

**Maria
Hahnenkamp**

March 21 —
August 31, 2025

English



Maria Hahnenkamp (b. 1959 in Eisenstadt, Austria) gained her first professional experience in print shops and as a commercial artist before she began attending Friedl Kubelka's School for Artistic Photography in 1990. Hahnenkamp's artistic interest lies primarily in the medium of photography.

Since the early 1990s, Hahnenkamp has exhibited in galleries in Austria, France, and the United States and has also taken part in numerous solo and group presentations—most recently at Camera Austria, Graz (2019); Fotogalerie Wien, Vienna (2016); and Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg (2008); as well as Landesgalerie Niederösterreich, Krems (2022/23); Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna (2021/22 and 2023); and the Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz (2015/16).

Hahnenkamp received the Promotion Prize for Artistic Photography by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education and the Arts in 1994 and the Msgr. Otto Mauer Prize in the following year. Her other accolades include the City of Vienna Promotion Prize for Fine Arts (1999), the frauen.kunst.preis (2006), the Honorary Prize for Artistic Photography from the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture (2007), the City of Vienna Prize for Fine Arts (2008), and the Honorary Prize for Fine Arts from the Burgenland-Stiftung Theodor Kery (2013).

Maria Hahnenkamp lives in Vienna.

Maria Hahnenkamp

Maria Hahnenkamp has been working with, through, on, and even against photography for over thirty years. The starting point for her critical and feminist work is always a radical questioning of the power of images. Stereotypical representations of (female) bodies in art history, fashion, and pornography are the material basis for the artist's challenging of representation and social norms.

In the late 1970s, Hahnenkamp first encountered professional photography through her work in commercial art. Her practical experience in print shops and advertising agencies enabled her to acquire the technical knowledge to work with photographic materials. As an autodidact, Hahnenkamp develops unconventional and unruly strategies in her art by rubbing off photographic prints, penetrating and cutting them up, or erasing them completely. In this way, Hahnenkamp uses her art to oppose the superficial commercialization of women's bodies.

This exhibition at Belvedere 21 is Hahnenkamp's first major institutional solo exhibition and was developed in collaboration with the artist. The selection of more than one hundred works illustrates central themes such as emptiness, space, craft, and ornament, as well as their thematic connections.

Detail from *Zudeck-Album* (Cover Album),
1989–91/2014
Chromogenic process (photograph)
on paper (satin-bound, embroidered album;
20 black-and-white photographs)
13 × 21 × 3.5 cm



Visualizing

Maria Hahnenkamp's first works, which date back to 1988/89, mark the beginning of a critical examination of her family environment in Burgenland, Austria, and her subsequent detachment from this rural Catholic context: in four photo albums, Hahnenkamp draws comparisons between her mother's everyday domestic work and Sunday church rituals. The *Hostien-Album* (Hosts Album), for example, documents the liturgical handling of round objects, while the *Zudeck-Album* (Cover Album) depicts the almost ritualistic covering of desserts with a cloth. The artist binds the books, designs the covers, and draws ornamental patterns on the interleaving paper between the pages.

In this series, Hahnenkamp renders things visible that usually remain hidden—such as women's unpaid care work, which is still taken for granted today. In doing so, she highlights the connection between stereotypical gender definitions and traditional ideals of femininity in a patriarchal society. These are themes that the artist would consistently explore in the decades to come.



Documentation of the work process
for the sanded-down and sewn-together
photographs



Erasing

Maria Hahnenkamp already expressed her criticism of images used in the media in some of her early series from 1993—all untitled—in which she photographed her parents' house in Burgenland, Austria, or a woman receiving a beauty treatment, for example, before rubbing the analog prints with sandpaper in a process that took hours. Once the extremely thin layer of gelatin was removed, Hahnenkamp stitched the underlying paper supports together, sometimes by hand: the largest version is composed of 195 individual pictures, creating a work measuring 1.47 by 7.42 meters.

With this radical yet meditative act, the artist eliminates all pictorial content and focuses on the emptiness instead of the woman. Through this erasure, she simultaneously reveals the expectations placed on the female body—after all, the destroyed pictures represented stereotypical models of femininity. With this gesture, Hahnenkamp does not create counterimages, but rather refuses to produce images herself. As a result of this, the artist decided in the early 1990s that she would no longer work as a photographer herself and that the images she conceived would be taken by someone else instead.



O. T. (Untitled), 1993

There is nothing left to see of these women getting a manicure or sitting at the beauty salon. Maria Hahnenkamp has painstakingly rubbed away the motifs of these analog photographs with sandpaper, thus erasing established feminine ideals. All that remains are fragmented glossy patches at the edges of the photographic paper. The newly created emptiness reveals a different, alternative image of women. With this series of works, which she began in the early 1990s, the artist critically draws on long-standing traditional representations of the female body in the media and the promotion of stereotypical beauty ideals. In her practice, Hahnenkamp consistently strives to defy the power of mages and to dismantle traditional models.

Detail from O. T., 1994/2018
Sanded-down and sewn-together
C-prints
147 × 78 cm
Belvedere, Vienna,
donated by Maria Hahnenkamp in 2018



**Ornament Nr. 20,
(Ornament No. 20), 2001/2025**

Maria Hahnenkamp working on
Ornament Nr. 20 at Stadtgalerie
Saarbrücken, 2001
Two-part, in-situ drilled wall work
applied to the wall using a template
and drill
Executed by Hans Weinberger for
Belvedere 21
109 × 132.5 cm and 109 × 160 cm

This in-situ work, which consists of hundreds of holes and covers several square meters, is probably Maria Hahnenkamp's most radical intervention in an exhibition space—even if it is barely perceptible at first. The artist deliberately experiments with the boundaries of visibility and also highlights the contradictions between removal and presence. A nineteenth-century pattern book for church furnishings serves as a template for the ornamental forms that penetrate the surface of the wall. Hahnenkamp uses a computer to digitally edit and modify the magnificent tendril patterns. The ornaments, which are adapted to the space, are then transferred to the wall with a drill, one hole at a time, in such a way that the dark circles of the drill holes create a kind of drawing.



Documentation of the work process
for the sanded-down and sewn-together
photographs



Penetrating

Manual craft is an important element in Maria Hahnenkamp's artistic practice. From the early 1990s onward, the artist had already entrusted photography to others and concentrated on manipulating the image material she had developed and commissioned. Hahnenkamp always works directly on the image itself—cutting it up, stitching parts together, and embroidering and penetrating the surface, either with a sewing machine or by hand. The holes she pokes through the pictures with the needle frequently remain as empty apertures. These perforations also extend beyond the edges of the image onto the passe-partout or even the exhibition wall, transcending the boundaries of the pictorial space. The patterns formed by the holes are inspired by ornaments from a pattern book for church furnishings from 1860.

Activities such as sewing or embroidery, which are traditionally associated with women, also serve as a means of reflecting on the history of invisible (female) labor for the artist.

Through her work, Hahnenkamp articulates a kind of silent rebellion against patriarchal structures while also highlighting the connection between the body and work.



Schnörksei (Flourish), 2005/06

Pigment print on handmade
paper, embroidered
56 x 43 cm

For her seven-part series *Schnörksei*, Maria Hahnenkamp begins with found photographs from fashion magazines, which are digitally overlaid with text fragments written by Rainer Fuchs. The Austrian art historian has repeatedly used Hahnenkamp's oeuvre to explore the role of ornament in the history of art and culture in order to demonstrate its social relevance. Finally, the artist embroiders the reproduced images by hand with artfully curved lines. By juxtaposing a supposedly clearly formulated text with a seemingly meaningless motif, Hahnenkamp calls for a reappraisal of ornamentation.



O. T. (*Parfum-Devotionalie I.—Roter Seidenfilz/Satin Nr. 19*), (Untitled [Perfume Devotional Object I—Red Silk Felt/Satin No. 19]), 1993

O. T. (*Parfum-Devotionalie I.—Blauer Seidenfilz Nr. 32*) (Untitled [Perfume Devotional I—Blue Silk Felt No. 32]), 1995

Silk-flocked plastic molds,
gilt frame
11 × 10.5 × 4.5 cm and 11 × 8 × 4.5 cm

Religious objects such as crosses, crucifixes, rosaries, and figures of saints and icons are usually referred to as devotional objects. These relics are used for remembrance and private prayer. In contrast, Maria Hahnenkamp's series of works of perfume devotional objects (starting in 1993) consists of satin or felt beds taken from different types of packaging with recesses for bottles and soaps. The empty spaces allude to the absence of the perfume bottle and, by association, to the absent, seductively fragrant female body. What remains is merely the ideal substitute in the form of an emptied object. The image—or rather the imprint—of the woman is thus inscribed into this hollow space, which the artist has placed in a golden frame.



Detail from *O. T.* (aus der Serie "Räume/Wände")
(Untitled [from the "Rooms/Walls" Series]), 2001/2024
Pigment print on Hahnemühle Photo Pearl paper
129 x 172 cm



Emptying

Maria Hahnenkamp not only empties pictorial spaces and erases their contents; she also constructs emptiness in exhibition spaces. From the early 1990s onward, the artist has consistently responded to existing spaces with simple, intentional gestures rather than large-scale architectural interventions. When conceptualizing her exhibitions, Hahnenkamp draws on her experience of working in commercial graphic design by arranging the works on the walls as if laying out picture poems on the blank pages of a book. The five-part work series *O. T.* (aus der Serie “Räume/Wände”) (Untitled [from the “Rooms/Walls” Series], 2001/2024) is also based on a strictly Minimalist concept: the large-format pictures show nothing but empty rooms, white walls, and a few objects from everyday life. The simple frames barely demarcate the photographs from the exhibition wall—on the contrary, the pictorial space seems to extend into the physical space. In this way, Hahnenkamp establishes the motif of empty space as infinite,

open, and expandable. In her own words, she wants this emptiness to become tangible and touching; it should serve as a surface for the projection and reflection of our own perception.



O. T. (Untitled), 1990

Maria Hahnenkamp has been collecting empty candy boxes since 1990 and uses the repurposed *objets trouvés* to reveal underlying meanings and contexts: the empty packaging refers to the supposedly precious object that was formerly wrapped while simultaneously exposing the deceptive appearance of marketing strategies—the packaging material is made of plastic rather than gold. Hung on the wall as an art object with a Baroque frame, the candy boxes once again experience an increase in value. The artist repeatedly works with found materials, which she transfers into an artistic context in order to challenge their form and purpose.

Candy box, packaging material
22.5 × 26.5 × 3.5 cm



Slide Projections

Slides nos. 76, 78, and 79 from
Diaprojektion 1 (Bollwerk) (Slide Projection 1
[Bulwark]), 2000/2002/2017
Slide projection

For a lecture at the School for Artistic Photography, Maria Hahnenkamp translated her collection of images into slides for the first time and developed them into an independent work: in *Diaprojektion 1 (Bollwerk)* (Slide Projection 1 [Bulwark], 2000/2002/2017), she combined photographs depicting Christian iconography, church architecture, fashion, and pornography. Over the years, she created further series in which she regularly adapted the selection of images. In a double projection, for example, she compares the facial expressions of women in fashion photographs and in pornographic magazines as well as the aesthetic presentation of these printed images. In a further pairing, Hahnenkamp juxtaposes photographs of an unknown woman from Hamburg with iconic images of Marilyn Monroe and uses their similar poses to reveal beauty ideals specific to that era.



Hahnenkamp archival material,
"Quellen-Reise Paris"
(source trip to Paris), 1993



Repeating

As a reaction to the mass distribution of photographs, Maria Hahnenkamp began collecting pictures in the late 1980s and increasingly used her art to counter the superficiality of the commercialized flood of images. She concentrated on one particular theme: the representation of women in everyday life, fashion, porn, and art history. Hahnenkamp uses a variety of material, which she photographs herself on walks and museum visits or cuts out of newspapers and magazines. She also collects depictions of studded upholstery—a form of fabric covering with buttons—and includes them in her works as placeholders for the female navel.

On the basis of this diverse collection, Hahnenkamp later developed a series of slide projections in various configurations: they represent an unstoppable flood of images, which is heightened further through superimpositions and overlays. Projected onto the wall in rapid succession, the pictures elude the viewer's gaze because they are immediately replaced by new ones and consequently disappear into each other. The artist repeatedly draws on her own image archive, which she regularly revises, adapts, and expands.



Detail from *O. T.* (aus der Serie "Eine Frau")
(Untitled [from the "One Woman" Series]),
2001/2014
Pigment print, gelatin layer removed
90 x 70 cm



Fragmenting

The almost exclusively female figures in Maria Hahnenkamp's work are always depicted as props or fragments. Through the often radically cropped images, the artist not only communicates that photographic images are constructed and staged, but also that this representation of women is reductive. Hahnenkamp achieves a similar effect when she chooses close-up views and encourages viewers to mentally extend individual body parts such as the back, chest, crotch, and buttocks beyond the boundaries of the picture. The subjects occupy the entire image area and are thereby flattened. Although the close-up suggests a certain proximity, the fragmentation means that the details cannot be clearly identified and remain at a distance.

To reinforce this ambiguous impression, Hahnenkamp developed a new setup starting in 2001 in which she had the female models photographed from below through a glass plate. The bodies appear to be pressed against the lens of the camera, seemingly inscribing themselves directly into the image and imposing themselves on the viewer. In doing so, Hahnenkamp emphasizes the complexity of the images and highlights their fragmentary nature.



Cut-Out, 2007

C-print, digital cut
70 x 90 cm

Maria Hahnenkamp's series *Cut-Out* shows female models in everyday clothes stretching horizontally across the pictorial space in fragmented close-ups. Individually or in pairs, they press themselves against a glass plate and are photographed from below. The flattened bodies, overlaid with cut-out white lines, give the impression of constriction—especially as their arms, legs, hips, and chests are wrapped in bands of text. The quotes are from *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* by American philosopher Judith Butler and refer to Hahnenkamp's ongoing engagement with sociopolitical, philosophical, psychological, and feminist criticism, which she incorporates into her artistic work and pictorial strategies.



O. T. (in Auseinandersetzung mit „Vortrag über nichts“ von John Cage) (Untitled [in Dialogue with “Lecture on Nothing” by John Cage]), 2024*

Text-based sound piece
 Ursula Langmayr (soprano)
 Georg Hühnerfuß (sound collage)

* Maria Hahnenkamp did not title this speech and sound piece herself. She used John Cage's text “Lecture on Nothing” (John Cage, *Silence* [Hanover, 1961], pp. 109–11) as a model. Hahnenkamp's adaptation of the text in turn serves as the basis for Ursula Langmayr's tonal interpretation.

Recording courtesy of the mdw—
 University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna
 “Lecture on Nothing” © John Cage Trust
 With thanks to the John Cage Trust

John Cage's “Lecture on Nothing,” published in 1961, is one of the most important contributions to experimental literature of the twentieth century. In it, the American artist and composer explores major themes such as love, loneliness, silence, memory, poetry, repetition, and nothingness in a sarcastic tone. Maria Hahnenkamp, who constantly works with language and music, has appropriated this text and uses its distinctive graphic layout as a template for a new reading: she deletes entire lines, adds pauses, and extracts the content that is relevant to her. Her composition forms the basis for a vocal interpretation by singer Ursula Langmayr, who gives Hahnenkamp's adaptation of the John Cage text an acoustic dimension that forms an integral element of the exhibition.

Ich bin hier , und es gibt nichts zu sagen . Was wir brauchen ist
 Stille ; aber was die Stille will .
 ist, daß ich weiterrede . Gib einem Gedanken
 einen Stoß : er fällt leicht um
 ; ?
 Aber nun gibt es Stille und
 die Wörter erzeugen sie, helfen mit diese
 Stille zu erzeugen .
 Ich hab nichts zu sagen
 und ich sage es
 Wir brauchen nicht die Stille zu fürchten. –
 wir könnten sie lieben .
 Oder aber es ist wie ein leeres Glas in das jeden
 Augenblick irgend etwas gegossen werden kann .
 Das heißt, Alles ist daher ein Vergnügen
 daß unser Vergnügen darin liegt, nichts zu besitzen
 Wir brauchen die Vergangenheit nicht zu zerstören: sie ist fort;
 Fast jeder weiß von der Zukunft wie un-gewiß sie ist .

This booklet is published on the occasion of the exhibition

Maria Hahnenkamp
Belvedere 21, Vienna
March 21 to August 31, 2025

General and Artistic Director: Stella Rollig
CFO: Wolfgang Bergmann

**Part of the exhibition includes
live performances with Ursula Langmayr:**

Thu, March 20, 8 and 9 p.m.
Sun, April 27, 3 p.m.
Sun, May 25, 5 p.m.
Fri, July 18, 5 p.m.
Sun, August 24, 3 p.m.

**The sound work in the exhibition will be
activated in the form of an audio recording
played at random times every day.**

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