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Rethinking the Museum – Re-experiencing the Museum

The Belvedere – a Baroque jewel and scene of the Austrian State Treaty.

One of the oldest museums in the world and, at the same time, a place for contemporary art. As one of the largest cultural institutions in the country, we are now called upon to rise to the challenge to evolve between the poles of cultural, scientific and touristic demands, along with a mandate for preservation and the desire for a new departure. We are a mediator for history and an interrogator of the present as well as the cultural locus of the country and the digital world.

With the title ‘Rethinking the Museum, Re-experiencing the Museum’, the dual leadership at the helm of the Belvedere, Stella Rollig (Science) and Wolfgang Bergmann (Business), present the programmatic outline for their directorship. Some of the planned measures will be implemented immediately and others executed in the mid to long term.

Rethinking the Museum

New Thought Patterns for Museum Activity

The new **artistic director of the Belvedere, Stella Rollig**, outlines her tasks and self-understanding as follows: ‘The most frequent question posed to museum professionals concerns visitor attendance. This question is justified. I, however, plead for a change in patterns of thinking; we have to ask ourselves: “How do visitors leave the museum and what do they take away from their visit?”’

For Stella Rollig, the museum is a **‘place of strength’**, which invites one to pause and engage in a dialogue with art. This concentrated exploration of art is thus directly connected with a high-quality visitor experience. Visitors should spend more time in the buildings, come here to rest and take away knowledge and experiences that no tourist guide and no other medium can offer. Under these conditions, the museum gains social relevance.

The **dialogue between the work of art and the viewer** is a tool for knowledge of the world and self-awareness; the prerequisite for a worthwhile and lasting dialogue with art is knowledge of background and context, the mediation of which is a primary task of the museum. According to Rollig, the pursuit of art as well as its mediation ideally includes an examination of social, economic, political, and contemporary historical conditions. Art allows individuals to experience themselves as powerful subjects, to develop social attitudes, and to communicate with others about world views.

In the **realm of research**, specifically in the new positioning of the Research Centre and in the reorganization of the **digital museum**, a new way of thinking is paramount.

Rollig describes the future of the Research Centre as follows: ‘The Belvedere will become a player in the national and international research landscape by designing and implementing **multi-year, internationally networked research projects.**’

Concerning the digital museum, Bergmann adds: ‘Just as radio cannot be the reading out of a daily newspaper, a digital museum cannot be reduced to a virtual tour. It is necessary to re-invent the museum within the framework of digital opportunities.’

Rotating Art History at the Upper Belvedere

Rollig announces a **new conception and rotation of the Upper Belvedere collection**, with the goal of **updating art history** through fresh and dynamic displays. By using analogue and digital media as tools for the dissemination of knowledge, visitors to the exhibition spaces are to be provided with comprehensive information about the works of art and the contexts of those works. Meaningful object descriptions, wall texts, and/or brochures as well as digital offerings will be an integral part of the exhibition. Educational programmes, especially the ones for children and young people, are being intensified. The history of the building, its grounds, as well as the museum collection will also be included in the visitor information.

Raising the Lower Belvedere’s Temporary Exhibitions Profile

The Lower Belvedere and the Orangerie will continue to feature temporary exhibitions, with Stella Rollig announcing a **stricter delineation of stylistic periods**. In terms of time spans, exhibitions will reach to the end of World War II. In terms of content, they will increasingly offer new perspectives on subject matter, stylistic periods, and artists, all while being presented through multiple media, thereby **more effectively conveying** the major changes in the definition of art, the increasing pluralization, and **the use of technology in the first half of the 20th century**.

An additional focus will be given to **the work and times of Gustav Klimt**, which is a real commitment for the world’s largest and most prominent collection of Klimt paintings. However, even here, Stella Rollig agrees, new points of access need to be created as well. In 2018, for example, a special exhibition commemorating the 100th anniversary of Gustav Klimt’s death will focus on Klimt’s legacy and the dawn of modern art in the artistic hubs of the former Danube Monarchy.

Redefining the 21er Haus

By positioning the 21er Haus as a ‘museum for contemporary art’, the Schwanzer building, steeped in tradition, has been utilized against its intrinsic qualities since its reopening in 2011. This function was quite appropriate for the years up to the 1980s, but with the current presence of many museums in Vienna dedicated to contemporary art, it has been rendered obsolete. Added to that is the fact that the museum’s structural conditions are inadequate for museum purposes.

The **great opportunity of the 21er Haus lies within its mission as a vibrant exhibition hall with interdisciplinary and multimedial dimensions** and as a social hotspot in an urban district of the future. To that end, generous spaces with flexible usability will be created. The upper floor will therefore be returned to its original open form. A long-term prospect is the creation of a new exhibition space in the lower level.

Thus, the 21er Haus is to become the ‘home base’ of the Viennese art scene – where Austrian art since the 1960s will be shown in an international context and the creations of emerging artists will be presented.

Re-experiencing the Museum

Getting in Shape and Redefining the Infrastructure

Wolfgang Bergmann explains the business aspect: ‘To achieve the desired improvements for the visitor experience, sweeping measures are necessary. Judging from the current standpoint, one must note that safety, climate control, and IT needs of the Upper Belvedere must first get in shape so that they may meet the requirements of a robust visitor stream.’

The performance of the Upper Belvedere is decisive for the economic success of the group as a whole. It is therefore necessary that, in the spirit of a sustainable economy, income must be adequately reinvested into the Upper Belvedere.

It is the goal to re-design the entire spectrum of ticket sales, security, cloakroom space, access to the building, adequacy of wet areas, gastronomy etc., to make sure

a modern and contemporary visitor experience is provided. This is a major project that the new management's entire term of office will be focused on.

Integration of the Overall Group

Bergmann counts on including the entire ensemble, i.e. **museum and park facilities**, into the museum visit, and therefore **seeks close cooperation with the Burghauptmannschaft and Bundesgarten**. Despite the given administrative separation between the museum, the building, and the park, it is important to think holistically.

As early as in the summer of 2017, new programs are planned for the Kammergarten, as for example, 'Art & Outdoor Cinema' or 'Art & Picnic'. In this context, Bergmann references the successful concert of the Fehlfarben band held at the 21er Haus at the beginning of May, which could also be viewed as an all-around experience.

For the 21er Haus, plans are in the works for gastronomical offerings in the sculpture garden, and an opening to the Schweizergarten to create a **smooth transition between the cultural and leisure zones**.

Expanding Opening Hours

As a first and immediate measure, Bergmann announced an expansion of the opening hours. **Starting on 1 July 2017, the Upper Belvedere will open its doors all day from 9 am onwards**. 'This is a special invitation for those tourists who want to start their day at the Belvedere', he said.

Evening opening hours, which until now only existed in the Lower Belvedere and at the 21er Haus on Wednesdays, will also be available at all houses of the Belvedere starting 1 July 2017, Fridays until 9 pm.

As part of the rebranding of the 21er Haus, longer opening hours are planned there as well.

The stronger reorientation towards the interests of the visitors is also reflected in **the abolition of the general ban on photography**. Client satisfaction and service orientation shall be the focus in all areas.

Newly Communicating the Museum

One Brand - Many Offers

The Belvedere brand as an all-around experience requires a communicative equivalent. Currently, the term "Belvedere" is mainly attributed to the Upper Belvedere. The other exhibition venues have hitherto been in the background. In the future, the different places will be more clearly communicated as being under the **umbrella brand 'Belvedere'**. Focusing on a strong brand will bring positive image transfers on both sides and a significant strengthening of the overall performance.

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All information and press photos are available in our online press section at:
www.belvedere.at/presse

GENERAL INFORMATION and NEW OPENING HOURS (from 1 July 2017)

Upper Belvedere

Monday to Sunday 9 am to 6 pm , Friday until 9 pm
Prinz Eugen-Straße 27, 1030 Vienna

Lower Belvedere, Orangerie

Monday to Sunday 9 am to 6 pm , Friday until 9 pm
Rennweg 6, 1030 Vienna

Winterpalais

Monday to Sunday 9 am to 6 pm , Friday until 9 pm
Himmelfortgasse 8, 1010 Vienna

21er Haus

Wednesday to Sunday 11 am to 6 pm, Wednesday and Friday until 9 pm,
Monday and Tuesday closed
Arsenalstraße 1, 1030 Vienna