



28. September 2023

Belvedere 21

Arsenalstraße 1
1030 Vienna

Opening hours
Tuesday to Sunday
11 am to 6 pm
Late night: Thursday
11 am to 9 pm
Open Mondays on holidays

Press downloads:
belvedere.at/presse

Press contact:
Irene Jäger
+43 664 800 141 185
i.jaeger@belvedere.at

Renate Bertlmann, *Messerschnullerhände – Ambivalenzen 1*, 1981

© Renate Bertlmann / Bildrecht Wien, Courtesy Richard Saltoun Gallery, London and Rome

RENATE BERLMANN FRAGILE OBSESSIONS

29 September 2023 to 3 March 2024

Renate Bertlmann came into the spotlight during the 2019 Biennale di Venezia. But by then, the feminist artist had already created some 5,000 works throughout her lifetime. In the year of her eightieth birthday, the Belvedere Museum is presenting the most comprehensive retrospective to date.

General Director Stella Rollig: As a key figure of the feminist avant-garde in Austria and a pioneer in the field of international performance art, Renate Bertlmann has been developing a distinctive body of work since the 1970s. It is an honor to present this retrospective exhibition, which coincides with her eightieth birthday.

Renate Bertlmann has been relentlessly deconstructing traditional female role models through her performances since the 1970s. Her work remains uncompromising to this day. For more than five decades, the Austrian artist, born in Vienna in 1943, has been obsessively working on her cosmos, which includes photographs and drawings, assemblages, sculptures, installations, performances, films, and videos. Bertlmann gained international attention later in life and was initially mostly known in a feminist context until her work was featured in a pivotal survey show at SAMMLUNG VERBUND's Vertical Gallery in Vienna in 2016. This exhibition coincided with the release of the first comprehensive publication of her work, which sparked interest from galleries and institutions. Her breakthrough moment manifested when she became the first female artist to represent Austria alone in the 58th Biennale di Venezia in 2019. Today, she is celebrated as a central protagonist of the Austrian feminist avant-garde movement.

Renate Bertlmann's radical, ironically provocative works subvert social attributions and stereotypes of gender, femininity, and masculinity, thus addressing the female body as a battlefield and assessing the ambivalences of pleasure and pain, desire and discipline, tenderness and vulnerability, which are also expressed in the exhibition's title, Fragile Obsessions, says chief curator Luisa Ziaja.

With an idiosyncratic and fascinating choice of motifs, media, and materials, Bertlmann developed a distinct artistic vocabulary even in her early work: forms and motifs such as the phallus, the vulva, and the breast; bride and groom; the wheelchair; the pacifier, and the scalpel remain constants in her examination of male dominance and petty bourgeois morality to this day. Latex castings, plexiglass in fluorescent colors, and scalpels are paired with pacifiers, condoms, and dildos. Conceptual black-and-white photographs are juxtaposed with glittering and tinsel works, performances, and large-scale installations. The artist draws from conceptual and pop-cultural aesthetics, appropriates pornography and kitsch from an altered perspective, and references literature, film, medicine, religion, and spirituality.

In the late 1970s, Bertlmann established "amo ergo sum" (I love, therefore I am) as the programmatic leitmotif for her artistic endeavors. In the sense of a feminist appropriation – a central strategy of the artist – she rejects the famous dictum of philosopher René Descartes, "cogito ergo sum" (I think, therefore I am) in favor of prioritizing emotion and sensory perception. Bertlmann emphasizes a holistic approach to being, incorporating the body, mind, and soul instead of a logocentric perspective. She also groups her entire body of work into three interwoven categories: pornography, irony, and utopia, reflecting her radical opposition to patriarchal values yet also her passion for sensual experimentation.

The retrospective at Belvedere 21 includes approximately two hundred exhibits that span from the late 1960s to the most recent artistic production, in a chronological presentation that enables the viewer to discern lines of progression, continuities, and ruptures. On view are iconic works such as *Zärtliche Pantomime* (1976), *Waschtag* (1976/2023), *Wurfmesserbraut* (1978), and *Rosemaries Baby* (1983), as well as numerous works presented for the first time such as *Wann werden die Theologen endlich etwas von Zärtlichkeit erzählen* (1979), *Verlust der Mitte* (1980), *Regret* (1999), and, the most recent work from the *enfant terrible* series, *Drag Queen* (2023). The exhibition is arranged into four thematic areas that trace the chronological evolution of the artist's work: *Experiments in Defiant Female Resilience* explores her early work, central motifs, and strategies that are later expanded upon in *Anger and Tenderness* and include photographic self-stagings as well as performances in front of an audience. *Vulnerability and Idiosyncrasy* brings together explorations of existential questions, feminism, and spirituality, while *Kitsch as a Pleasurable Breach of Taboos* follows Bertlmann's subversive-ironic approach to the present day. The exhibition architecture, specially designed for this extensive collection of works by studio-itzo (Martina Schiller and Rainer Stadlbauer), features a modular wooden and fabric design that pays homage to Karl Schwanzer's aesthetic. This innovative display serves the dual purpose of providing light protection and hanging space along the interior facade. Additionally, four spatial brackets are strategically placed to demarcate the thematic areas of the exhibition.

EDITION

Renate Bertlmann created a special edition to complement the installation of *Amo Ergo Sum* (I love, therefore I am) as part of the *Carlone Contemporary* series at the Upper Belvedere in 2020. The edition features a love poem presented in the form of an aphorism, which was initially published in the *Amo Ergo Sum* trilogy with the same title in 1989. The artwork comprises capital letters set against a translucent background and bordered by a red mat. Bertlmann's piece is imbued with a sense of ambivalence, exploring themes of longing, desire, denial, fragility, and obsession, recurring motifs in her work that favor love over Descartes' famous imperative "cogito ergo sum" (I think, therefore I am).

RENATE BERLMANN

O.T., 2020

Hot foil stamping on white Japanese paper

Dimensions: 210 × 297 mm

Framed, signed, dated, numbered

Edition: 30 + 5 A.P.

EUR 720 incl. VAT

Available at the shop of Belvedere 21 or at editionen@belvedere.at

BIOGRAPHY

Renate Bertlmann was born as Renate Mück in Vienna in 1943. From 1964 to 1974 she studied restoration and conservation as well as painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. Between 1970 and 1982 she worked there as a lecturer for artistic techniques. In the 1970s and 1980s, Bertlmann collaborated both the Austrian context and internationally with artists such as VALIE EXPORT and Martha Wilson. Alongside her individual artistic practice, she has also worked collectively with other artists, such as the Marebagroup (from 1974–77 with Emanuela Marassi and Barbara Strathdee) and the BC-Kollektiv (from 1976 onwards with Linda Christanell). Since 1977, she has been an active member of IntAkt (International Action Group of Women Artists), and, since 1993, a member of the Vienna Secession. Bertlmann has received several awards throughout her career, including the Vienna Prize for Fine Arts in 2007 and the Grand Austrian State Prize for Visual Arts in 2017. Renate Bertlmann lives and works in Vienna.

EXHIBITIONS (SELECTION)

1973 *Renate Bertlmann. Mischtechniken*, Künstlerhaus, Vienna

1975 *MAGNA Feminismus: Kunst und Kreativität*, kuratiert von VALIE EXPORT, Galerie nächst St. Stephan, Vienna

1976 *Bertlmann. URVAGINA*, Tommaseo Galleria d'Arte, Trieste

1978 *Museum des Geldes*, Kunsthalle Duesseldorf

1982 *Renate Bertlmann. Streicheleinheiten*, Frauenmuseum, Bonn

1982 *Renate Bertlmann. Stimmen der Sehnsucht. Objekte aus Teil III: UTOPIE*, Galerie Apropos, Luzern

1983 *Renate Bertlmann*, Galerie Hildebrand, Klagenfurt

- 1983 *Andere Avantgarde*, Brucknerhaus, Linz
- 1983 *Berührungen*. Renate Bertlmann, Linda Christanell, Rita Furrer, Karin Mack, Sylvia Taraba, Jana Wisniewski, Palais Liechtenstein, Feldkirch
- 1985 *Renate Bertlmann. Berührungen*, Forum Stadtpark, Graz
- 1985 *Kunst mit Eigen-Sinn. Aktuelle Kunst von Frauen*, Museum des 20. Jahrhunderts, Wien/München
- 1986 *Bestehend – lebend – gegenwärtig*. Monika Baumgartl, Renate Bertlmann, Shigeko Kubota, Lidy von Lüttwitz, Nancy Spero, Museum Villa Stuck, Munich
- 1993 *Renate Bertlmann. Schneegestöber – Flitter(s)türme. Bilder und Objekte 1989–1992*, Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna
- 2002 *Werkschau VII: Renate Bertlmann. Arbeiten 1976–2002*, Fotogalerie Wien, Vienna
- 2002 *Let's twist again. Was man nicht denken kann, das soll man tanzen*, Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna
- 2003 *Künstlerinnen. Positionen 1945 bis heute. Mimosen Rosen Herbstzeitlosen*, Kunsthalle Krems
- 2003 *Frauenbild. Das Bild der Frau in Kunst und Literatur*, Niederösterreichisches Landesmuseum, Sankt Pölten
- 2008 *Werkschau XIII – INTAKT. Die Pionierinnen*, Fotogalerie Wien, Vienna
- 2009 *VIDEORAMA. Kunstclips aus Österreich*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna
- 2010 *Satisfaction. Renate Bertlmann*, Kunstverein Baden
- 2010 *Ich ist ein anderer. Die Kunst der Selbstdarstellung*, Landesmuseum Niederösterreich, Sankt Pölten
- 2010 *DONNA: Avanguardia Femminista negli anni '70 dalla SAMMLUNG VERBUND di Vienna*, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome
- 2010 *BERTLMANN/DASCHNER*, Ve.Sch, Vienna
- 2011 *re.act.feminism: A Performing Archive*, Centro Cultural Montehermoso Kulturnea, Vitoria-Gasteiz; Instytut Sztuki Wyspa, Danzig; Galerija Miroslav Kraljević, Zagreb; Museet for Samtidskunst, Roskilde; Tallinna Kunstihoone; Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona; Akademie der Künste, Berlin
- 2013 *Mujer. La vanguardia feminista de los años 70. Obras de la SAMMLUNG VERBUND*, Viena, Circulo de Bellas Artes, Madrid
- 2014 *Aktionistinnen*, Kunsthalle Krems; Forum Frohner, Krems
- 2014 *Burning Down the House*, 10. Gwangju Biennale, South Korea
- 2014 *Self-Timer Stories*, Austrian Cultural Forum New York, Museum der Moderne Salzburg, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León
- 2014 *WOMAN. The Feminist Avant-Garde of the 1970s. Works from the SAMMLUNG VERBUND* Vienna, BOZAR, Brussels
- 2015 *Rabenmütter. Zwischen Kraft und Krise: Mütterbilder von 1900 bis heute*, Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz
- 2015 *The World Goes Pop*, Tate Modern, London
- 2015 *Feministische Avantgarde. Kunst der 1970er-Jahre aus der SAMMLUNG VERBUND*, Wien, Hamburger Kunsthalle
- 2015 *Die achtziger Jahre in der Sammlung des MUSA*, Wien Museum MUSA
- 2016 *Renate Bertlmann. AMO ERGO SUM. Ein subversives Politprogramm*, SAMMLUNG VERBUND, Vienna
- 2016 *Renate Bertlmann. Two Climaxes*, Richard Saltoun Gallery, London

- 2016 *Feminist Avant-Garde of the 1970s: Works from the SAMMLUNG VERBUND Collection*, Vienna, The Photographer's Gallery, London
- 2017 *Renate Bertlmann. Angst*, Fotohof, Salzburg
- 2017 *Sex Work: Feminist Art & Radical Politics*, Richard Saltoun Gallery, Frieze, London
- 2017 *RENATE BERGLMANN – MARIA LASSNIG*, Sotheby's Gallery, London
- 2017 *WOMAN. Feministische Avantgarde der 1970er-Jahre* aus der SAMMLUNG VERBUND, mumok – Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien
- 2017 *FEMINISTISCHE AVANTGARDE der 1970er-Jahre* aus der SAMMLUNG VERBUND, Wien, ZKM – Zentrum für Kunst und Medien, Karlsruhe
- 2017 *Die Kraft des Alters*, Belvedere, Vienna
- 2018 *Zeig mir deine Wunde*, Dom Museum, Vienna
- 2018 *Die 90er Jahre. 2. Aufzug: Subversive Imaginationen*, Wien Museum MUSA
- 2018 *DRAG: Self-portraits and Body Politics*, Hayward Gallery, South Bank Centre, London
- 2018 *#It's You Too*, Galerie Steinek, Vienna
- 2018 *Flagge zeigen – Farbe bekennen II*, WUK, Vienna
- 2018 *THE FEMINIST AVANT-GARDE OF THE 1970s. Works from the SAMMLUNG VERBUND Collection*, Vienna, The Brno House of Arts
- 2019 *A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women*, Muzeum Susch
- 2019 *THE FEMINIST AVANTGARDE OF THE 1970s. Works from the SAMMLUNG VERBUND Collection*, Vienna, CCCB Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona
- 2019 *Nothing Less! 100 Years of Women's Suffrage*, Austrian Cultural Forum, London
- 2019 *Renate Bertlmann. Hier ruht meine Zärtlichkeit*, Landesgalerie Niederösterreich, Krems
- 2019 *Discordo Ergo Sum*, Österreichpavillon, Biennale di Venezia
- 2020 *FEMINISTISCHE AVANTGARDE MADE IN AUSTRIA*, Vertical Gallery, SAMMLUNG VERBUND, Vienna
- 2020 *THE FEMINIST AVANTGARDE OF THE 1970s – Works from the SAMMLUNG VERBUND Collection*, Vienna, ICP – International Center of Photography, New York
- 2020 *Renate Bertlmann*, Carlone Contemporary, Belvedere, Vienna
- 2021 *Female Sensibility. Feministische Avantgarde aus der SAMMLUNG VERBUND*, Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz
- 2021 *Ladies and Gentlemen. Das fragile feministische Wir*, Universalmuseum Joanneum, Neue Galerie Graz
- 2022 *FEMINIST AVANT-GARDE OF THE 1970S*, Museum of Contemporary Art Vojvodina, Novi Sad
- 2022 *that other world, the world of the teapot. tenderness, a model*, Kestner Gesellschaft, Hannover
- 2023 *Public Matters. Zeitgenössische Kunst im Belvedere-Garten*, Belvedere, Vienna
- 2023 *Renate Bertlmann. Fragile Obsessionen*, Belvedere 21, Vienna

Performances

- 1977 *Deflorazione in 14 Stationi*, Museo Comunale d'Arte Moderna di Bologna
- 1978 *Die schwangere Braut im Rollstuhl*, Modern Art Galerie, Vienna
- 1978 *Die schwangere Braut mit dem Klingelbeutel*, Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Duesseldorf
- 1979 *Let's Dance Together*, Stichting de Appel, Amsterdam; Modern Art Galerie, Vienna
- 1980 *Sling Shot Action*, Franklin Furnace, New York

1982 *Sling Shot Action*, Nordstadt-Galerie-Kollektiv Wuppertal

1982 *Dokumente: Washtag-Plakat-Aktion*, in the public space of Kassel

1982 *Discorso – Erotik und Askese*, Kunstakademie Düsseldorf; Gesamthochschule Wuppertal

1983 *Discorso – Erotik und Askese*, Brucknerhaus, Linz

1992 *Transformation – Verbrennung des Grabes HIER RUHT MEINE ZÄRTLICHKEIT*, Gut Gasteil, Prigglitz near Gloggnitz

GENERAL INFORMATION

Exhibition title	<i>Renate Bertlmann. Fragile Obsessions</i>
Curator	Luisa Ziaja
Assistant Curator	Andrea Kopranovic
Duration	29. September 2023 bis 3. März 2024
Location	Belvedere 21 Arsenalstraße 1, 1030 Vienna
Opening hours	Tuesday to Sunday 11 am to 6 pm Late night: Thursday 11 am to 9 pm Open Mondays on holidays
Tickets	Regular €8.90 online, €10.50 on-site Discounted €6.90 online, €8 on-site Belvedere Annual Ticket €39 Children and youth up to the age of 18 free
Web	belvedere.at facebook.com/belvedere21 X.com/belvedere21 instagram.com/belvedere21wien #RenateBertlmann

For more information on the exhibition and high-resolution press photos, please visit belvedere.at/en/press.