

The Essl Collection

Tentatively scheduled for 7 December 2020 – 14 March 2021
Actual dates may change subject to pandemic-related developments.

The winter and spring of 2020/2021 are all about the Essl Collection at ALBERTINA MODERN. At this new location, an initial showing of the Essl Collection's highlights will offer glimpses into its great artistic diversity and quality—from Dieter Roth to Nam June Paik, from Annette Messager to Heimo Zobernig, and from Gilbert & George to Fang Lijun.

110 major works by the Essl Collection's most famous artists convey an impression of the broad collecting horizon in play here alongside an artistic breadth and diversity of employed media such as only few collections in Central Europe can boast. Since 2017, the Essl Collection has been entrusted to the ALBERTINA Museum—where it forms the backbone of this institution's holdings of modern and contemporary art.

The current selection concentrates on the three decades since 1980. The exhibition itself does not, however, aim to narrate a certain chapter of art history or explore a specific area of the collection in depth. The point here is much rather to provide an overview that, in the case of a collection numbering several thousand works, must remain incomplete but can provide at least a rough idea of such a collection's great riches.

While the ground floor at ALBERTINA MODERN is given over to paintings, sculptures, objects, installations, and videos, the lower level is reserved for a special exhibition of works from the Essl Collection's photographic holdings. Alongside artists such as Cindy Sherman, Nan Goldin, and Gregory Crewdson, the focus here is above all on representatives of the Becher School including Andreas Gursky, Thomas Ruf, Thomas Struth, Elger Esser, and many others.

The past five decades have seen Karlheinz and Agnes Essl invest an outstanding level of passion in bringing together what is one of the world's most important private art collections. With over 6,000 individual objects, it numbers among the largest collections of contemporary art worldwide. Together with Hans-Peter Haselsteiner, they first entrusted the collection to the ALBERTINA Museum in 2017 as a permanent loan in order to ensure its continued existence as a unified whole. From the very beginning, the plan was to show works from the collection in the spaces of ALBERTINA MODERN at the Künstlerhaus on Karlsplatz, which—thanks to the farsighted patronage of Hans Peter Haselsteiner—has since been

ALBERTINA modern

restored, modernized, and expanded. 2019 saw the Essl family generously donate part of the collection to the ALBERTINA Museum. The museum will thus be able to draw on these important collection holdings over the long term, developing interesting and attractive exhibitions in the future. The exhibition *The Beginning*, which opened ALBERTINA MODERN, is now being followed by a presentation that concentrates exclusively on highlights from the Essl Collection; future exhibitions, however, will always combine Essl Collection works with other ALBERTINA Museum holdings.

Above all, the Essl Collection offers a look into the collection's international art holdings. For alongside its important and well-known focus on Austrian art is well known, the collection also stands out for its important blocks of works by world-renowned artists from outside the country. The collecting activities of Karlheinz and Agnes Essl have been and still are characterized by exceptional curiosity and a thirst for knowledge, qualities that enabled them to build this important collection of contemporary art: alongside the initial group of Austrian works and subsequent acquisitions of output by German artists, the fall of the Berlin Wall occasioned a rapid broadening of the couple's interest to include other European countries as well as the USA, China, Mexico, and India. The two collectors went on to collect the oeuvres of many artists "in depth," as they put it, accompanying their creative development over multiple decades and acquiring large blocks of works. The collecting couple is personally acquainted with almost all of the artists, with many of whom they still share close friendships today.

The present exhibition at Albertina Modern focuses on several important highlights of the collection: the American artists Alex Katz, David Salle, Chuck Close, Jim Dine, Peter Halley, and Philip Taaffe are included here, as are the Irish artist Sean Scully and British artists Gilbert & George, Sarah Morris, Cecily Brown, Tony Cragg, and Marc Quinn. Among the collection's artists from Germany, Georg Baselitz, Albert Oehlen, Stephan Balkenhol, Daniel Richter, Jonathan Meese, Neo Rauch, Dieter Roth, and Tim Eitel are represented. Also present are works by Daniel Spoerri of Switzerland and Antoni Tàpies y Puig of Spain. A further highlight consists in works by the internationally successful Chinese artists Fang Lijun, Minjun Yue, and Xiaogang Zhang. Rarely shown installations and works by Fluxus artist Nam June Paik, artist Annette Messager, video artists Bill Viola and Tony Oursler, Danish artists Peter Land and Tal R, and the Vienna-based Romanian sculptor Virgilius Moldovan represent another special focus. And Austrian artists including Elke Krystufek, Johanna Kandler, Gudrun Kampl, Martha Jungwirth, Gelitin, VALIE EXPORT, Arnulf Rainer, Hubert Scheibl, Franz Zadrazil, Heimo Zobernig, and Franz West round out this presentation of Essl Collection masterpieces.

ALBERTINA **modern**

This exhibition is at once challenging and stirring on account of the various tensions that arise between starkly contrasting works: when Franz West's drastic contribution stands alongside the irony of the two popes by Moldovan, when the art world's probably most famous collective Gilbert & George meets China's artistic awakening, or when Annette Messenger's installation meets Daniel Richter's critical take on the refugee crisis.

This first presentation aims to show the Essl Collection's great amplitude—both in terms of media and thematically—at its absolute extremes.

Only few institutions can lay claim to such rich treasures from the realm of contemporary art as can the ALBERTINA Museum. And thanks to the immense generosity of Karlheinz Essl and his family, it can now do so all the more.