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Belvedere 21

Arsenalstraße 1
1030 Vienna

Opening hours:
Tuesday to Sunday
11 am to 6 pm
Late opening:
Thursday 11 am to 9 pm
Only open on Mondays
during public holidays

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Installation view *Hans Haacke. Retrospective*
Photo: Kunst-Dokumentation.com, Manuel Carreon Lopez / Belvedere, Vienna

HANS HAACKE RETROSPECTIVE

1 March – 9 June 2025

Founding figure of political conceptual art and institutional critique at Belvedere 21

As one of contemporary art's central protagonists, Hans Haacke (b. 1936) redefined the relationship between art and society, and influenced generations of artists. His work remains highly topical and strikingly relevant in today's world.

Stella Rollig, General Director of the Belvedere: Hans Haacke's sharp view of institutions, politics, ecology, and society reflects the explosive issues and conflicts of our present, not only calling for critical debate but also demanding us to take a position. Haacke's artistic work sensitizes us to diversity, freedom of opinion, and democratic values—attitudes of the utmost importance at a time when democracies are coming under siege worldwide.

From the 1960s onwards, the German-American artist initially reflected on physical, biological, and ecological systems before turning his attention to socio-political structures and subjecting them to a precise, often unsparring analysis. He thus addressed abuses of power, mechanisms of exclusion and inequality, historical-political distortions, the entanglement of public institutions, politics, and the economy, and, not least, anti-democratic tendencies.

As a founding figure of artistic institutional critique, Haacke always pays particular attention to his own field of action, to the implicit and explicit rules and framing conditions of the art world as well as the

power dynamics and class relations at work within it. His works draw on sociological methods of observation and inquiry, data-based research, and principles of systemic thinking, but also make a point of involving their audience, making it an essential factor in his investigations.

Luisa Ziaja, curator of the exhibition: *This retrospective allows us to rediscover the topicality of Hans Haacke's art and to grasp its significance for the pressing questions of our time: How do capital, ideology, and history influence us? What images, rhetorics, and manipulative strategies does nationalist populism employ? How about the complicity of the art world, but also the critical potential of art?*

ON THE EXHIBITION

Almost twenty years after Hans Haacke's last retrospective in Europe and nearly twenty-five years after the only monographic exhibition of the artist's work in Austria to date, Belvedere 21 presents a comprehensive exhibition of works from 1959 to today in cooperation with the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt.

The show highlights the simultaneous versatility and rigor of this oeuvre—from early paintings and objects, photographs, process-oriented actions, and performances to expansive installations, site-specific interventions, and participatory works. In addition to numerous iconic works, it also has a particular focus on projects that Haacke developed specifically for the Austrian context.

The roughly chronological exhibition kicks off with Haacke's physical, biological, and ecological experiments from the 1960s, including his famous "real time systems" such as the *Large Condensation Cube* (1963–67). They demonstrate Haacke's engagement and exchange with the ZERO group as well as with approaches from Minimalism, Op Art, and Kinetic Art, but above all the lasting influence of interdisciplinary systems theories and the principles of cybernetics. Presented for the first time in an exhibition setting, the artistic-documentary film *Hans Haacke: Self-Portrait of a German Artist in New York* (1969) provides an insight into this work phase and shows numerous processual pieces in their respective contexts of origin. Haacke subsequently transferred his practice of demonstrating processes and phenomena in the form of "real time systems" to economic, social, and political systems, and expanded it by an institution-critical line of inquiry based on factual observations.

In response to the Vietnam War and the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in April 1968, Haacke felt an urgent need to relate his work to society. With *News* (1969), an installation that transmits the information disseminated by press agencies on a given day into the exhibition space, he thematized social realities, political events, and economic developments for the first time. Soon afterwards, the artist created a direct interaction between the work and the audience with the participatory projects *Gallery-Goers' Birthplace and Residence Profile Parts I and II* (1969/70) and *MoMA Poll* (1970). The visualization of conditions and structures through the evaluation of mostly publicly accessible data often triggered far-reaching debates. Haacke's works repeatedly demonstrated the critical potential inherent in the factual.

On several occasions, the information gathered was seen as so controversial that museums canceled Haacke's shows or his participation in group exhibitions. For example, *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971) had been planned for Haacke's solo exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York and revealed corporate machinations in the interest of real estate speculation. Meanwhile, *Manet-PROJEKT '74* (1974) was conceived for an anniversary

exhibition at the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne and used the provenance of Édouard Manet's *Bundle of Asparagus* (1880) to uncover Nazi continuities in the post-war era. With this installation in the 1970s, the artist anticipated approaches to provenance research that would be pursued systematically from the late 1990s onwards.

The preoccupation with Nazi history, its continuities after 1945 and its impact on the political reality of the present is a constant throughout the work of the artist, who grew up in (post-)National Socialist Germany. Especially in the context of a retrospective presented in Germany and Austria, it is pertinent to trace Haacke's strategies of critical "counter-memory", to situate them in a specific time and place, and to reconsider them from a contemporary perspective.

Haacke first engaged with the historico-political arena of public space as a special form of site- and context-specific work as part of the 1988 *steirischer herbst* in Graz, which was dedicated to the so-called *Anschluss* (annexation) of Austria to the German Reich fifty years earlier. With the installation *And You Were Victorious After All*, Haacke reconstructs a Nazi victory monument in the former *Stadt der Volkserhebung* (city of the people's uprising) and transforms it into a memorial for the victims of National Socialism. Heavily debated and controversial from the outset, the installation was destroyed by a neo-Nazi arson attack. Hans Haacke's temporary counter-memorial intervened in a national self-image based on denial and repression of the Nazi past at the very moment it was starting to crumble, thus making a significant contribution to a new culture of remembrance in Austria.

For his 2001 solo exhibition at the Generali Foundation in Vienna, Haacke developed the installation *We Are Who We Are* that caricatured contemporary right-wing populist aesthetics and revealed their ideological roots in the Nazi era, against the backdrop of the coalition between the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) which was condemned throughout Europe.

Haacke's longstanding engagement with the politics of history, the afterlives of National Socialism, and the resurgence of racist movements is a connecting thread throughout the exhibition. His award-winning contribution to the German pavilion at the Venice Biennale, *GERMANIA* (1993), transformed it into a sensational field of rubble by breaking up the marble floor laid during the Nazi era as a commentary on the past and present of the newly reunified Germany. Haacke developed one of his best-known works in 2000 for an inner courtyard of the Reichstag building in Berlin: he countered the *völkisch* ideology of the façade inscription "Dem Deutschen Volke" (to the German people) with the dedication "Der Bevölkerung" (To The Population). The decision to realize the artwork was accompanied by intensive debates in the Bundestag. Conceived for public spaces, the banner and poster work *We (All) Are the People* (2003/17 – ongoing) references the right-wing appropriation of the Peaceful Revolution slogan and reappropriates it as an appeal for cultural diversity and tolerance.

With the sculpture *Gift Horse* (2014), Haacke takes up the concept of the counter-monument once again. As part of the renowned Fourth Plinth project at London's Trafalgar Square, he transformed the genre of the heroic equestrian statue into a biting critique of the connection between power and capital. The work is on view in the sculpture garden of Belvedere 21 for the duration of the exhibition. Furthermore, the visitors poll specifically adapted for the presentation in Vienna also highlights one of Haacke's main goals: the formation of a democratic public, a public that becomes aware of itself and thus becomes able to think and act politically.

At a time when liberal values are under threat worldwide, Hans Haacke's pioneering work and the critical potential inscribed within it proves to be more relevant than ever. The retrospective at Belvedere 21 makes it accessible to a broad public and invites visitors to reflect, take a stance, and, not least, to defend the principles of a pluralist society.

SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Hans Haacke (b. 1936 in Cologne) has lived and worked in New York since 1965. After studying at the Staatliche Werkakademie in Kassel (1956–60) and spending time abroad in Paris, Philadelphia, and New York, he taught for thirty-five years as a professor at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. He was also a visiting professor at the Hochschule für bildende Künste in Hamburg and the Gesamthochschule in Essen as well as a lecturer at the University of California, Berkeley. He holds honorary doctorates in fine arts from Oberlin College, Ohio, the Bauhaus University Weimar, the San Francisco Art Institute, and the Maryland Institute College of Art.

From the early 1960s, Haacke took part in numerous international group and solo exhibitions as well as documenta 5, 7, 8, and X (1972, 1982, 1987, 1997) and the Venice Biennial (1976, 1993, 2009, 2015). He has received numerous awards, including the Distinguished Artist Award for Lifetime Achievement of the College Art Association of America, the German Critics' Award for 1990, the Golden Lion for the German Pavilion at the Biennale di Venezia 1993 (together with Nam June Paik), the Art Award of the Kurt Eisner Cultural Foundation, the Fine Art Prize of the Helmut Kraft Foundation, the College Art Association's Distinguished Teaching of Art Award, the Peter Weiss Prize of the City of Bochum, the Bremen Roland Prize for Art in Public Space, the Art Prize of the Roswitha Haftmann Foundation, and the Kaiserring of the City of Goslar.

CATALOG

Hans Haacke: Retrospective

Editors: Stella Rollig, Luisa Ziaja, Ingrid Pfeiffer

Authors: Sebastian Baden & Stella Rollig, Sabeth Buchmann & Stephan Geene, Hubertus Butin, Hans Haacke, Vanessa Joan Müller, Ingrid Pfeiffer, Ursula Ströbele, Luisa Ziaja

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PRESS IMAGES

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Exhibition title	<i>Hans Haacke: Retrospective</i>
Curator	Luisa Ziaja
Assistant Curators	Katarina Lozo and Theresa Dann-Freyenschlag (until September 2024)
Duration	1 March – 9 June 2025
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Opening hours	Tuesday to Sunday 11 am to 6 pm Late opening: Thursday, 11 am to 9 pm Only open on Mondays during public holidays
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Web	belvedere.at facebook.com/belvedere21 X.com/belvedere21 instagram.com/belvedere21vienna #HansHaacke

The exhibition is being presented in collaboration with the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt.

Further information and press photos of the exhibition are available for download at belvedere.at/press.