSO** is set to play some old-school "ball" music in the Stefaniensaal at Grazer Congress: "Advanced dance music". With its central theme of "Thieves, dreamers, dancers", however, the platform for New Music is also staying firmly in the present this year again: the large-scale world première of a composition by **Peter Jakober** kicks off a series of (world) premières. Performers include **Ensemble PHACE** and **Studio Dan**, **Quatuor Diotima**, **ensemble zeitfluss**, and exceptional British double bass player **Barry Guy**. Also taking place is "Homages", an ingenious acoustic exhibition that was on show in spring at the Cultural Forum in New York.

Four authors are again keeping a highly subjective online diary for the **Randnotizen** blog (Marginal Notes). Swedish theatre-maker **Gunilla Heilborn**, Austrian writer **Marie Gamillscheg**, artist, author and performer **Matthias Schamp**, and last but not least **Veronica Kaup-Hasler**, who accompanies her last steirischer herbst with personal insights and prospects.

This herbst is a special one in this relation too. It is the last one of Veronica Kaup-Hasler as director of the festival. During her tenure, the festival has continued to flourish – hundreds of artists have been involved and we have reached many thousands of people over this period. The aim is not simply to create relevant contemporary productions, but always – from the outset – to consider the audience as part of the artwork and to enable participation. The underlying mindset and conviction: contemporary art is a necessity for a civil society that must not be amenable to circles of experts alone. Above and beyond its subject matter, contemporary art must not lose sight of the viewer, the vis-à-vis, society: it must consider how we reach and – in many respects – meet one another.

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