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Exhibition:

VIENNA COMPLEX

FEB 27 - MAY 26, 2014

Austrian Cultural Forum New York
11 East 52nd Street, New York

FEB 26 | EXHIBITION OPENING

6:00 PM - 8:00 PM (no RSVP req'd)



Verena Dengler, *The Verena Complex* (2014)

ARTISTS: Ei ARAKAWA & Shimon MINAMIKAWA, Josef DABERNIG, Verena DENGLER, Anke DYES & Niklas LICHTI, Harun FAROCKI, Tonio KRÖNER, Ulla ROSSEK, Astrid WAGNER, Franz WEST, Heimo ZOBERNIG
CURATOR: Cosima RAINER

New York, January 2014 - This new international group exhibition at the **Austrian Cultural Forum New York**, titled **Vienna Complex**, is being presented in conjunction with Carnegie Hall's three week-long festival, **Vienna: City of Dreams**. Curated by Austrian **Cosima Rainer**, it will be the first exhibition produced under the auspices of the Austrian Cultural Forum's new director, **Christine Moser**.

The show takes the transformative psychoanalytic momentum of Vienna in 1900, and the resulting entwinement and fascination of the proponents of modernist abstraction with this therapeutic revolution as a point of departure. Based on the hypothesis that the culture of self-improvement that permeates all spheres of society today is also a result of the artistic dissemination of therapeutic ideas into the mainstream, the exhibition presents contemporary artistic reflections on the phenomenon of our modern meritocracy.

The centerpiece of the exhibition is a skeletal metal couch by the late Austrian artist **Franz West** titled *Liège*, culled from the collection of Vienna's Sigmund Freud Museum. Visitors are encouraged to lie down on the sculpture, which is of course reminiscent of Freud's infamous couch. "The perception of art takes place through the pressure points that develop when you lie on it," West said in 1999. The title can be read as the German word for a couch-type of bed, as well as the Belgian city –which is perhaps meant as a reference to the importance of words and wordplay in a Freudian context. **Astrid Wagner**, who contributed to the design of this exhibition, has created a fabric wall tapestry reminiscent of a gauze wound dressing, which links the ACFNY's gallery spaces together. In her large-scale posters, which are also on view in **Vienna Complex**, she has painted over the "self-improved" models featured on these advertising posters, ultimately turning them into unshapely, "polymorphously perverse" blobs. **Harun Farocki's** 1998 film, *Worte und Spiele (Words and Games)*, which has not been shown in the U.S. to date, explores the cynical machinery of reality TV which emerged in Europe in the 1990s, and exposes the ways in which intimate emotional moments are turned into thrilling entertainment.

The artists featured in **Vienna Complex** employ a self-referential approach, by reflecting on the artistic process itself, and the ways in which artistic practice has been influenced by therapeutic currents. Satirical bloggers **Niklas Lichti** and **Anke Dyes** (aka *The Critical Ass*, thecriticalass.at), have created a large-scale wallpaper featuring a tongue-in-cheek chart of psychological disorders they consider prevalent among people working in the arts. The texts are written in the style of the DSM (the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, published by the American Psychiatric Association), and self-deprecatingly chronicle the oftentimes attention-seeking behavior of artists. Paintings produced by Shimon Minamikawa in 1990s Japan, are at the center of **Ei Arakawa** and **Shimon Minamikawa's** video, *Paris Adapted Homeland*, in which the neurotic and competitive environment among painters is staged as an ironic social drama.

Tonio Kröner's installation serves as a stageset for his performance, *Le Bordel d'Avignon - Musical*, which was the name Pablo Picasso used for his seminal 1907 painting, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)*. Kröner sees the many studies and preparatory drawings Picasso made as trial runs, or rehearsals, for the final product. He draws parallels to the constant self-improvement and underlying perfectionism inherent to marketing and self-promotion, which he ultimately considers instruments of social control. This focus on process is also evident in the piece by **Josef Dabernig**: In 1977, he spent a summer focused on self-treatment where he first worked as a woodsman, and then pursued an equally meditative strictly delineated daily routine. He produced a handwritten copy of an early 20th century book on human intestines, which can be seen as both a disciplinary method and a healing process. In this age of burn-out syndrome, dysfunctional intestines have, after all, largely come to symbolize a failure of self-management. German artist **Ulla Rossek** has created a decorative and elaborately bound book of texts copied and pirated from the seminal works of others, including the likes of Walter Benjamin and Dierich Diederichsen. The copies are smudged and almost illegible, and the reference to Benjamin's book, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* aligns the work squarely with recent artistic projects dealing with Google Books' scanning process, which touch on issues like the nostalgia for paperbound books on one hand, and concerns about mass digitization on the other.

Other artists focus on self-reflection as a motor driving artistic practice, often drawing on aspects of their own biographies. **Heimo Zobernig's** 2007 *Video Nr. 24* employs blue screen techniques and features the artist himself battling with adversaries dressed in the chroma key colors of blue, red, and green. The compulsion toward self-reflection is represented as inherent within the process of artistic creation, and self-fulfillment is –ultimately– an exhaustive undertaking. An ironic allegory on the creative, entrepreneurial self, **Verena Dengler's** playful installation comprises existing pieces, found objects (such as the artist's own apron from her studies at the academy), and new sculptures and posters. Dengler has also created the poster image for this exhibition, in which she uses symbols of fin-de-siècle Vienna to reference multitasking as an essential aspect of the concept of self-improvement – which lies at the core of the show's curatorial concept.

>> **Press images** are available online at <http://www.acfny.org/press-room/press-images-texts/vienna-complex>

ABOUT THE FESTIVAL

This exhibition is part of the Austrian Cultural Forum's **Vienna Complex Festival 2014**. The ACFNY is partnering with New York's **Carnegie Hall** to present the large-scale **Vienna: City of Dreams** festival in Spring 2014. The Austrian Cultural Forum opens the mind and senses to Vienna today. Building upon the vast artistic, intellectual, and cultural legacies of Vienna in 1900, the ACFNY explores the vibrant creative fabric of the 'city of dreams' in the 21st century with this exhibition, as well as a festival of contemporary music, a symposium, and a film series.

>> **More information** is available at: acfny.org/viennacomplex

ABOUT THE AUSTRIAN CULTURAL FORUM NEW YORK

With its architectural landmark building in the heart of Midtown Manhattan, the Austrian Cultural Forum New York hosts more than 200 free events annually and showcases Austrian con-temporary art, music, literature, and academic thought. The Austrian Cultural Forum houses around 10,000 volumes in its state-of-the-art library, and enjoys long-standing and flourishing partnerships with many venerable cultural and academic institutions throughout New York and the United States.

>> **More information:** acfny.org

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CONTACT, HOURS AND DIRECTIONS

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Directions

Subway:
E, M Train to Fifth Avenue/53rd Street
B, D, F, M Train to 47-50 Street/Rockefeller Center
E, M, 6 Train to 51st Street/Lexington Avenue

Bus:

M 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 to 53rd Street

Open Daily, 10 AM – 6 PM | Admission to exhibitions, concerts, and other events is free.
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