

## Austrian Pavilion at the 58th International Art Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia

### **Discordo Ergo Sum**

2019 will mark the first time in the history of Austria's participation in the International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia that a female artist, namely Renate Bertlmann, will put on a solo presentation at the Pavilion. With this, curator Felicitas Thun-Hohenstein is setting an example; an example that is in accordance with the idea of art and examines structural imbalances.

In Austria, Renate Bertlmann has long been regarded as a leading feminist artist and a pioneer of performance art. In recognition of her groundbreaking work, she was awarded the Grand Austrian State Prize in 2017. Her works were presented at large events, such as the Gwangju Biennale, as well as in seminal exhibitions, such as *The World Goes Pop* at Tate Modern, London (2014), *Self-Timer Stories* at the Austrian Cultural Forum New York (2014), *Renate Bertlmann - Maria Lassnig* at Sotheby's Gallery, London (2017), and *Sex Work: Feminist Art & Radical Politics*, Richard Saltoun Gallery, Frieze Art Fair, London (2017).

Bertlmann can look back at a complex oeuvre that is both aesthetically and conceptually intricately connected to an aesthetics of risk. Always keeping a keen eye on the transformational potential of difference as a counterweight to power, the artist oscillates performative, sculptural, graphic, photographic, filmic, and textual aspects between the past and the present, between dispossession and covetousness, between the everyday and the unusual, between art and life.

**Discordo Ergo Sum** ("I dissent, therefore I am") is the title of Austrian artist Renate Bertlmann's site-specific installation for the Austrian pavilion. In this rephrasing of the philosophical principle *Cogito Ergo Sum* ("I think, therefore I am"), the artist attempts to cancel out the supremacy of reason and to describe herself within her insurgent worldview. With a further modification of this principle, the phrase *Amo Ergo Sum* ("I love, therefore I am"), Renate Bertlmann ironically signs the pavilion's architecture. This subversive treatment puts the principle of her artistic approach in a nutshell. An expression thereof is the installation of knife-roses in the courtyard, whose form and content allows us to sensuously experience the dichotomy of our existence.

Renate Bertlmann juggles with social symbols, breaks them open, and opens up a dialogue that revolves around critical social phenomena such as gender relations, role models, and power structures by confronting them at times ironically, at times insurgently, often in a trans- or posthuman gesture. From the nimble foundation of the artist's two central figures, the lover and the insurgent, emerges a transitional space where contradictions stand side by side in accord, where incongruities convene, separate things change sides, and hierarchies are set in motion. Between this foundational movement in the exterior space and the pavilion courtyard, the exhibition space gives way to a cartographic view of Renate Bertlmann's artistic practice. A selection of her aesthetic and conceptual aspects exemplifies her multilayered oeuvre since the 1970s. The presentation of wall charts, sketches, photos, filmstrips, and drawings in a box inserted to fit into the pavilion creates a contemplative zone where visitors immerse themselves in Renate Bertlmann's artistic self-understanding and can perceive it in relation to the new installation.

**Renate Bertlmann** (\*1943 in Vienna) studied at the Academy of Arts in Oxford in 1962/63 and subsequently at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna until 1970. After graduating in Painting and Restoration, she was a lecturer at the Department of Conservation and Technology at the Academy until 1982. She lives and works in Vienna. In her work Bertlmann explores representations of roles and bodies, questioning gender relationships by discussing subjects like pornography, sexuality, violence, Eros, and hierarchy. Her works are particularly characterized by a provocative, ironic approach. She has been a member of the Vienna Secession since 1993 and a coeditor of the magazine [sic!] *-Forum für feministische Gangarten* since 1994. In 2007, she received the Prize of the City of Vienna and in 2017, the Grand Austrian State Prize.

Renate Bertlmann is represented by Galerie Steinek [www.galerie.steinek.at](http://www.galerie.steinek.at) and Richard Saltoun Gallery [www.richardsaltoun.com](http://www.richardsaltoun.com)

**Felicitas Thun-Hohenstein** is a curator, art historian, and professor at the Institute of Art Theory and Cultural Studies at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. She has headed several research projects, such as the Cathrin Pichler Archive for Science, Art, and Curatorial Practice. In her work as a teacher, researcher, lecturer, and exhibition maker, she has been focused on themes of contemporary art, modern art, arts-based research as well as feminist theory and art practice, body and spatial production. She is a member of the curatorial board of the mumok – Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Vienna. Felicitas Thun-Hohenstein is the author and editor of several texts and publications.

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