

→ steirischer herbst '19
Grand Hotel Abyss
Jasmina Cibic, Jeremy
Deller, Ian Hamilton Finlay
20 09 2019 — 28 11 2019

Welcome / Artist Talk
21 09 2019, 5 p.m.

In collaboration
steirischer herbst '19
Künstlerhaus, Halle für
Kunst & Medien



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In the frame of the extensive project "Grand Hotel Abyss," the steirische herbst and the Künstlerhaus, Halle für Kunst & Medien collaborate on three artistic positions whose works "play" with the idea to connect the establishment of the Künstlerhaus to the internationally oriented cultural policy of the British allies, positioned in Styria in the post-war era. Jasmina Cibic's video installation is an allegorical, poetic examination of architecture and other art forms that constitute political gifts of the variety the Künstlerhaus might have been. Jeremy Deller takes a stand against the political chaos enveloping Britain today, a rise of right-wing populism similar to the one in Austria. A selection of objects and prints by artist and poet Ian Hamilton Finlay comments on the militarization of art between modernism and classicism—thus also reacting to the conservative modernist architecture of the building itself.

The title of steirischer herbst '19 is "Grand Hotel Abyss"—a striking metaphor used by philosopher Georg Lukács. Lukács described the European intellectual and cultural scene as "a beautiful hotel, equipped with every comfort, on the edge of an abyss, of nothingness, of absurdity. And the daily contemplation of the abyss between excellent meals or artistic entertainments, can only heighten the enjoyment of the subtle comforts offered." Lukács's image rhymes with the self-presentation of Graz and the surrounding Austrian county of Styria as a "Genussregion," a culinary and aesthetic pleasure zone. It is one of many bubbles of sublime gastronomy, wellness and organic comfort arising in times of heightened inequality—places custom-tailored for business travelers and cultural tourists, where praise of heirloom products has creepy crypto-nationalist undertones, and where the abyss of radical social exclusion, economic crisis, and all-out military conflict is lurking just around the corner, approaching in slow motion. "Grand Hotel Abyss" takes this situation as a point of departure for a broader meditation on hedonism in times of approaching apocalypse. It looks back to the festival's prehistory in the heady days of the early Cold War—when British officers, including a young John le Carré, took over the city's one actual grand hotel, Hotel Wiesler, and set up their headquarters in Palais Attems, today the office of steirischer herbst.

The obvious assumption that the construction of the Künstlerhaus grew out of the favourable support of the British allies sheds new light on the genesis of the institution and its late modern building that was changefully planned over decades and eventually realized in 1952, under the auspices of the province of Styria and with the support of the city of Graz, the federacy and local artists. For the constitution of the 2nd republic, the British allies put significant emphasis, next to general administrative activities, on the rebuilding of the constitutional state, the re-democratization and denazification, whereby a cosmopolitan cultural policy played a valuable accompanying role, which provided the regional population and artists with access to modernism, which was prohibited in the times of Austro-fascism and National Socialism, and enabled international exchange.

Jasmina Cibic's video installation "The Gift—Act I" (2019) is the first chapter of her new poetic study of the many "political gifts" found in European history of art and architecture, especially during times of rebuilding after political upheaval. There is a persistent and unsubstantiated rumor in Graz that the Künstlerhaus was also such a "gift" from the departing British occupation forces. Cibic's installation looks at how culture turns into a Trojan horse with such donations. Some of the most spectacular architectural examples of this become the backdrop for a poetic narrative guided by "Four Fundamental Freedoms"—allegorical characters based on a speech by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1941. These protagonists devise a plan for a cultural battle between different worldviews, where three personifications of Art, Architecture, and Music face off to tender themselves as the perfect presents for an imaginary, divided nation. They are judged by the Freedoms, who offer increasingly aggressive populist criticisms of culture's complicity to politics, and in the end, their verdict is damning. Cibic's film follows this contest, while a wrought metal sculpture represents the perfect gift with a quote drawn from the political debates around one of the film's locations: "Everything that you desire and nothing that you fear."

Jeremy Deller's new single-channel film "Putin's Happy" (2019) provides a unique view of the rise of right-wing populism and, possibly, fascism in the United Kingdom. It looks at the often-absurd xenophobia, isolationism, and misplaced patriotism fueling the vote to leave the European Union, sentiments ironically shared by many Continental Europeans on the right, including those in Austria. A vocal opponent of Brexit, Deller has intervened directly in the political process—as with his highly publicized T-shirt campaign of 2017—and also delved into the "magic" of British national myths and political history that have produced the present moment. In his new film, Deller focuses on the grotesque details and eccentric decor of British populism's fantasy world, showing its tragicomic effects in reality as its protesters reappear day in and day out. Anti-Brexit banners designed by Deller preface the installation, continuing another means with which Deller has lent his unique voice as an artist to political struggles over the years.

Ian Hamilton Finlay's work, presented here through a selection of prints, objects, and aphorisms (1973-2003), revolves around the ambivalence of neoclassicism—a style linked to the democratic ideals of the French Revolution but revived as a totalitarian aesthetic in the 20th century. Finlay daringly balances on this double edge. Fragments of neoclassical art become visual puns, commented by lines of poetry, inscriptions, and anagrams, reflecting upon the history of the revolution and its conscription of classical art to quasi-military service. Not only does Finlay find traces of this militarization in neoclassicism itself, he also discovers neoclassical elements in the aesthetically beautiful machines and camouflage patterns of modern war. Finlay rarely traveled and spent most of his life working on a garden installation in Scotland facetiously named "Little Sparta" to contrast it with nearby Edinburgh, which is sometimes called "Athens of the North" due to its topography and its high incidence of neoclassical architecture. It was here that he realized many of the poetic propositions shown in these prints, punctuating his rambling garden with stone tablets on trees, classical fragments, aircraft-carrier bird platforms, and beehive

battleships. In the present context, the outward conservatism and defiant radicalism of his work comments on the urban myth that Graz's Künstlerhaus was a gift from the British occupation forces.

Curators: Ekaterina Degot, Christoph Platz, David Riff

Support Jasmina Cibic: ERSTE Stiftung

Supporting Program

- 21.09.2019 5 p.m. Jasmina Cibic, Jeremy Deller, Christoph Platz, David Riff, Artist Talk
- 26.09.2019 6 p.m. Michał Murawski, *The Political Aesthetics of the Architectural Gift*, Lecture
- 10.10.2019 6 p.m. Evan Calder Williams, *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse Revisited*, Lecture
- 17.10.2019 6 p.m. Siegfried Beer, Johannes Feichtinger, Birgit Johler, *Historical and Cultural-Political Municipal Area of the Post-War Era*, Talk
- 24.10.2019 6 p.m. Gudrun Danzer, Günther Holler-Schuster, *Awakening and Reaction. Modernism in Styria*, Talk
- 07.11.2019 6 p.m. Günter Eisenhut, *Modernism in Dark Times*, Lecture
- 14.11.2019 6 p.m. Herbert Lipsky, *The Art of Assimilation*, Lecture
- 21.11.2019 6 p.m. Josef Ploder, *A Question of Site. The Künstlerhaus Graz and its Precursive Projects*, Lecture
- 28.11.2019 7 p.m. *Lepenik and Gründler Perform Adorno*, Concert

Art Education Program

- 22.09.2019 11 a.m. Vanessa Hanneschläger, *In Focus: Ian Hamilton Finlay*
- 28.09.2019 3 p.m. Christoph Szalay, *Home Game*, Convo Club
- 04.10.2019 4 p.m. Paige Baralija, *In Focus: Jeremy Deller*
- 05.10.2019 6 p.m.–1 a.m. Lange Nacht der Museen, Special Program
- 11.10.2019 4 p.m. Christian Brugger, *In Focus: Jasmina Cibic*
- 31.10.2019 6 p.m. *mischen #3*, Magazine Presentation and Performance
- 09.11.2019 2 p.m. Risograd, *Print it out!*, Poster Workshop
- 23.11.2019 11 a.m. Paula Watzl, *Art Stories: On Writing About Art*, Review Workshop
- 3 p.m. Victoria Dejaco, Iris Kasper, *Curating and Experimenting*, Convo Club



Ian Hamilton Finlay, *Neoclassicism Needs You*, 1983, postcard, courtesy of the Estate of Ian Hamilton Finlay.



Jasmina Cibic, *The Gift—Act I*, 2019, production still, courtesy of the artist and Espace Niemeyer.